# Burnout amongst school counselors: a study in a Chinese city

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# Abstract

There is national and international research evidence that school counselors are prone to suffering burnout. Limited official data shows a similar situation in Ningbo in recent years. This research aims at exploring school counselors' burnout in Ningbo.

Three questions are raised: what is the current situation of their burnout, what are the possible reasons for their burnout, and how does burnout develop among them?

This research adopted a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches. The general pattern of counselors' burnout and factors associated with it was surveyed using a questionnaire (127 responses), while the other two research questions were examined using semi-structured interviews with seven purposively sampled school counselors.

The quantitative data identify that the Ningbo school counselors' have on average a moderate burnout level, significantly influenced by variables such as gender, age, and consulting load. Results of the qualitative research identify that the counselors do not suffer from burnout for a single clear-cut reason, but a variable mix of reasons. Seven possible reasons contributing to their burnout were explored: *case-load, perceived prejudice, subject marginalization, de-professionalization, marriage and income attitudes, counselors' gender and personal characteristics*. By including these additional factors, the research shows that the model of burnout causality can be expanded to a "culture-school-individual" framework.

The analysis of burnout has been mainly informed by psychological perspectives. Besides, the work of a counsellor involves much psychological aspects as it does social contextual elements. The complexity and individual peculiarity of the development process of their burnout are revealed. The management and the final outcome of their burnout took various forms among the counselors; some even found burnout led to positive personal outcomes.

The findings highlight the key challenges and opportunities in developing counseling services in schools in Ningbo and suggestions are given for counselors, principals and the local education bureau to promote the working motivation, effectiveness and well-being of school counselors. The limitations of the research are recognized and directions for future research are suggested.

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# Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Overview

Across the world, rapid economic development and other social changes have increased the pressure on people in different aspects of their lives. One consequence of this has been the emergence and growth of the psychological counseling industry. Psychological counselors serve in schools, hospitals, prisons and communities. Most counselors agree that the effective interaction with visitors will help to improve the visitor's problematic behavior (Campbell & Dahir, 1997; Schmidt, 1999). Since the beginning of the 21st century, psychological counseling has been booming in China, especially in Beijing, Shanghai and other big cities, and public awareness of the possibility of seeking psychological assistance has been enhanced (Pei, 2006).

It has been reported (Gao, 2013) that adolescent concerns have become more and more serious amongst school students since the beginning of the 21st century – concerns such as learning difficulties, mood weariness or family conflicts. With the greater public awareness of adolescent mental health issues, school counselors have increasingly entered schools. In the view of Murray (1995), school counselors form an important group who possess professional identity and skills in the particular context of education.

With the increase in students or adolescents' problems around the world, school counseling has become an emerging industry. School counseling means a kind of services for adolescents provided by trained school counselors using specific counseling techniques. The British Association for Counseling & Psychotherapy (BACP) (2003) considers school counseling to be an interpersonal interaction in the context of school, where the counselor mainly focuses on behaviors, beliefs and feelings of the students. Through this mutual interaction, students' problems may be solved to some extent.

Burk and Stefflre (1979) insist that the face-to-face school counseling between experienced school counselors and students will directly help students understand and clarify their own viewpoints and make wiser choices. Corey (1996) states that school counseling intends to help students recognize their strengths and weaknesses; through counseling, students will make a decision whether they should change their behavior or not. The Northern Island Government (2003) officially define career guidance, academic counseling, and psychological support as the three basic responsibilities for school counselors. Ye (2003) believes that according to the physical and mental development characteristics of students, a school counselor helps students solve their problems by applying the theories and

techniques of psychology or pedagogy. In a word, most researchers stress that school counseling aims to promote students' psychological health.

### 1.2 School counseling: An international perspective

Over the last few decades, school counseling has been rapidly developing. I will introduce the state of school counseling internationally and nationally as follows.

#### 1.2.1 School counseling in the world

Harris（2013） from the University of Nottingham has engaged in a lot of research into the situation of school counseling across the world. She reported that with government attention, school counseling in 62 countries is quickly developing. Amongst these, school counseling in 39 countries is mandatory, including some countries in South America, Europe, and Africa. School counseling in 24 countries including Australia and Belgium is not mandatory. In most countries, school counseling is intended for children and adolescents aged 5-18.

In some countries, the school counseling service is provided by qualified and experienced teachers. While in some other countries, school counseling is either provided by psychologists or teachers who have received training in counseling. In the United States, school counseling is primarily conducted by professional counselors who accept supervision from relevant local or national professional organizations (Harris, 2013).

Many schools in the United States have recruited school counselors. Career guidance is the fundamental work of these school counselors. However, the core content of school counseling in 8 countries including Switzerland, Hong Kong and Indonesia is to deliver psychology education courses. Meanwhile, 19 countries, including China and Australia, underline that school counselors should provide students with face-to-face counseling in respect of their study, career or mental health. Also, Harris considers that counseling in school is quite different from the counseling in community or personal clinics (*ibid*.).

School counseling in the United States has a long history which has had a profound impact on counseling services in China. At first, American school counseling focused on career guidance (Gysbers and Henderson, 2001). By the 1920s-1940s, school counselors were providing students with career guidance and psychological counseling. In 1952, The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) was established as an independent organization, which marked the booming of American school counseling (Bauman et al., 2003). ASCA issued an official document to regulate the job responsibilities, training mechanism and evaluation mechanism of school counselors across the United States (American School Counselor Association, 2005). The official document prescribes that school counselors are required to spend at least 80% of their time on students' service. The document also states that school counselors are prioritized to focus on three

aspects of student development: academic development, career development, individual and social development (Schmidt and Ciechalski, 2001).

In addition, American school counselors should hold at least a master's degree and attend a lot of psychology training after induction. However, in many US autonomous states, the role of school counselors is not clearly defined. They are often assigned to do other things irrelevant to counseling such as computing grade-point averages, maintaining student records or doing some clerical record keeping. Paisley and Mahon (2001) have argued that the marginalization of school counselors would be the most challenging issue in the field of school counseling. On one hand, when school counselors spend too much time on something irrelevant to counseling, their professional effectiveness will not be fully demonstrated; on the other, their role as professionals in schools has often not been fully recognized by school leaders.

Compared to the United States, the history of school counseling in the Asia-Pacific region is relative shorter (Shen & Herr, 2003; Hui, 2002; Takano & Uruta; 2002). Due to the mounting pressure from student examinations and competition in a number of Asia-Pacific countries, school counseling is often evaluated in terms of whether it can help students maximize their academic performance and improve the school reputation (Tan & Goh, 2002).

### 1.2.2 School counseling in China

In China, school counseling services started relatively late. By the early 1990s, only a few schools had begun to provide a psychological counseling service. Before 2000, the Chinese school counseling service was sporadically provided in Shanghai, Beijing and other megacities. Changes in social and economic structure and the prominence of children with mental problems began to attract a lot of school counselors to work in schools and since 2000, even in Chinese rural areas, school counseling has also been gradually developing. In April 2002, the Ministry of Education issued "Guidelines for Mental Health Education in Elementary and Secondary Schools", which significantly fueled the national school counseling. Before that year, no other relevant official document had been put forward to regulate school counseling. After 2002, however, many relevant contents of school counselling have been unified.

It is important to note, however, that school counselling in China is not mandatory and the implementation situation still varies from province to province. There is no standard history or set of practices of school counselling but, in 2012, the Ministry of Education revised the Guidelines and drafted a new official document (MoE, 2002, 2012). In this key national document, the role and task of school counselors and the aim of school counselling have been clearly stated. In addition, Chinese educational departments now tend to provide school counselors with lots of professional training to enhance their counselling skills every year, and the Chinese

government has spent a lot of money in leading the qualification of school counselling.

This document clearly states that school counselors should serve students through individual counseling, psychology education courses and crisis intervention. The document also states that the overall goal of Chinese school counseling is to reduce the academic pressure on students, enhance their ability in environmental adaptation, exploit their potential, enhance their self-awareness, and help them learn how to study. The document also prescribes that all the education administrations must allocate a financial budget to school counseling service. The document also insists that the school counselors should hold at least bachelor's degree in Psychology or related discipline. Also, this document clearly states that the school counselors should work with all the other staff in their school to care all the students.

### 1.2.3 School Counseling in Ningbo

Ningbo school counselling can largely rely on the Zhejiang Province relevant policy. In detail, the Zhejiang Education Department fixed that nearly 70% of schools in this province should enroll a school counselor who is only doing the counselling job between 2015 and 2020. Also, Zhejiang Educational Department has suggested that the school counselors should work within a big 'caring system' which includes the parents, school leaders and some other social resources such as doctors or social workers.

Ningbo is a coastal city with a developed economy and advanced educational system. It is located in the southeast coast of China with pleasant climate, which attracts an increasing number of people to work there. It is reported that Ningbo's GDP growth ranked in second place in Zhejiang Province (Zhejiang Provincial Government Work Report, 2016).

In Ningbo, the number of students who have emotional instability and test anxiety has increased year by year (Xu, 2003). In a survey of the mental health situation among 3,000 primary and secondary students in Ningbo, Chen (2016) found that 30% of them (aged in 7-18) suffered from test anxiety. Chao (2014) found that in Ningbo, 10% of children have experienced some unexpected family changes such as loss of family members or parents' divorce. These students' mental health condition has aroused the attention of local government. In the fall of 2010, the Ningbo School Mental Health Education Guidance Center was established. Since then, many schools in Ningbo have begun to recruit school counselors to provide students with counseling services in learning, psychology or career planning, which is intended to enhance students' sense of happiness in schools.

In Ningbo, each school may at its own discretion decide whether to employ a school

counselor or not. Before 2005, some teachers acted as counselors in schools. They only received some training in Pedagogy, Psychology or Psychological Counseling. After 2005, more professional counselors with bachelor or master's degree were employed by schools and were responsible for monitoring students' mental health. They provided students with a specialized counseling service. In 2010, Ningbo School Mental Health Education Guidance Center issued an official document, which set out that the aim of school counseling in Ningbo is to help students understand themselves, recognize their abilities, exploit their potentials and plan their academic career. This document also specified that only people who graduate with bachelor's degree or above in Pedagogy or Psychology are eligible to act as school counselors.

Based on this document, in Ningbo, school counselors should assume the following tasks (Ningbo School Mental Health Education Guidance, 2010). They should understand students' learning interests and learning difficulties. They should teach students psychological knowledge. They should measure and evaluate the students' mental health status over time. Also, they should provide counseling to students who have problems in learning, interpersonal interaction, emotional control and so on. Also, Ningbo schools expect them to deliver some psychological and mental health courses which are suited to the students. Many training sessions such as counselling skills training or psychological knowledge training have been provided for the school counselors.

From 2014, in some counties (e.g.: Yinzhou District), some schools even employed two school counselors. As a result, the school counseling development in Ningbo is considered the best in Zhejiang Province in the aspects of the number of employees, specialization of personnel, and comprehensiveness of counseling service in schools.

Nevertheless, Ma & Jin (2012) investigated the ratio of school counselors to students in Ningbo. They discovered that the ratio reached 1:800. It seems that in Ningbo, one school counselor needs to serve as many as 800 students on average. Zhao (2014) investigated 50 school counselors in Ningbo and found that more than one fourth of school counselors have experienced negative emotions such as anxiety or depression after providing counseling services; but, in his research, the reasons why they felt so much negative were not addressed. Some other researchers surveyed the working conditions of Ningbo school counselors. For instance, Shao's results showed, from interviews with 24 participants, that 32% of Ningbo school counselors at some time had the intention of leaving their job as a school counselor (Shao, 2016). Authorities of the Ningbo Institute of Education Sciences argued that some principals in elementary and secondary schools are biased against school counseling to some extent (*ibid*.). Based on this limited evidence, school counseling in Ningbo is facing great challenges even though it is developing rapidly. But, the reasons why school counselors felt negative emotions and what factors cause their trend of leaving the job are not clearly stated from

individual perspectives in these studies.

### 1.3 Burnout among school counselors internationally and nationally

#### 1.3.1 School counselor: a challenged group

In school, school counseling is an especial human service profession that renders mental health support to the students. Like other health care professionals, school counselors are the group susceptible to their own psychological threat. This is because that they need to be highly engaged when counseling and give a lot of sympathy to the students. As Bardwell said in 2010, "School counselors are working at a full load today. The continuous caseload will keep them away from concentrated working" (p 30). School counselors are challenged by the increase in their caseload and the higher expectations from the society and parents (Last & Silberman, 1989). Too heavy caseload and inadequate social support lead to school counselors experiencing mental problems themselves (Huebner, Gilligan, & Cobb, 2002; DeMato & Curcio, 2004; Lambie, 2007; McCarthy, Kerne, Calfa, Lambert, &Guzmán, 2010). Pu（2013） and Huebner (2011a) also state that the feeling of role ambiguity can be a big threat to counselors' professional awareness and confidence.

#### 1.3.2 Burnout and school counselors

Freudenberger raised the concept of burnout in 1974. He considered that burnout is one of the pathological syndromes of emotional exhaustion that can easily occur in the helping profession. Since then, many other researchers have given different definitions to burnout. The most influential definition of burnout was raised by Maslach et al. in 1996. In his view, burnout is defined as "a pathological syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals" (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996, p. 4). Maslach et al. claimed that emotional exhaustion refers to a state of extreme emotional fatigue due to lack of working enthusiasm. Depersonalization means that a worker takes an indifferent attitude towards the working object or environment. Reduced personal accomplishment means that workers negatively evaluate themselves and their job. Maslach's burnout theory will be fully discussed in the literature review chapter afterwards.

School counselors have become one of the groups most vulnerable to burnout internationally (Butler & Constantine, 2005; DeMato & Curcio, 2004; Kolodinsky et al., 2009). For instance, Huebner found that 26.2% of the school counselors were experiencing high-level burnout in a survey of American school counselors. In a survey of 324 school counselors working across the United States, Wilkerson and Bellini (2006) found that 28.6% of them were experiencing high-level burnout. Furthermore, some school counselors have also suffered from burnout in China (Bian,2008; Pu,2013; Zhao,2009). For instance, Bian (2008) argued that the burnout levels of school counselors were significantly higher than those of counselors working outside the schools. Pu (2013) found that 38.5% of school counselors in Shanghai were at moderate levels of burnout. Zhao (2009) found that

over a half of school counselors were at moderate or high burnout level in some eastern provinces in China.

School counselors working in Ningbo also face burnout problems, based on some limited surveys. For instance, after interviewing 30 counselors, Shao (2016), as a researcher working in Ningbo Mental Health Center, found that 20% of the school counselors have endured some syndromes of burnout such as emotional exhaustion in their work. Shi (2014) found that the burnout level of some counselors in Ningbo is moderate by collecting data from 10 schools using Maslach's burnout scale. Wang found that the burnout scores of school counselors are higher than those of teachers of Chinese or Maths（Wang, 2009）.

School counselors' burnout can pose a great threat to schools, students and their own well-being. Maslach & Leiter claimed that burnout is associated with various forms of personal negative reactions such as job dissatisfaction, low working efficiency, low organizational commitment, absenteeism, and interpersonal conflicts (Maslach & Leiter, 2008). Lawson & Myers (2011) claimed that counselors who are enduring burnout may complain about students or show indifference to students, which in turn may harm students instead of helping them. Shao (2016) found that those school counselors with high-level burnout often complain at home about their job. School counselors who have once endured burnout begin to become fed up with their job (Dahir & Stone, 2009; Kolodinsky et al., 2009). For example, Huebner reported 23% of the American school counselors who suffered burnout intended to resign in the next five years (Huebner, 1992).

### 1.4 My research position & research questions

School counselors are facing burnout due to various reasons within a global and national context, which can lead to a lot of negative effects on their living or work. To understand this, it is necessary to engage in an in-depth study on this group. We need to examine their current burnout status and its causes and development process. Only in doing so can we comprehensively understand school counselors' working status and provide the education bureau or principals with some first-hand evidence and relevant suggestions for improving the situation faced by these counselors.

As a professional counselor working in a school, as an insider researcher, I often communicate with other counselors to express our views on the counseling work. Many counselors have told me that they suffered burnout a lot, which raised my attention. And, some native official literature in Ningbo also shows Ningbo school counselors have begun to endure burnout, which affects their working enthusiasm and efficiency (Xu, 2013; Shao, 2016; Wang, 2012; Shi, 2014). According to my personal working experience, if school counselors cannot adjust their working status, the efficiency of counseling students can be impacted. Given these, I have a strong motivation and personal interest in researching school counselors' burnout

situation in Ningbo.

The main aim of my research is to explore the situation of Ningbo school counselors' burnout. In the following research, I act as a researcher. As a doctoral student, I can study this burnout phenomenon from the most objective perspective as possible. Though I am familiar with the school counselors' working background to some extent, I have no agenda before the research. Also, I am aware that I should avoid any subjectivity or bias in data collection so as to ensure the trustworthiness of my research.

Over the past 20 years, the progress of international research on school counselors' burnout is relatively rapid. However, the Chinese research in this field is relatively behind that elsewhere. So, I will explore the burnout situation of school counselors in Ningbo through a questionnaire and interviews based on international and national relevant researches, in an attempt to provide a practical basis for Ningbo school counselors to deal with or avoid their burnout. To achieve the overall objectives of this research, the following three questions will be raised:

What is the current situation of Ningbo school counselors' burnout?;
What are the possible reasons for the observed levels of Ningbo school counselors' burnout?;
How does burnout develop among Ningbo school counselors?

**1.5 Contribution to knowledge**

School counseling is a new profession which is greatly challenged internationally (Bryant & Constantine, 2006; Culbreth et al., 2005). Based on much evidence, we can state that school counselors have been increasingly facing burnout (Bryant and Constantine, 2006; Kolodinsky, Draves, Schroder, Kindsey & Zlatev, 2009）,Lambie, 2002; Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006).

My research can make a contribution to knowledge in the following three aspects. Firstly, whilst mandatory school counseling is government policy in China, provision of school counseling is not consistent across the county. So, my research aims to investigate school counselors' burnout situation in one city in China (Ningbo). Further, as a relatively new profession, there is currently very little research on school counseling in China which is related to the training, role or workload of school counselors. And, my research has the potential to highlight key challenges or opportunities in developing counseling services in schools. My engagement in exploring counselors' burnout can enrich the knowledge of school counseling in China.

Secondly, an important and potential benefit of this research is to increase the knowledge of the reasons for school counselors' burnout and its development process. In other words, this research can dig further and deeper knowledge about

burnout experienced by school counselors. In particular, this research may enrich the existing theories about of school counselors' burnout.

Lastly, this study can significantly benefit school counselors who are experiencing burnout. The possible factors and development process of counselors' burnout I explore in my research may help those school counselors with a certain degree of burnout to work and live more happily to some extent. Also, this research can benefit Ningbo school students. If a school counselor endures burnout, he or she may ignore, blame or even evade students who seek his help, which is unfair and harmful to them. These students can complain that the counselors do not care about their feelings or emotions. In this case, if my research results can help those school counselors relieve their burnout level, the students seeking counseling can benefit more from counselors.

# Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this review section, I will specifically describe the meaning of two key words in my thesis: school counselor and burnout. Next, I will give a detailed and critical description of the international and national literature on researches on the burnout of school counselors.

## 2.1 School counselor

### 2.1.1 Definition of school counselor

According to the International School Psychology Association (ISPA), 'school counselor' refers to the professionals who have attended psychology and pedagogy training and render psychological services for children and adolescents in the context of schools (Cunningham& Oakland, 1998). The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) defined school counselor as the professionals who own the unique counseling technology and serve the academic development, career growth and personal development of all students (American School Counselor Association, 2005). At the same time, they must hold the professional certificate awarded by the American Psychology Association (APA).

In the United States, the pre-service training of school counselors arouses nationwide attention and a strict qualification authentication system has been established. Specifically, a person who applies for the qualification of school counselor has to attend psychology study before taking the accreditation examination organized by APA. They will be awarded the certificate issued from APA only after passing the examination. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) provides that a school counselor is a professional consultant in the context of a school who must hold a master degree or above (American School Counselor Association, 2012). According to ASCA standards, the pre-service training for a school counselor involves a course program in respect of social and cultural development, skills of helping others, group work, research and project evaluation (*ibid*.). In addition, a school counselor also needs to acquire the following knowledge: history, knowledge and skills of school counseling and basic knowledge of medicine (*ibid*.). Through pre-service training sessions, these future school counselors are expected to quickly adapt to the practice of school counseling (Schmidt, 2001).

In the United States, in general, school counselors' wage levels are higher than any other teacher or faculty due to their diploma and longer time of pre-service training. According to the data released by U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the annual average income of school counselors was USD 48,050 in 1998, while it was in USD 33,590-37,890 for other teachers at primary and secondary schools across the

nation in the same period. Thus, school counselors play an important role in American schools (Wang, 2003) and this is recognized by their employers.

In 2002, Chinese Mental Health Education Guidance provided that school counselors are professionals who serve the mental health of all students at schools. In 2002, the head of the Ministry of Education officially put forward the concept of "school counselor" (China Education Daily, September 3rd of 2002, Second Edition). He stated that school counselors in China must hold a bachelor degree in Psychology or Pedagogy. Moreover, school counselors in China have to serve students in various ways including individual counseling, group counseling, and provide psychological counseling courses, crisis intervention, and academic pressure relief. They should help students recognize themselves, know how to learn, interact with others. But, in China, the professional role of school counselors is still less recognized compared to the United States. Scholars elsewhere have emphasized that in the context of schools, it is very important to recognize counselors' identity as professionals (Gladding, 2000; Myric, 1997; Vace & Loesch, 2000). However, in this literature, the researchers merely state the threats to their professional identity that school counselors may be facing, but provide no detailed account from a personal or school perspective on why they are threatened with identity loss.

### 2.1.2 The identity and role of school counselor internationally

Harris (2013) points out that school counselors in Iran, Japan, South Korea, and Switzerland are those eligible and experienced teachers who usually have received additional training sessions in guidance and counseling. In Brazil, Egypt and Greece, school counselors are psychologists. In some other countries, such as Portugal, school counseling is engaged in by school psychologists who have received instructional training and those teachers who have received counseling training. In Belgium and Macau, school counselors are either psychologists or social workers, while in China, school counselors are professional teachers holding a bachelor or master degree in Pedagogy or Psychology.

The job responsibilities of school counselor vary from country to country. According to a survey conducted by Harris (2013), career guidance is the basic work for school counselors in 32 countries, including Brazil, Jordan, Turkey, Philippines and Germany. In 8 countries including China, Singapore and Indonesia, psychology education classes are extensively delivered. She also found that school counselors cooperate with parents and teachers or separately provide special-needs students with counseling services.

Similarities and differences in the experiences of school counselors can be discovered within a global perspective. For example, in Turkey, school counselors provide service in educational settings to the students. These services include dealing with students' complex cases such as depression, substance abuse, school

violence and suicide attempts (Gündüz,2012). Also, they provide consultation services to the parents and teachers. In Australia, school counselors give support to the students who have mental problems. They provide students with psychological tests and some crisis interventions or supportive counselling. Also, they give some mental health professional development classes for the other teachers and staff (Campbell & Colmar, 2014). In Georgia, school counselors work very closely and maintain contact with both students and their teachers and principals for their personal development (Paisley & McMahon, 2001).

The American School Counselor Association (2012) states that school counselors deliver the program through two major components: direct and indirect student services. Direct student services involve teaching school counseling core courses and providing individual counseling services, while indirect student services include some assistance in school such as computing grade-point averages or keeping clerical records. American School Counselor Association (2012) has explicitly suggested that school counselors need to spend 80% of their time in direct student services. In their official document, American School Counselor Association has clearly identified appropriate activities (see Table 2.1) and inappropriate activities (see Table 2.2) for school counselors. They also suggest that in schools, counselors should use their professional knowledge and skills to focus on the students' needs. Otherwise, if they spend too much time on inappropriate activities, their professional role cannot be fulfilled. In this sense, the main responsibilities of school counselors in USA are to promote the academic progress, mental health, and individual and social development of all students (Bryant & Constantine, 2006). The following two tables (2.1 and 2.2) manifest some appropriate and inappropriate activities of school counsellors in USA.

**Table 2.1**
**Appropriate Activities for School Counselors in USA**

| |
|---|
| Individual student academic program planning. |
| Counseling students who are tardy or absent. |
| Counseling student who have disciplinary problems. |
| Counseling students as to appropriate school dress. |
| Collaborating with teachers to present guidance curriculum lessons. |
| Providing teachers with suggestions for better management of study hall. |
| Assisting the school principal with identifying and resolving student issues and needs. |
| Working with students to provide small- and large- group counseling services. |
| Advocating for students at individual education plan meetings, student study teams and school attendance review boards. |

Note. Source: ASCA, 2012.

**Table 2.2**
**Inappropriate Activities for School Counselors in USA**

| |
|---|
| Registration and scheduling of all new students. |
| Responsibility for signing excuses for student who are tardy or absent. |
| Performing disciplinary actions. |
| Teaching classes when teachers are absent. |
| Computing grade-point averages. |
| Maintaining student records. |
| Clerical record keeping. |
| Assisting with duties in the principal's office. |
| Preparation of individual education plans, student study teams and school attendance |

Note. Source: ASCA, 2012.

### 2.1.3 School counselors：A special group in Chinese schools

School counselors always have two identities: counselor and teacher (Schellenberg, 2012). In China, school counselors have both of the two identities: they must teach psychology-educational courses, provide individual counseling, assist principals and parents in managing students, conduct surveys in respect of mental health among students, and provide psychological intervention for trauma-affected students. These activities are almost identical with the responsibilities of school counselors suggested by ASCA in 2012.

In China, school counselors are a group of professional counselors working in schools. But, they are different from other teachers in schools or those psychological counselors outside school. Specifically, other teachers teach Chinese, math, science or other subject knowledge to the students. In China, school counselors are a group of special teachers who must hold both qualifications in psychology and teacher credentials. Meanwhile, school counselors are also different from other counselors who work outside the school. Firstly, they serve different visitors. School counselors only serve students, teachers and parents in schools, while counselors who work outside the school may serve all the people in society. Secondly, school counselors are obliged take a lot of other extra assignments, such as administrative or management duties, in addition to counseling students, while other counselors mainly specialize in psychological counseling only.

Above all, school counselors in my research refer to the practitioners who graduated from Pedagogy or Psychology and have attended the professional training of psychological counseling. They engage in psychological health education and counseling in schools. These school counselors have two main characteristics. Firstly, their main responsibilities are to monitor and maintain the mental health of

students and promote their academic progress. Secondly, their counseling services are intended for students, teachers and parents in schools.

## 2.2 Burnout

### 2.2.1 Freudenberger's burnout definition

In the past twenty or thirty years, burnout has been extensively studied in western human resources management. Recently, burnout has become a major topic discussed at the human resources conferences in the United States. The study of burnout can, however, be traced back to the 1970s: in 1974, Freudenberger put forward the concept of burnout. He argued that burnout was a symptom of emotional exhaustion which is more likely to occur in those engaged in the "helping professions" such as teachers, nurses, polices or counselors. In Freudenberger's view, when the worker's ability and vigor fail to meet the job requirements, the he or she will get exhausted. In that case, burnout will occur. He observed that when many young mental health practitioners in New York clinics attempted to satisfy their job expectations and requirements, they began to be exhausted physically and psychologically. He found that although these mental health workers were exhausted, they still had to help visitors, which could lead to their depression and indifference to others. In his view, these workers were subject to burnout. In my view, Freudenberger mainly employed a clinical perspective to understand the problem of burnout which focused on the description of etiology or symptoms. Since then, the concept of burnout has had many different interpretations in various countries. The following section will engage with some of the important and key interpretations in burnout definitions.

### 2.2.2 Burnout's dynamic and static definition

Chemiss (1980a) argued that burnout refers to a process in which a worker's job attitudes and behaviors are gradually changing negatively. Etzion (1992) defined burnout as a slow negative development process. He argued that in the beginning of burnout, the worker cannot perceive it. As the burnout comes to a critical point, the worker can perceive his exhausted state. Sarason (1992), from Yale University, believed that in the early stage, the worker may or may not feel the burnout. As time goes by, it is only when the worker think it is too difficult to remain devoted to the service work, as the social conditions cannot offer a favorable environment for that work, that burnout occurs. These researchers all view burnout as a negative and dynamic – or progressive - condition.

Different from the above researchers, Pines & Aronson (1989) defined burnout as a state of physical, emotional and psychological exhaustion. Brill (1984) defined burnout as a state of individual malfunctioning due to the large workload or high work expectations. The above researchers viewed burnout as a somewhat static and negative state – an end-point rather than a process.

In my view, the static and dynamic definitions of burnout are not mutually exclusive. In a way, they complement each other. Actually, a symptom such as exhaustion described in the static definition can be viewed as a performance in the later stages in the dynamic definition of burnout. In the history of the study of burnout internationally, Maslach, the most famous researcher in this filed, raised a definition that combines both the static and dynamic features of burnout.

### 2.2.3 Maslach's burnout definition

Maslach and his colleague have clearly illustrated their definition of burnout in 1986. According to their definition, burnout is a group of syndromes including emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment which occur amongst workers in helping professions (Maslach & Jackson, 1986).

In their view, emotional exhaustion is at the center of all three dimensions of burnout. They believe that as the job demand and caseload increase, workers are likely to suffer emotional exhaustion (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001). Emotional exhaustion refers to the over-consumption of an individual's emotional resources, fatigue or energy loss (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001). Emotional exhaustion is mainly determined by job demands or characteristics outside of an individual's control (Maslach & Jackson, 1986).

In their view, depersonalization is the second dimension of burnout, which refers to a negative, indifferent, alienated or ignored attitude of an individual towards the work subject or environment. It means that in the process of burnout, the workers even will blame the work subjects or reduce their interaction with them (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001). Reduced personal accomplishment is the third dimension of burnout (*ibid*.), which refers to the workers taking a passive view of their job, or being dissatisfied with their job performance or experiencing a loss of working competence. Maslach et al.（2001）claimed that once a practitioner in the helping professions suffers symptoms in these three dimensions, burnout will occur.

Until now, the definitions of burnout remain controversial among scholars internationally. However, Maslach and Jackson's burnout definition is the most influential and dominant. In Maslach's view, three-dimensional definition contains the physical, psychological and behavioral reactions of burnout, and also reveals the dynamic characteristics of burnout. Specifically, Maslach et al. claimed that these three symptoms occur asynchronously, which implies that the occurrence of burnout is a dynamic process. They suggested that on the one hand, the emotional exhaustion they have felt will lead to depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment, while on the other hand, reduced personal accomplishment will intensify their emotional exhaustion (Maslach & Jackson, 1996). They further suggested that the burnout of this definition is not seen as a dichotomy of burnout or no burnout. They viewed burnout as a continuous variable. They proposed that only at one critical time can the worker feel total burnout. In that case, the worker

cannot go on with his or her work.

### 2.2.4 Burnout definition in Chinese research

Compared with the international literature, there is less literature on burnout in China. Not until 2003 did we see a few articles on burnout in China. From 2003 to 2007, some national researchers thought burnout can be used to describe the state of a worker who is physically and mentally exhausted and less motivated (Wang & Liu, 2003; Xu & Gi, 2004). From 2003, Li Yongxin, the most famous researcher in China in this field, began to research burnout with his colleagues. He claimed that burnout arises out of increased workload and a negative working environment. Once a worker suffers burnout, he will be overwhelmed by physical and mental exhaustion, begin to complain or blame the working environment or have a more negative evaluation of his job (Li, 2003). He concluded that burnout is a number of experiences including emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment, after he and his colleagues interviewed 78 helping professions in two years in China (Li, 2003). Li Yongxin 's short definition of burnout is very similar to Maslach's (1986).

Later, Li examined 324 workers in Shanghai and Beijing initially to prepare a burnout scale that suits the Chinese conditions (Li, 2004). Li's burnout scale can be viewed as the first burnout investigation tool in China. In his research paper, the burnout experience consists of mental exhaustion, complaining about or blaming the working environment and negative responses to the job. Afterwards, a limited number of Chinese researchers began to explore burnout components by investigating various groups of people. For example, Li & Xu (2005) after interviewing 79 doctors in Shanghai and Zhejiang argued burnout consists of three symptoms: exhaustion, indifference to patients and job dissatisfaction. Wang & Xu (2006) argued burnout consists of physical and mental exhaustion, indifference to students and job dissatisfaction, after investigating 143 teachers working in school settings in Hangzhou, Shanghai and Nanjing. Li Yongxin examined 821 policemen, doctors, nurses and, after his measurements, he finally formed the Chinese edition of a burnout scale which is called the Chinese-Maslach-Burnout-inventory (CMBI) (Li, 2007). The detailed information of this CMBI scale will be fully dealt with later in this and the following chapters. It can be concluded from the above limited evidence that the Chinese definition of burnout is basically uniform with Maslach's to a considerable extent.

### 2.2.5 Burnout and stress: the commonalities and differences

Walter B. Cannon (1997) defined stress as an event or environment that makes people nervous. Hans Selye defined stress as a heavy physical or mental burden (Selye, 2000). Selye (1999) thought that stress arises when the job requirement exceeds personal coping resources. Most researchers agree that any account of stress generally includes stress source, individual's assessment of stress and individual's response to stress (Ammondson, 2000; Faber, 1999; Li, 2005; Zeng,

2009; Xu, 2013). Li (2005) and Lin (2010) take the position that stress and burnout are two distinct concepts but they share some commonalities (see table 2.3;2.4). In their view, stress and burnout are connected with each other, but they are different concepts.

**Table 2.3 Commonalities between stress and burnout** (Li, 2005; Lin, 2010)

| Commonalities | Explanation |
|---|---|
| 1. There may be a certain causal relationship. | Stress can be seen as one of the causes of burnout and burnout can be seen as a result of prolonged stress. |
| 2. Both of the two can lead to negative results. | After copying with stress, some negative physical or mental damage also can be caused. And, after an individual experiences burnout, some negative responses also will be produced. |
| 3. The experiences of the two are similar. | Both stress and burnout can be manifested in an individual's experience as fatigue, loss of his energy or emotional problems. . |

**Table 2.4 Differences between stress and burnout** (Li, 2005; Lin, 2010)

| Differences | Explanation |
|---|---|
| 1.Different people who experience it | As long as an individual is working, he will feel working stress, while, only those individuals who have high expectation of the job can experience burnout. |
| 2.Different conceptual dimensions | Stress includes stress source, stress assessment and stress coping response, while, burnout includes emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal achievement. |
| 3. Unclear relationship between the two | The theories of stress emphasize the interaction between people and the environment. It remains unclear whether or not there is a mediating factor between the two. In other words, high stress does not mean high level of an individual's burnout. |

## 2.3 School counselors' burnout

### 2.3.1 School: a place where burnout is on the increase

As shown in much of the literature, around the world, teachers, principals, as well as school counselors are more vulnerable to burnout in schools. Over the past two decades, teachers' burnout has markedly increased in schools, as they increasingly get anxious, depressed and even dissatisfied with their job (Luo, 2003; Ivancevich, 1988). Luo (2003) reported that with stress increasing, teachers become more susceptible to physical or mental exhaustion. He thought that fast-paced work and low salary were two important causes for teachers' burnout. Chan (2003) conducted a survey among 415 Hong Kong teachers and found excessive workload and a lack of social support led to their high level of burnout. Luo (2003) also conducted a survey among 1238 teachers and found interpersonal conflicts and long working hours are the main causes of teachers' burnout in China.

At the same time, more and more literature is suggesting that principals have begun to suffer burnout. After visiting 38 school principals, the American Dr. Barbara found principals' burnout level is higher than teachers'. She argued that more responsibilities of school management and interpersonal conflicts are two important causes of their burnout (Barbara, 2009). Chen (2012) discovered that principals had a moderate level of burnout by administering the burnout scale to them in 22 schools in Taipei. She further claimed that lack of management experience and heavy workload are the main factors that cause their burnout. Lin argued that the dramatic changes in internal and external environments of school cause burnout among school workers. He claimed that more complex interpersonal relationships, increased student problems and high expectations from parents will cause a lot of burnout in teachers, principals and school counselors (Lin,2010).

In school, school counseling is a special human service profession that renders mental health support to the students. Like other health care professionals, school counselors are a group susceptible to the threat of burnout. Lin (2010) argued that these counselors need to be highly engaged in their work and give a lot of sympathy to students with problems. Every day, a school counselor has to deal with many students with many mental problems. School counselors are considered the main professional staff in school responsible for students' mental healthcare. In this process, many of them may directly face mental crises which may harm them. When their energy cannot meet these needs, they begin to suffer burnout (Lin,2010). In this case, longer working hours, lack of leadership support and an increase in the number of students to be served may put the health of school counselors under threat. As Bardwell wrote in 2010, "School counselors are working at a full load today. The continuous caseload will keep them away from concentrated working." (p 30).

Much international and national literature can support the claim that school counselors are suffering from burnout to some extent. For example, in 1984, Pierson-Hubeny and Archambault compared the burnout level between school counselors, discipline teachers and social workers in New Orleans. They found that school counselors reported a higher level of burnout compared to the other two groups (Pierson-Hubeny & Archambault, 1984). Maslach (1996) found that 27．8%, 15．4% and 12．2% of school counselors were at the higher levels, average levels and lower levels of burnout respectively after conducting a survey among 30 counselors in 40 schools in USA. Su (2000) conducted a survey among 132 school counselors in Taipei and found that over 30% of them had moderate levels of burnout.

### 2.3.2 School counselors' burnout symptoms

Some researchers have begun to study the burnout situation of school counselors over the last 20 years. Many researches demonstrate that the overall situation of

burnout of school counselors is not optimistic as expected (Wachter, Clemens, & Lewis, 2008). In general, the burnout symptoms of school counselors are similar to those of other helping professions (Pu, 2013; Bian, 2008; Zhao, 2009). Bardwell found that out of the three dimensions of burnout, school counselors are the most susceptible to emotional exhaustion (Bardwell,2010). Pu (2013) interviewed 39 school counselors in Shanghai. The interviewees in his research argued that they perceived 'burnout' as a process of their emotional exhaustion and loss of working motivation and working accomplishment.

The symptoms of burnout showed by school counselors are basically consistent with Maslach's three major symptoms of burnout, according to some Chinese literatures. Through semi-structured interviews with 8 school counselors, Bian reported the burnout symptoms of school counselors (Bian,2008). In his research paper, some school counselors argued that burnout appears as loss of interest and passion in their work. Others argued that burnout is reflected as the loss of a sense of accomplishment after long working hours, and some believed that burnout will occur when they feel physical and emotional exhaustion. In his research, the interviewees considered that they sometime also had some negative attitude towards students while counseling. Moreover, 6 counselors reported that they will get annoyed when providing counseling service. Similarly, after interviewing 29 counselors in Nanjing, Pu (2013) found that school counselors will show exhaustion, inability to concentrate on counseling, and resistance against counseling, if they are experiencing burnout.

### 2.3.3 School counselors' burnout scale

The selection of an appropriate measuring tool has a significant effect on research results. Internationally and nationally, there are a lot of scales to measure burnout level, but, there are very few scales specifically for the measurement of school counselors' burnout level. The most influential tool is the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), which is widely used for the study of burnout level of all working people. This questionnaire was prepared by Maslach & Jackson in 1996 with a total of 22 items. The entire questionnaire covers three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishment. All items are scored from 0 to 6, in which 0 means "never" and 6 means "everyday like that". More than 90% of researchers in this field used MBI before 2005. A lot of researchers reported the high reliability and validity of MBI (Maslach, 2001; Lambie & Glenn W, 2007).

Later, MBI evolved into two new versions: the MBI-Human Service Survey，and the MBI-Educators Survey. The former MBI-HSS scale was used to test the burnout level of social services workers such as policemen, nurses, doctors and so on, while the latter MBI-ES was used to test the burnout level of teachers in school. Also, lots of researchers have reported the high reliability and validity of MBI-HSS and MBI-ES (Maslach, 2001; Lambie, 2007). In China, Wu (2003) & Liu (2004)

measured the burnout levels of 323 nurses using MBI-HSS, Zhao (2004) measured the burnout levels of 210 teachers using MBI-ES, and Wang & Xu (2004) measured the burnout levels of 309 policemen using MBI-HSS.

From 2005, some Chinese researchers began to measure the burnout levels of social help workers using localized scales, although in the national literature from 2005, there are not many Chinese local burnout scales. For example, Wang (2007) revised certain items in MBI-Educators Survey and prepared a localized teachers' burnout scale. Shi & Bi (2008) measured 2,176 Chinese teachers using Wang's teachers' burnout scale.

In 2005, Li Yongxin and his colleagues prepared a burnout scale which they called the Chinese Maslach Burnout Inventory (CMBI) that suits the Chinese conditions and culture. Li Yongxin is one of the earliest scholars to engage in research on burnout. CMBI has been revised and tested for several times. Li Yongxin conducted a survey among 370 doctors, nurses and policemen and initially prepared the burnout scale to suit Chinese national conditions (Li, 2005). In this study, he and his colleagues identified three dimensions of burnout by performing exploratory factor analysis on the results. The three dimensions of burnout are exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal achievement which are consistent with Maslach's dimensions of burnout (Li, 2005; Maslach, 1986). In 2006, Li Yongxin and his colleagues measured 577 teachers, police and doctors using this scale and then revised some items. Using confirmatory factor analysis, they found that the collected data is also substantially consistent with the three-dimensional burnout structure, but some items in the scale were revised (Li, 2006).

Since 2008, a few researchers have used CMBI to measure burnout levels among different groups of workers, including teachers, nurses, policemen, as well as school counselors in some parts of China. Li's burnout questionnaire (CMBI) has aroused the attention of relevant scholars and has been widely used by many Chinese research institutes. For example, Pu (2013) used Li's burnout questionnaire to text the burnout level of 678 school counselors. Zhao (2009) used Li's questionnaire to test the burnout level of 567 school counselors. In Zhao's study, the Cronbach's Alpha for the whole CMBI was 0.68. Also, the three-factor model was supported by his data manifesting the good construct validity of CMBI. However, as yet there is no Chinese scale specially designed to measure only school counselors' burnout levels.

### 2.3.4 School counselors' burnout level

In the past, some researchers have used qualitative standards to define the burnout level. For example, the participants' subjective judgment of their degree of tiredness or exhaustion may be taken as the main indication of their burnout level. However, the subjective nature of this qualitative criterion makes it difficult to apply and compare across different populations, particularly culturally different

populations, but also even within countries. In response to this difficulty, the quantitative-based criterion has been spread throughout the world. Under the dominant influence of Maslach's three-dimensional burnout theory and his MBI scales, most researchers began to test the burnout level of school counselors using his method and scales.

According to Maslach's methods, he firstly divided the whole research participant group into three separate groups based on the scores of each dimension of burnout from high to low. He supposed that the participants who obtained scores in the highest one third of the range have experienced high exhaustion. He supposed that the participants who obtained middle one third to two thirds scores have experienced moderate exhaustion, and that the participants who obtained the last one third low scores have experienced low exhaustion. He used the same calculation principle with the next two burnout dimensions. Then, he calculated each of the three burnout dimensions' critical value, which means the cut-off score in the position of the highest one third in each of the three group scores.

According to these three critical values, Maslach judged participants' overall burnout level. He viewed any participant for whom only one of the dimension scores exceeds its critical score to be defined as a "low burnout person". Any participants for whom any two of the dimension scores exceed their critical scores can be defined as a "moderate burnout person". Any participants for whom all three factor scores exceed their critical scores can be defined as a "high burnout person". One of the largest advantages of this quantitative criterion is that the researcher can fully consider all of the three aspects of burnout rather than only the burnout total score. So, in Maslach's total judging process, it has no meaning to clarify the actual contents and features of each participant' s burnout level (low, moderate, high) because it is all based on their scores in the scales rather than their subject experience or narrative.

However, the detailed critical values of each burnout dimension between the countries are different. So, the results between the countries also vary. For example, Farber (1985) used MBI to survey the burnout level among US school counselors and found that 12% of them were at the high burnout level. In 1988, Ackedey, Holder and Kurdek used MBI and found that 36.9% of American school counselors experienced a moderate or high burnout level. According to a survey among 173 school counselors in Detroit conducted by Mills (1998), about 38.9 % school counselors were at the moderate or high burnout level. Kym-Myree Earle (2017) also used MBI to survey 243 school counselors working in NSW Australia found that only 31.5% of school counselors had a low level of burnout.

However, other international studies have come to very different conclusions. In 1986, Hellman, Morrison and Abramowitz surveyed 467 new US school counselors using MBI and found that 78% of them had a low level of burnout. In 1989,

Raquepaw and Miller found that 80% of school counselors investigated were at the low to moderate levels of burnout.

Disputes over the burnout level in school counselors are also significant among Chinese researchers. After conducting a survey among school counselors in the north part of China, Li (2005) found that compared to the workers in other occupations, school counselors are at the low levels of burnout. Pei (2006) also found that 82.7% school counselors in Yunnan are at the low level of burnout.

However, Bian (2008) found that 61.5% school counselors are at the moderate or high burnout level by using CMBI. And, after surveying 122 school counselors by CMBI, Pu (2013) discovered that only 34.2% of school counselors investigated were at the low level of burnout. Overall, we can draw a conclusion that the burnout level of school counselors varies from survey to survey, which might be attributed to different surveying tools, different researchers' judgement criteria or different school context.

## 2.4 Key Factors contributing to school counselors' burnout

In this section, some important influential factors in the burnout of school counselors will be discussed in depth. Based on domestic and foreign professional publications in 1980-2017, I found many factors which may impact on school counselors, e.g., gender, age, working years, workload, role ambiguity, social expectation, counselor personality, peer support, or work environment. Due to the complexity of the factors influencing counselor burnout, I conducted a more rigorous and focused literature review in this section. A few key factors are discussed in this chapter. By sorting the literature published in 1980-2017, I will examine three kinds of factors influencing burnout: demographic factors, work-related factors and intermediary factors. Amongst these, demographic factors include age, gender, working years, etc.; work-related factors include workload, role, stress, etc. Some of the literature have evidenced how these factors actually cause burnout.

### 2.4.1 The demographic factors and school counselors' burnout

A lot of demographic variables may affect school counselor burnout, such as age, income, working years, gender, or marital status. The findings tend to be very inconsistent between different researchers internationally or nationally.

#### 2.4.1.1 Age and burnout

Most researchers assert that the age of counselors is negatively correlated with emotional exhaustion and depersonalization of burnout, but shows no significant relationship with personal accomplishment (Hellman & Morrison, 1987; Ross &

Altmaier, 1989; Rogers & Dodson, 1987). Lambie (2007) surveyed more than 500 school counselors and found that their burnout levels would reduce with the age. Other studies supported the finding that the burnout of counselors with shorter period of employment is higher than that of those with a longer period of employment (Cordes et al, 1993; Miller et al, 2000). Similarly, Pu (2013) surveyed 121 school counselors in Eastern China and found that the burnout level of the school counselors aged between 20 and 29 was significantly higher than that of those aged above 40. Huston (2010) surveyed 213 school counselors in Southern Taiwan and found that the burnout level of school counselors aged between 26 and 35 was significantly higher than that of those aged above 40. Pedrabissi (1992) surveying some French school counselors, found that their burnout level was at its peak in the 26-30 age group. Researchers have given their own explanations of these findings. Maslach (2006) indicated that workers aged in their 20s are more enthusiastic and often hold unrealistic illusions at work, so they are more likely to suffer from burnout. Rogers & Dodson (1987) offered the reason that with increase in age, counselors are able to learn more mature coping skills and develop different working habits and expectations compared to younger counselors.

However, a few researchers have reported that age shows no significant correlation with the burnout of school counselors (Thornton, 1992; Xu & Gao, 2004; Bian, 2008; Pei, 2006). Only a few findings indicate that age is positively correlated with the level of counselor burnout. Kahill (2007) conducted a survey among 550 American school counselors. The result is that increasing age shows a significant positive correlation with their burnout level. Also, Kruger (1991) found that the burnout level felt by counselors with over 20 years of service in school is higher than that with less than 10 years of service. Kruger argued that these older counsellors experienced greater burnout feeling merely as a result of their accumulated workload. With the multiple workload gradually out of their control, they could not balance their work and family life. Finally, they will experience burnout without any support from their working environment. So, there is still disagreement over the relationship between age and school counselor burnout level.

#### 2.4.1.2 Gender and burnout

There is still great disagreement as to the impact of gender on burnout although some researchers asserted that there is no difference between male and female counselors in burnout level (Ackerley et al, 1988; Coleman, 2001; Pu, 2013).

Many studies have drawn inconsistent conclusions as to whether male counselors or female counselors are more overwhelmed by burnout. In China, some studies reveal that compared to female counselors, male counselors are more likely to experience the higher burnout level. For example, Bian (2008) compared 115 male counselors and 390 female counselors in his research. Through comparison of three dimensions in the level of burnout, he concluded that the depersonalization score of male counselors was significantly higher than that of female counselors, which

coincides with the conclusion of some other Chinese researches (Jiang & Xu, 2004; Pei, 2006). Bian (2008) argued that compared to women, men are less patient and considerate in the counseling process. For that reason, male school counselors may tend to show more burnout symptoms than female counselors.

However, many other researchers contend that compared to male counselors, female school counselors feel more about burnout (Kruger et a, 1991; Wethington et al., 1987; Lambie, 2002). For example, Lambie (2002) interviewed some female counsellors and provided a possible explanation that female school counselors may perceive more burnout feeling as they shoulder much more responsibility in marriage, pregnancy and taking care of the children compared to the male counsellors. Due to the relatively small number of male school counselor participants in these researches, however, the scope for generalization of these research results is somewhat limited. So, in future research, we need to consider how to increase the percentage of male respondents if possible, to enhance the credibility of the research.

#### 2.4.1.3 Working years and burnout

Most researches showed that the burnout level of school counselors with a short period of service will be higher than that of long-serving counselors (Cordes et al, 1993; Rohland et al, 2000; Jiang & Xu, 2004). For example, Ross et al. (1989) found that those with a short period of school counseling service reported more emotional exhaustion than those with a long period. Heckman conducted a study in 2004 and found that new school counselors would feel most burnout in his first and second year (Heckman, 2004). Maslach & Jackson (2005) explained that with the increase of working years, school counselors will gradually adapt to the school conditions and demands, and learn how to cope with different challenges in school. In that case, the burnout level will reduce year by year.

In contrast, however, Butler et al's (2005) findings are that the burnout level of school counselors with 20 years of service or longer are higher than that of counselors with less than 10 years of service. Also, Lambie (2002) found that new counselors with one or two years' experience in the job tend to have a lower level of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization than that of counselors who have been working more than 15 years. He argued that as their working time goes by, the counsellors may confront much more challenging work as a result of which they may devote more energy, both mental and physical, to their work. Once they cannot deal with the challenging work effectively, they may feel depression, perceive themselves as useless men and finally suffer from burnout.

Bian (2008) discovered that the burnout level and working years of school counselors are not in a simple linear relationship. He argued that the burnout level of school counselors tends to increase from a low level and then decrease. In his study, the burnout level of school counselors is "inverted U-shaped" in relation to

the working years. The burnout level of the school counselors with 10-15 years of service is higher than for those with less than 10 years of service and those with more than 15 years. In his research paper, Bian (2008) explained that counselors with 10-15 years working are experiencing greater caseloads, career and family burdens, which cause this group to be more susceptible to burnout. However, Verhoeren (2003) surveyed 69 Turkish school counselors and obtained a result just the opposite to Bian's conclusion. In her research, school counselors with 1-10 years of service or more than 20 years of service show a higher burnout level than counselors with 10-20 years of service. Both findings do, however, agree that there is an association between the working years of school counselors and their burnout level.

#### 2.4.1.4 Other demographic factors and burnout

The relationships between working years, gender, and age and school counselor burnout and whether any identified relationships are causal are three major concerns of domestic and international researchers. Other demographic variables such as marital status and income have been found to be variously related to counselor burnout, making the identification of causal links and effects problematic.

Relationships between and effects of marital status on school counselor burnout are contested. A set of studies has found that there is no significant difference in respect of burnout level between married and unmarried counselors (Coleman,2001; Pei, 2006; Aekerley et al,1988), but some studies do show different burnout levels. For example, Quigley et al. (1999) reported that, compared to married counselors, unmarried counselors are more vulnerable to burnout (Quigley et al., 1999). However, two Chinese studies have suggested that married school counselors are more vulnerable to burnout (Bian, 2008; Pu, 2013).

There are few researches focusing on the relationship between income and burnout level. For example, Gao (2013) surveyed 70 counselors in Shanghai and found that the burnout level of those school counselors with a monthly income of less than RMB 2,000 was the highest, whereas the burnout level of the respondents with a monthly income of more than RMB 6,000 was the lowest (Gao, 2013). Gao interviewed some of the counselors and discovered that the counselors with higher income have greater feelings of safety and working motivation, which can diminish their burnout during their working process, while the counselors with lower income have less working motivation and efficacy as a result of which they experience more feelings of depression. This depression can make them feel exhausted and hold a more negative attitude towards their work. In the end, they can be in a state of burnout.

Smith (2003) conducted a burnout survey among Singaporean school counselors and found that no demographic variable is significantly correlated with their burnout level. Some other researchers before 1989 have also confirmed that

demographic factors have little effect on school counselor's burnout level (Ross, 1989). Some Chinese studies, however, have revealed that some demographic variables, such as gender and age, show a relationship with burnout level and could explain some of the variation found in burnout level (Bian, 2008; Pu, 2013; Pei, 2006). Overall, it is too early to decide whether demographic factors are correlated – whether consistently or at all - with burnout, and more studies are needed.

## 2.4.2 Work-related factors and school counselors' burnout

Work-related factors have been repeatedly discussed in research on burnout in the helping professions (Maslach, Schaufel & Leiter, 2001; Baker & Gerler, 2004; Bryant & Constantine, 2006; DeMato & Curcio, 2004; Bian,2008; Zhao,2009; Li,2003). According to Baker & Gerler (2004), school counselors have two identities: educator and counselor. In this sense, they argue that school counselors need to take on more responsibilities than others working in schools. Several researchers confirm that school counselors are subject to role conflict and increasing caseloads (Bryant & Constantine, 2006; Kolodinsky, Draves, Schroder, Kindsey & Zlatev, 2009). Based on many international and national research findings, it can be claimed that work-related factors can explain more variation in burnout level than can demographic variable (Schaufeli & Janczur, 2004; Skovholt, 2005; Bian, 2008; Pu, 2013). Of these work-related factors, the most influential are caseload, role problems and stress (Sears & Navin, 1983; Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Lee and Ashforth (1996) in particular maintain that all of these three factors are closely related with burnout level.

### 2.4.2.1 Caseload and burnout

Some literature shows that the caseload on school counselors is mainly reflected in the number of the students to whom they provide counseling services (Lapan & Blair, 1999; Herr, 2001). In their researches, the number of the students who came for counseling has the most significant impact on the burnout score. Bian (2008), however, claims that the caseload of school counselors should not only refer to the number of students who came for the counseling but the time taken in providing students with counseling service. In Bian (2008)'s empirical study, he conducted a survey among 484 school counselors and divided them into 3 groups (1-3 hours, 4-10 hours, 10-15 hours) according to their counseling time per week. His findings showed that as the counseling time per week increases, the burnout level also increases. In Bian's follow-up interviews, he found that with the counseling time increased, the counsellors devote more continuous emotional energy. When the counsellors cannot supply or increase enough energy to themselves, exhaustion can occur. When the more difficult and complex cases occur, they gradually do not want to see their students and feel helpless in their work, which can lead to their burnout. Kolodinsky et al. (2009) surveyed Arizona school counselors and found that of the many factors that affect their burnout, the time taken in dealing with students' psychological problems has been the dominant one.

Other studies, however, show that there is no, or even a negative correlation between the caseload and school counselors' burnout level. Pei (2006) used the number of cases per week to represent the caseload of counselors, and found that the burnout score or any of the three dimensions of burnout is not significantly correlated with the number of cases per week. However, in a survey among 116 Chinese school counselors, Pu (2013) also used the number of cases per week to represent the caseload, dividing 116 school counselors into three groups according to the number of cases per week. The results showed that the emotional exhaustion and depersonalization scores of those with 3 or less cases per week were significantly higher than for those with 3-7 or over 7 cases, which conflicts with many other findings (Lambie, 2007; Wilkerson, 2009; Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006).

Some researchers have suggested that the caseload will not directly lead to school counselors' burnout (Wilkerson & Bellini, 2009). They argued that it is their subjective perception of their caseload that is a key factor that matters. They suggest that if the actual caseload on school counselors is greater than expected, their burnout levels tend to be higher. They also argue that burnout will not occur until an individual perceives that the caseload exceeds their control. Most Chinese studies do not yet mention the counselors' subjective perception to their caseload (Bian, 2008; Pu, 2013; Pei, 2006). So, the questions as to whether objective working hours, counselor-student ratios or the subjective perceptions of an individual's caseload can predict the burnout levels of school counselors are not yet fully resolved internationally or nationally.

#### 2.4.2.2 Role and burnout

Some researchers argue that counselors often engage in multiple administrative and clerical tasks, while spending less time in providing students with tutoring and counseling services in school (Hutchinson, Barrick, & Grove, 1986; Kim, 1993; Burnham & Jackson, 2000). They argue that it is the counselors' role issues that are most significant. Sears and Navin (1983) found that counselors exhibit lower levels of work happiness due to this role issue, and studies demonstrate an association between role confusion and burnout among school counselors.

For example, Hutchinson, Barrick, and Grove (1986) surveyed 56 Indian school counselors, and found they needed to report on 16 different activities in their work, from the ideal activities perceived by school counselors to the actual activities they undertook on a daily basis. Almost all counselors stated that they preferred to engage in individual counseling than recording student performance or doing some other trivial matters in their schools. Kim (1993) surveyed 54 school counselors and 26 principals in his research. He found that the great differences between their expected role and actual role in school can be a key contributor to the counselors' burnout level. Burnham and Jackson (2000) conducted interviews with 50 licensed school counselors and found that their routine work varied greatly. Many of these

counselors complained that they had to engage in time-consuming administrative tasks which contributed to their sense of burnout. According to much international and national literature, role problems among school counselors involve role ambiguity and role conflict.

#### 2.4.2.2.1 Role ambiguity and burnout

School counselor's role ambiguity has defined as arising when they are uncertain about their job responsibilities and consequently doubt their professional identity in school (Um & Harrison, 1998). In school, the gap between the work that counselors themselves expect to take on and their actual work makes them feel their professional status is challenged (Brief & Aldag, 1976). Culbreth et al. (2005) similarly argued that role ambiguity among school counselors emerges when their actual job requirements deviate from their understanding and expectation of the work before they took up their employment.

The source of role ambiguity can be traced back to the history of the development of the role of school counselors. Taking the United States as an example, the role of school counselors has changed drastically since the position was created. In the early 20$^{th}$ century, career guidance and student performance evaluation were their major responsibilities. By the mid-20$^{th}$ century, however, they mainly provided students with individual counseling services. As with the development of the "No Child Left Behind" campaign in the USA, most school leaders were attempting to enlarge the responsibility of school counselors beyond school counseling. Many school leaders regulated the job responsibilities of school counselors based just on the whole goal of school development, which made school counselors less clear about their professional identity and role (Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Schmidt, 2003). Paisley & McMahoon (2001) also assert that the construction of professional identity among school counselors is a big problem for American schools. In the United States, ASCA explicitly listed some appropriate and inappropriate job responsibilities for school counselors (ASCA, 2005) (as stated at the beginning of this chapter). Unfortunately, as a result of rapid social changes and education reform, some school counselors in the USA still cannot play their professional role well in school (Schmidt, 2003). Schmidt maintains that school leaders in the USA treat these counselors more as academic instructors than psychological counselors who have received specific professional training in that field (*ibid*.).

Some evidence shows that levels of role ambiguity among school counselors are associated with their burnout levels. For example, Webber (2004) reported that those respondents who described themselves as counselors working in schools experienced lower burnout levels than those who described themselves as educators dealing with many other concerns in addition to counseling students. Pierson-Hubeny & Archambault (1984) carried out questionnaire surveys with school counselors, teachers and social workers, and found that school counselors reported the highest scores for both role ambiguity and burnout. In Agresta's

(2006a) research, the counselors who reported least discrepancy between ideal and actual professional roles also reported the lowest burnout levels. Lee (2008) tested 258 school counselors and found that the level of recognition of their professional identity in school can significantly predict their burnout level. In China, Bian also (2008) stressed that differences between counselors and principals in their recognition of the counselors' role is the key factor that causes counselors' role ambiguity. He argued that as a large gap develops between the counselors and principals' recognition of the counselors' role, the school counsellors may feel unfairly treated in their schools and be tired of immersing themselves in other work unrelated to the counselling. Then, they can complain the school leaders, which tends to speed up the emergence of their burnout feeling in school. It seems from the above researches that lower levels of role ambiguity among school counselors may predict lower burnout levels for them.

#### 2.4.2.2.2 Role conflict and burnout

Initially, role conflict was defined as occurring when an individual cannot accommodate two or more role expectations (Kopelman, Greenhaus, & Connolly, 1983, p. 201). In the view of those authors, role conflict occurs when they cannot simultaneously deal with different requirements or expectations from different people, such as principals, students, even parents and other school-teachers. For example, principals may treat counselors as teachers rather than professional counselors, while parents and other teachers may treat them as psychological experts in solving student problems. Culbreth et al. (2005) suggest that role conflict occurs when individuals are required to complete tasks that directly or indirectly conflict with their own beliefs and values. In the United States and some other countries, including China, school counselors are required to engage in many routine administrative tasks that are irrelevant to their previous training experiences (Zalaquett, 2005; Baker & Gerler, 2004, Pu, 2013). Schmidt (2008) argues that role conflict and role ambiguity are two similar concepts, but are not identical in that role conflict occurs before role ambiguity. He adds that even if a school counselor experiences strong role conflict, he or she may be able to handle it. In that case, role ambiguity may not occur. Schmidt (*ibid.*) further clarifies the situation by suggesting that role conflict tends to reflect an objective status of work, while role ambiguity only reflects a subjective feeling of a worker.

Marks (1977) thought that multiple conflicting roles can actually make people more energetic in their job. Seiber (1974) suggested that once workers adapt to role conflict, they will obtain more flexible working experience and reduce their feelings of boredom at work. Most studies, however, support the notion that there is a positive correlation between role conflict and burnout. For instance, Ward-Allen (2002) found for all counselors in his research, levels of role conflict show significant positive correlation with their burnout. Falls (2009) surveyed 449 school counselors in the state of Texas and drew the same conclusion as Ward-Allen. He measured the counselors' role conflict by using a Counselors' Non-counseling

Activity Rating Scale and found the level of their role conflict is also positively correlated with their burnout level. He argued that if the counselors deal with many affairs at the same time, they should balance all the affairs effectively. If not, they can feel disordered and distracted in dealing with so many things, which finally causes their burnout.

In China, two small-scale studies support these conclusions. Pu (2013) interviewed 15 middle school counselors and found 12 of them reported that they engage in teaching, research work and administrative work, which caused them to often feel exhausted. They also claimed that they would feel even more physically and mentally exhausted when they are required to provide individual counseling services after so much other work in school. Wang (2009) interviewed 10 school counselors in Hangzhou. Seven of these argued that if they engage in administrative or management duties which are not directly connected with students, they will easily suffer burnout.

Some researchers prefer to study role ambiguity and role conflict together (Scarborough, 2005; Schmidt, 2008), although more prefer to study them as separate issues (Falls, 2009; Pu, 2013; Wang, 2009). Whichever approach is adopted, however, most research supports the conclusion that both role conflict and role ambiguity of school counselors can be a contributory cause of their burnout. For example, Wang (2009) argued that school counselors' role conflict or ambiguity can make them feel as an 'outsider' in schools and reduce their sense of school belongingness. With the reducing working belongingness, they can feel burnout as an outcome of the increasing of their counseling cases and other affairs.

After 2005, researchers appear to have shown little interests in simply studying correlation between burnout and role of school counselors and have turned instead to researching possible reasons for the occurrence of role ambiguity or role conflict. Of the many reasons, principals' perceptions of the role of school counselors has been found to have a critical impact on counselors' role awareness (Amatea & Clark, 2005; Dollarhide & Lemberger, 2007). For example, Ballestero and Marshall (2010) found that over one fourth of the principals in their study believed that discipline management rather than school counseling is the primary duty for school counselors. Pérusse, Goodnough, Donegan and Jones (2009) reported that over 80% of middle school principals whom they studied perceived that many non-counseling duties including recording student exam grades and registering student information are counselors' main responsibilities in their research. In a study in the USA, Leuwerke, Walker and Shi (2009) noted that over a half of principals disregarded the ASCA provisions on the role of and appropriate activities for school counselors. Kirchner & Setchfield (2005) conducted a questionnaire survey among 158 school counselors and 120 principals and found that principals and school counselors' perceptions of the role of counselors are totally distinct.

In conclusion, most reported findings show that burnout level of school counselors is positively correlated with their role problems, whether expressed as role conflict or role ambiguity. However, there is too little relevant research about the relationship between role and burnout level among counselors in China, which should receive much attention in the future.

#### 2.4.2.3 Stress and burnout

As described earlier in this chapter, burnout is defined as "a group of syndromes including emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment'' which occur in helping profession workers (Maslach & Jackson, 1986). However, stress is an organism's response to a stressor such as working environmental. Stress is the body's method of reacting to a challenge (Selye，1980). The concept of stress involves stress source, stress reaction and stress coping. Modern stress theory holds that stress refers to a physical and psychological tension that occurs when the work requirements exceed one's coping resources（Folkman，1984）.The differences and commonalities of burnout and stress have been presented earlier in this chapter.

The relationship between stress and burnout is quite controversial in the relevant international literature. There are many researchers who view burnout as a potential outcome of prolonged work-based stress. For example, Li Yongxin (2003) carried out a survey among 646 teachers, nurses and policemen. He found that factors such as feeling a lack of reward and unfairness in school both can lead to stress; and, the stress can lead to an individual's burnout. McCarthy (2010) suggested that for school counselors, a negative school working environment can cause stress; then, burnout will occur with the accumulation of stress. Leiter & Maslach (1988) asserted that stress beyond an individual's coping ability will lead directly to emotional exhaustion (Leiter & Maslach, 1988). Also, Maslach stated that the stress can directly lead to fatigue which can be viewed as one of the key reasons contributed to their burnout. In her interview with her participants, she found that the working stress can directly make them less motivated and feel hopeless in their working. These negative emotions can easily cause their burnout. These researches all support a direct causal relationship between stress and burnout: if we want to avoid burnout, the key thing we should do is to manage stress.

There are also many researchers who do not view burnout as simply a potential outcome of prolonged stress. They view burnout as being influenced by many other factors besides stress. Modern stress theories highlight the interactive relationships between individuals and environments. For example, Wilkerson and Bellini (2006) found that when counselors handle stress through emotion-focused coping strategies, their burnout levels will increase, while if they handle stress using cognition-focused coping strategies, their burnout levels will reduce substantially. Pu (2013) surveyed 243 school counselors in different parts of China using different scales and discovered that the counselors' stress can lead to their burnout; but,

some environmental factors such as the lack of principal's support or their perceived school climate also can lead to burnout. These researches show stress and other factors interact with each other to influence the counselors' burnout level. These researches may support a relatively complex relationship, not just a direct linear relationship between the stress and burnout. Pu (2013) also argues that stress is not the only influence on burnout level. She claims that if we want to avoid burnout, we should do more than just manage stress.

There are not many studies of the relationship between stress and burnout of school counselors. From the limited empirical evidence, we can see that the two models relating burnout and stress summarized in the previous two paragraphs are both supported by some researches. The relationship between the two concepts remains to be further tested and clarified in future studies.

#### 2.4.2.4 Other work-related factors and burnout

In addition to caseload, role and stress, school climate, the attitude of principals towards counselors and the support given by principals to school counseling have aroused growing attention from researchers (Amatea & Clark, 2005; Zalaquett, 2005). In particular, the school climate is an important factor that affects the burnout level of school counselors. Lambie (2002) claimed that the school climate, as perceived by school counselors, can help to predict their burnout levels; he argued that a perceived positive and optimistic school climate will decrease burnout levels. Similarly, Mayer et al. (2003) found that the support given by the principal to school counselors is positively correlated with those counselors' job satisfaction and negatively correlated with their burnout level. Cummings and Nall (2003) measured the burnout levels of 51 rural and urban school counselors in Iowa in an attempt to identify the relationship between those burnout levels and school leadership. Their results show that those school counselors who considered their leaders to have an autocratic leadership style reported more burnout feelings than those who considered their leaders gave them more autonomy. This result suggests that counselors need to feel they have some degree of control over their working lives and practices if they are to reduce or avoid burnout. That is, we can suggest a more generalized conclusion that counselors need to have their professional identity, competence and integrity recognized if they are to avoid burnout. This would match with the findings about their not wanting to be expected to do things unrelated to their professional identity.

### 2.4.3 The mediating factors and school counselors' burnout

In addition to demographic and work-related variables, scholars have also explored and discussed the impact on their burnout level of mediating factors such as the personal characteristics of school counselors and the social support system, on which I will focus in this section.

#### 2.4.3.1 Personality and burnout

Chang et al (1996) found that optimistic personality scores of counselors are negatively correlated with their burnout levels. Huebner, Scott, and Lane (1994) showed that those counselors with high scores in 'competition' tend to have higher burnout levels. Butler and Kent (2005) surveyed 533 school counselors in central Florida and found that those counselors with high collective self-esteem tended to report lower burnout levels. Bian (2008) conducted a quantitative study among 830 school counselors and concluded that their positive personality, especially possession of a sense of humor, can effectively predict their burnout. In Bian's view, counselors' personality can influence their attitude to the work and the difficulties they meet in their job. Also, their personality can affect their management of their working challenges. So, their personality does not cause but can help them adjust to their burnout.

Other studies have shown that the relationship between personal characteristics such as self-efficacy and burnout remains unclear. For instance, Julie (2006) found that self-efficacy is in significant positive correlation with counselors' emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, whereas Pei (2013) found that self-efficacy in counseling of school counselors is significantly and negatively correlated with their burnout levels. Contradicting both of these studies, Webber (2004), from a questionnaire survey among 247 school counselors in New Jersey, found that counselors' self-efficacy cannot effectively predict their burnout level.

#### 2.4.3.2 Support and burnout

In the field of school counseling, researchers have mainly examined three kinds of support: supervision support, peer support and family support. Firstly, supervision is an important guarantee for school counselors' personal growth and professional development. Feldstein (2000) found that school counselors who are supervised often reported significantly lower levels of burnout. According to a survey conducted by Webber (2006), those school counselors with more supervision support and peer support have a lower score of exhaustion. Secondly, most research findings support there being an association between peer support and burnout of school counselors. For example, Savicki and Cooley (1987) argued that in school, peer support is positively correlated with personal accomplishment of counselors. They maintained that if other colleagues in school support counselors' work, they will perceive their counseling job to be meaningful. Lastly, some researchers' findings support that there is also an association between family support and burnout of school counselors. For example, Haddad and Afaf (1998) surveyed 90 school counselors from the northern part of Jordan and found that family support has a significant negative correlation with their burnout levels. Yildrim (2008) studied Turkish school counselors and reported that support from a spouse shows a significant negative correlation with burnout of counselors. Wilkerson and Bellini (2006) reported that support from children can strongly buffer the emotional exhaustion of school counselors.

These researches show that support from different sources can impact on the burnout levels of school counselors. But, Li (2007) criticized some researchers for focusing only on the sources of social support, while ignoring the subjective feelings of an individual for such support. Social psychology theory suggests that the feeling towards social support may be more important than the source of social support itself. However, there are very few studies supporting this argument, internationally or nationally. For example, Li (2007) discovered that school counselors' subject awareness of their social support can be a predictor to their burnout level in school after conducting a research in Shanghai. Li argued that the more they are aware of social support, the more positive emotion and working attitude can be achieved, by which can manage their burnout to some extent.

In summary, researchers hold different opinions about the relationship between demographic variables, work-related variables, moderating variables and burnout levels of school counselors. In my view, their contrasting findings may arise from different cultural backgrounds in which the research is carried out, and the use of different research methods or tools. There is a need for future research in an attempt to resolve these conflicts and contradictions.

From the above review, certain 'gaps' emerge that I seek to address in my study. Firstly, there is a significant absence of research in China on the relationship between influential factors and burnout. Secondly, there are many inconsistencies amongst research findings in identifying factors correlating with burnout. My study cannot entirely resolve this but will add further quantitative data applicable to this field in China. Thirdly, there is some absence of well-founded explanations in the relationship between factors and burnout. Explanations of burnout remain inconsistent and various partly as a result of the lack of attention to socio-cultural diversity and partly through the lack of qualitative research. Through my use of qualitative research, I aim at understanding personal experiences of burnout, from which I can contribute to possible explanations for the knowledge on how these factors influence burnout. Finally, many researchers have not referred to the process of how these factors cause burnout because they view burnout more as a product or state than as a process. Thus, it is difficult to be sure that the considered factors did not just cause stress, depression or exhaustion, but also did causatively lead to burnout. I will cover these 'gaps' by evidencing more explanations on the relationship between inferred factors and burnout and also the burnout development process itself.

## 2.5 Burnout development process

As stated earlier, Maslach and his colleagues defined burnout as a group of syndromes including emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment which occur in helping profession workers (Maslach & Jackson, 1986). In China, Li Yongxin (2005), however, viewed burnout as a process

during which the workers can suffer from emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. Researchers have carried out studies on the burnout development process amongst service workers. They obtained valuable evidence and have proposed different burnout development process models, which are reviewed below.

Spaniol & Caputo (1979) interviewed 31 nurses and policemen and concluded that their burnout development can be divided into three stages. In the first stage, they occasionally experience the symptoms of burnout. In this stage, an individual can regain the job satisfaction by taking a rest or enjoying entertainment. In the second stage, an individual's burnout symptoms often appear. In this stage, the individual still feels tired even after a relaxing weekend. After a week's work, the individual feels exhausted. In the final stage, he/she begins to suffer physiological and psychological problems and doubt his/her competence, and they may even be considering quitting the job. Clearly, Spaniol & Caputo's model is somewhat simple as it just lists the progression of burnout symptoms, but divided into 'stages', characterized by increasing severity of those symptoms.

Leiter & Maslach (2008) surveyed and interviewed many service workers for three years. They concluded that the burnout process of those service workers has three successive stages. They suggested that when an individual is under the stress from colleague, leader or customer, they will first experience emotional exhaustion, physical fatigue, then become dissatisfied and complain about their customers, ending up with a sense of reduced personal accomplishment towards their job.

Golembiewski et al (1998) also presented a different development process model. They held that once individuals suffer burnout, they will first complain about their customers, and then experience the reduced personal accomplishment towards their job, ending up with emotional exhaustion. These two burnout development models are somewhat similar to the Spaniol & Caputo's, only manifesting the different experience of service workers' burnout in a different order.

Cherniss (1980a) and his colleagues held several interviews with 28 new service workers within two years. They argued that there are also three stages on their development process of burnout. In the first stage, a negative working environment has some negative impacts on individuals. In the second stage, individuals suffer fatigue, emotional exhaustion, anxiety and other symptoms. In the third stage, individuals will do what they can to cope with these negative symptoms. If they fail, they will gradually suffer burnout, but their personality has a mediation impact on their burnout. Compared to the previous three models, this model includes both some of the causes and the experience of burnout in its development process.

The above burnout development process models seem to reveal the inner development of participants' burnout to some extent. These models can reflect the

'stages' of burnout development. Also, these models can be viewed as depicting the burnout process in terms of clinical and psychological perspectives and their consequent analysis.

However, Li Yongxin raised a different model to reveal the whole process of burnout (Li,2007). He surveyed 370 policemen and nurses. He used exploratory factor analysis, correlation analysis, regression analysis to identify the relationships between the burnout and some causal variables, mediation variables and consequence variables. Based on his data, he claimed that an individual's burnout development process takes place as shown in Fig. 2.1. As the feeling of being out of control and having excessive workload increases, they begin to be dissatisfied with and complain about their work, and experience emotional discomfort, followed by a sense of low accomplishment in their work. In other words, their accumulated feelings of being out of control and having an excessive workload can cause their burnout. At the same time, they may try to obtain some social support to deal with their burnout. Their personality in this case also has a mediation impact on their burnout. With the burnout progressing, some negative outcomes can appear such as the deterioration of their mental health or the low working effectiveness.

Li's burnout process model of 2007 has been considered the most complete burnout development model in China so far by some researchers (Bian, 2008; Pei, 2006). In this burnout development process model, the possible causes, experiences and outcomes all can be manifested to some extent.

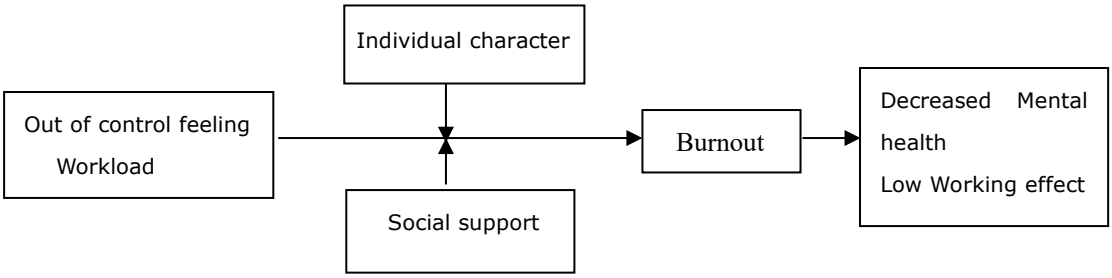
Compared with other models such as Spaniol & Caputo's, Li's model does not 'look inside' the burnout 'stages'. As a professional doctorate (EdD) student and a practicing school counselor, I have some interest in the conditions which can lead to burnout and its consequences. But I have more interest in psychological stages or steps of the burnout process.

It is obvious that Li 's model has not provided more detail, systematic and explicit with the steps in the process (from starting stage to the last stage) than Leiter & Maslach's or Spaniol & Caputo's models. The progression relationship (what comes first, what follows next, etc.) among the steps is not shown clearly in his model. So, I can seek to improve Li's (2007) model by adapting some elements from Leiter & Maslach (2008) as well as Spaniol & Caputo (1979). But I will not necessarily be going into the clinical aspects. In fact, I am dealing with psychology situations in my educational practice. However, Li's model is too general for specific application to school counsellor's burnout process; we should add some useful information in these boxes, in a Chinese school context.

So, I accept the several 'stage' models of burnout which are generally similar and assume that some version of these stages happens in Li's box labelled 'Burnout'. Although a study of the detail of the 'burnout' box is opening up, as a doctoral

student, I will not research this part using the necessary longitudinal and psychological methods, because of the time limits. I should, however, 'improve' Li's model by adding more detail to the 'inputs', in particular in a Ningbo school context which is open to empirical investigation.

**Fig.2.1 Li's (2007) burnout development process model**




**(Li,2007, p.53)**

In reviewing all the international and national literature in the field of burnout, some researchers seem to ignore the potential positive outcome of people's burnout. Some researchers have argued that some helping professionals who experienced prolonged burnout learned something and grew from their burnout experience. For example, Peter (2013) discovered that although burnout can impact negatively on the workers' life, it can also enhance their coping capability after they have experienced it. Qiu (2015) interviewed 13 doctors who experienced high burnout. The findings show that nearly one third of them stated some positive outcome in the process of managing the burnout, such as they learned more and more deeply about their job and themselves. Linley (2005) stated that the people who have experienced burnout can obtain personal growth, such as gaining new recognition and management of their life if they have made a positive adaptation to the burnout situation. And, from this limited literature on personal growth from burnout, we can learn that the helping professionals who experienced burnout may obtain some positive outcome or growth in their job, life, themselves or other aspects. However, the Chinese literature tells us little about this growth or development after burnout. We also do not know much about the possible positive outcome after school counselors have experienced burnout.

## 2.6 Burnout theoretical framework

After reviewing all the relevant the literature, there are multiple psychological theories that could contribute to various parts and observations of burnout occurrence. We can take the view that 'mental exhaustion' is the ultimate and most fundamental behavior in concepts raised by Freudenberger (1974), Maslach (1986) and Li Yongxin (2007). But there is no single 'theory of burnout' in the sense of

offering a complete causal explanation. For schools, the underlying multiple theories that 'explain' burnout are not so helpful in practice.

From the above 2.1-2.5, we can extract a burnout theoretical framework to some extent. Burnout (defined already in 2.2) occurs when various personal, institutional and social conditions occur such that their combined effect is beyond the capacity of the individual to control. The most classical 'burnout three-dimensional theory' means that the participants who experience burnout suffer emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. This theory firstly only focused on the helping professionals in general. Also, the research tended to view only situational factors as the main reason for the workers' burnout. With this theory established some researchers not only focused on the helping professionals but also on general groups of people, including those in non-helping professions. Also, Maslach and her colleagues expanded the relevant factors contributing to burnout from situational factors to include personal factors. In this case, the burnout causality theoretical framework was developed significantly.

This integrated view of a 'situational-personal' burnout causality framework can be considered as a key theory in the explanation of burnout by some researchers (Bian,2008; Pu,2013; Zhao,2014). In this framework, the interaction of both the personal and the environment can be considered. Thus, the 'situational-personal' burnout causality construct can be seen as an appropriate framework for understanding burnout. Based on this theoretical framework, both psychological and sociological perspectives of burnout or person within the context could be accepted in explaining burnout phenomenon. This 'situational-personal' burnout theoretical framework can be viewed as the cornerstone for the orientation of this enquiry, the analysis and the discussion of my research. I rely on this burnout theoretical framework throughout my thesis as it provides a combined, complex and 'stereoscopic' perspective of burnout.

We can refine this theoretical framework by identifying finally which specific respective factors in which combinations are correlated with the occurrence of burnout. By identifying factors that correlate with burnout, we can develop a theory that is relevant and useful for practice. This theory can be presented as a model. There are models of influence of causes on burnout. For educational practitioners, these 'models' can be viewed as 'theories in action'. These theories (models) can be viewed as providing some explanations for the occurrence of burnout. These theories (models) can be developed further and in more detail with more research data. In this sense, Li's (2007) burnout model can be seen as a useful action theory to refer to. If I can add some useful detail information to Li's model based on my data, I can develop the theory further to some extent.

## 2.7 Burnout situation of Ningbo school counselors

Ningbo teenagers are suffering a growing number of emerging psychological and academic problems which have aroused the serious attention of Ningbo Bureau of Education and Ningbo Government (Xu, 2003; Chen, 2016; Chao, 2014). After 2005, Ningbo schools began to recruit school counselors to help to ensure the mental health of students and promote their academic progress. In 2010, Ningbo Mental Health Education Guidance Center issued a document which provides that in Ningbo, the primary duty of school counselors is to deliver psychological counseling courses, provide group and individual counseling services, assist other teachers, principals and parents to manage students, provide proper psychological crisis intervention and promote the personal growth and academic progress of students.

However, limited evidence shows that Ningbo school counselors are also highly challenged. For instance, Xu (2013) interviewed 33 Ningbo counselors from different kinds of school. Half of them reported they suffered physical exhaustion and reduced confidence about their counseling work. One third of the participants reported that they are often assigned to do many things unrelated to students' counseling and are subjected to dealing with too many complex students' problems. Shao (2017) conducted a small survey and interviews among 10 Ningbo school counselors from 12 schools. In her findings, 7 school counselors had shown some signs of burnout symptoms over the last two years, such as emotional problems or indifferent attitude towards students. This limited evidence only can show some signs of possible burnout among some school counselors in Ningbo, rather than providing a comprehensive picture.

Some leaders of Ningbo Education Science Research Institute also have highlighted that being a school counselor has become a challenging occupation in Ningbo in recent times. Meantime, some official data also reflect the awkward and challenging situation of Ningbo school counselors in some respects. For instance, Ningbo Mental Health Center surveyed the current working situation of 32 school counselors in May 2016. The final results showed that 15 of them suffered from physical fatigue or emotional exhaustion. Once again, however, this sample is too small to provide a reliable overall picture.

## 2.8 A Brief Synthesis of the Literature Review

The duties of school counselors vary across different nations. In the United States, for example, their primary duty is to help students improve their academic performance and promote their personal growth and social development (ASCA, 2005). In China, the school counselor is a special group with two identities: counselor and teacher. They deliver psychological counseling courses to students,

provide them with academic, psychological and career counseling services and promote their personal mental health.

Different researchers define burnout in different ways. A commonly accepted definition remained controversial until the social psychologist Maslach proposed his classical three-dimensional burnout theory. He argued that burnout involves three symptoms: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced working accomplishment. An individual's burnout is characterized by the occurrence of these three symptoms (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996, p. 4). Though doubted and opposed by some other researchers, this three-dimensional burnout concept has been supported and used in very many empirical studies, internationally and nationally.

Over the last two decades, researchers have surveyed school counselors from different regions. In particular, after 2006, a large volume of research data indicates that the burnout condition of Chinese school counselors is getting worse. Prof. Li began to prepare a burnout scale (CMBI) that suits Chinese conditions to survey the national burnout status of service workers (Li, 2005). According to the literature published in 1980-2017, there are controversies over the relationship between workload, sex, age, role, stress or other factors and burnout which might be related to the research method, tool or the research sample. Although Li Yongxin and Maslach et al. proposed their burnout development process model (Leiter & Maslach, 1988; Li, 2005), no researcher ever proposed a development process model specifically for school counselors.

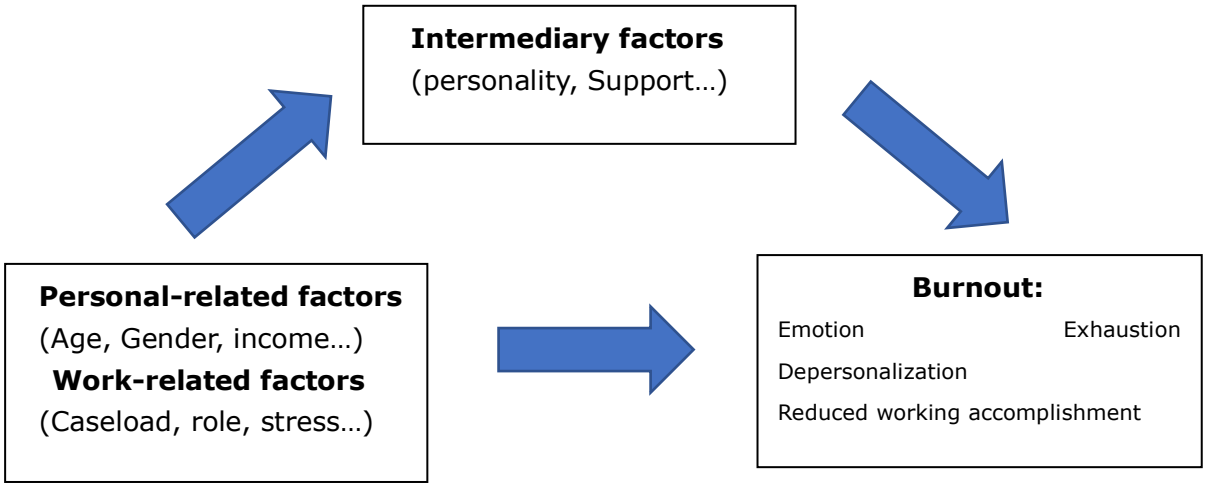
I shall summarize all key findings from the literature. Maslach's three-dimensional burnout theory can be considered the main burnout theory in this thesis. It can be viewed as providing detailed explanations of burnout from both social and psychological perspectives. Three symptoms, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced working accomplishment, can be viewed as the most common experience in helping professionals' burnout. From Maslach's perspective, burnout is handled as a process rather than a state. 'Mental exhaustion' is the most fundamental behavioral symptom in concepts raised by Freudenberger (1974), Maslach (1986) and Li Yongxin (2007).

The 'situational-personal' burnout causality framework will be viewed as the cornerstone for the orientation of this thesis's research questions, the analysis and the discussion. Three kinds of factors, personal factors such as age or gender, work-related factors such as role and case, and intermediary factors such as support have been examined. The empirically identified relationships between the relevant factors and burnout are full of inconsistencies and even contradictions. But, from the identification of these inconsistencies, we can cover these 'gaps' through further research to some extent. Furthermore, two sorts of burnout development process models exist in the history. One comprises those models which reveal the inner

development of participants' burnout. These models can reflect the 'stages' of burnout development in terms of clinical and psychological perspectives.

Another model raised by Li Yongxin in 2007 is an important burnout development model in my thesis. I intend to extend Li's model by adding more detail to the 'inputs', in particular, in a Ningbo school context which is open to empirical investigation. The following picture (Fig.2.2) shows the relationships among the key factors and burnout.

**Fig.2.2 The relationships among the key factors and burnout**



# Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

## 3.1 Overview

Over the last three decades, foreign studies on burnout of school counselors have been rapidly developing, while Chinese studies in this aspect have remained relatively weak. In the previous chapter, I focused on the current situation, impact factors and development process of school counselor burnout. At the beginning of this chapter, I briefly sort the relevant studies from the perspective of research methods. Through a detailed analysis of domestic and foreign studies published over the last thirty years, I found that before 2005 a large number of the researchers working outside China preferred to study the burnout of school counselors using only quantitative methods, for example, survey methods (Maslach, 1996; Mills, 1998; Rogers & Dodson, 1987; Thornton, 1992; Kruger, 1991; Ackerley et al, 1988; Afaf, 1998; Quigley et al., 1999; Lee & Ashforth, 1996）. After 2005, a growing number of researchers combined qualitative methods – interviews, for example - into the specific studies (Maslach, Schaufel & Leiter, 2006; Bryant & Constantine, 2006; DeMato & Curcio, 2004; Gündüz, 2012; Lambie, 2007; Wilkerson, 2009; Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006; Kym-Myree Earle, 2017). These researchers, however, only treated qualitative methods as a minor supplement to quantitative methods even though they used two approaches at the same time. In other words, quantitative methods tended to be given greater importance than qualitative methods in their research.

After 2000, researchers in China began to use quantitative methods to survey the burnout of school counselors (Liu, 2008; Ren, 2012; Zhao, 2009). A few researchers used qualitative methods to examine this problem (Bian, 2008; Wang, 2007). Other researchers of the topic combined quantitative and qualitative methods to carry out studies aimed at giving greater understanding of the processes involved (Pu, 2013; Bian, 2008; Wang, 2007; Li, 2003). However, these researchers also treated qualitative methods as a supplement to quantitative methods. Furthermore, the quantitative research and qualitative research showed little substantial connection.

To research the current situation of burnout of Ningbo school counselors and explore the possible causes and development of their burnout, I adopt mixed methods, namely combining qualitative research and quantitative research, and these are treated as being equally important. I survey the level of burnout of Ningbo school counselors and its possible causes so as to get a better understanding of what they are really thinking about. In more detail, I identify the general patterns of burnout and influential factors on it, using an existing survey instrument. The survey reveals what is going on and what factors influence what is happening. The

survey was also used to identify potential interviewees for the qualitative part of the research. The qualitative research seeks deeper understanding of how and why the phenomenon of burnout actually operates. Personal perspectives and variations in experiences of burnout, rather than group patterns, are explored in the qualitative research process.

This chapter is organized in three sections: Theoretical Perspective, Research Design and Ethical Issues. In Theoretical Perspective, I discuss the underlying philosophical basis for this research. In O'Brien's (1993) view, our theoretical perspective will influence our way of seeing the world that we are investigating. Next, I give details about the specific steps taken in planning and implement ting the quantitative research and qualitative research. In the last section, I discuss the ethical issues arising from the research process that may need to be addressed.

## 3.2 Theoretical perspective

### 3.2.1 My Research Ontology

In Burrell & Morgan's (1979) view, approaches to social science should be based on a set of assumptions about ontology, human nature, and epistemology. Based on the researcher's philosophy and experience as an educator, the theoretical base of this research was gradually developed and became the foundation of the entire research. The philosophical base of this thesis rests in the middle of the two divergent rationales of social science: objectivist and subjectivist. Each can be used to give a different perspective on the world. There is a 'real' world outside our perceptions, open to objective study, but there are also perceptions and meanings given to the world by individuals which are subjective. Philosophical bases of social science may differ in respect of ontology, epistemology and methodological concerns. In the following I specifically describe each aspect of these.

With a view to the ontology, I am opposed to the extreme objectivist who treats society as a machine, independent of researchers and human beings. I am also opposed to the extreme subjectivist who treats this world as being the result of individual experience and personal consciousness only. In my view, in the present research, the phenomenon of burnout in school counselors is reflected both by objective figures and by the subjective experience and explanations of counselors. In this sense, the nature of the world that I am researching may be reflected both by consciously phenomenological modes of insight and through external observation. So, I stand somewhere between the extreme objectivist and the extreme subjectivist positions. I think that we are meaning making conscious creatures living in an objectively knowable world.

### 3.2.2 My Research Epistemology and Methodology

The assumptions about the social world and human nature have a direct influence on the epistemological considerations for this research. According to Elliott (2002),

different ontologies lead to different epistemologies. The epistemology of the objectivist is that social science has established some common and objective causal laws and certain associations between related social facts, which aim to predict and control human behavior. Moreover, objectivists highlight the significance of studying the connections between various elements in a society. They stress the importance of empirical analysis in the process of knowledge production (Skinner 1953, 1957; Cohen & Manion, 1994). At the other end of the continuum, the epistemology of the subjectivist is that knowledge is not acquired from objective observation but rather from dialogues, reflective writing and subjective statements. They argue that knowledge production depends on attention, cognition and memory (Husserl, 1962; Cohen et al, 2000).

I stand somewhere between these two polar opposites. On one hand, I agree with the subjectivists' view to some extent that burnout is the cognitive outcome of school counselors. To be more specific, the burnout phenomenon I am investigating is "subjective". It is the behavior responding to individuals' meaning-making of the situation in which they find themselves. However, in addition to some typical cases or events, the knowledge of social science also includes some laws or rules that can explain different behaviors of people as a group. So, the fact of burnout of school counselors also needs to be measured in a more objective way to reveal some more generalized patterns.

This epistemological position has a direct influence on my methodology. The objectivist researchers attempt to examine the correlations and causal relationships between different elements of the world. To allow them to do this in their studies, the number of respondents will be large. In the course of their analysis, extreme data might be ignored because they deviate from the general pattern. Conversely, subjective researchers may attempt to understand particular characters or extreme cases through research. They attempt to understand how and why the phenomenon actually operates. In their researches, all individuals and cases are meaningful. So, I use a methodology that combines objective and subjective positions.

### 3.2.3 My Research Methods

I adopted mixed-methods to carry out a comprehensive and in-depth study of burnout of school counselors. As a methodology, it involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of the collection and analysis of data and the mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches in the research process. As a method, it focuses on collecting, analyzing and using both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study.

In my research, quantitative research and qualitative research are equally important and inseparable, which is different from a number of domestic and foreign researches. Quantitative research reflects the overall situation by using statistical methods to identify patterns and their significance. But the quantitative

research cannot access the internal mental process of the research participant. However, the qualitative research can deeply describe and analyze micro-level and particular phenomena, and understand the complex, deep feelings of the research participant. But qualitative research is deficient due to the potential for personal interpretations and biases of the researcher. Also, it has a lack of generalisability because of the limited number of research objects. So, using mixed-method research in my study provides macro- and micro-level perspectives for studying the counselors' burnout phenomenon.

## 3.3 Research design and implementation

### 3.3.1 Research questions and methods

The purpose of this research is to understand the burnout situation of school counselors in Ningbo through a questionnaire and interviews based on relevant international and national studies, in an attempt to provide a practical basis for Ningbo school counselors to deal with and avoid their burnout. I used the questionnaire to examine the relationships between burnout and various organizational and demographic factors, identified from the research literature and through piloting of earlier versions. Through interviews, I obtained deep, pertinent and comprehensive information from individuals on their experiences of burnout and the influential factors.

My research questions are:
1. What is the current situation of Ningbo school counselors' burnout?
2. What are the possible reasons for the observed levels of Ningbo school counselors' burnout?
3. How does burnout develop among Ningbo school counselors?

The first question is divided into three sub-questions. Firstly, what is the level of burnout among Ningbo school counselors? Secondly, what are the relationships between burnout level and the demographic factors? Thirdly, what are the relationships between burnout level and the work-related factors?

Overall, the first question relates to the overall situation and patterns of burnout of Ningbo school counselors. The second and third questions relate to the causes and processes of burnout. Connides (1983) claims that the combination of qualitative and quantitative will be very effective in searching for comprehensive data and deep understanding of respondents and the phenomena. In my research, the first research question is examined using quantitative methods, while the other two questions are examined using qualitative methods.

The two approaches were used sequentially, the quantitative preceding the qualitative, as the former is used both to explore the general pattern and provide an overall view of the burnout state of Ningbo school counselors and identify the

subsequent interviewees. Having established the pattern of factors influencing burnout by using the questionnaire, the interviews were used to explore the processes of interaction amongst these factors at individual level. The survey data was examined and illuminated by the interview data and the stories of the school counsellors. In detail, the RQ1 sub-RQ 2&3 aim at finding the relationships or correlations between personal or work-related factors and burnout level. The RQ 2 aims at identifying possible explanations for their perceived burnout. Answers to the RQ 2 reveal the reasons why a particular factor has an influence on burnout.

Furthermore, quantitative research outcomes are statistical in nature, not definitive, so that the personal experiences of individuals who feet in the same analytical category in the quantitative data may be very different, and these differences must be explored as part of any investigation of causality. Whereas quantitative research tends to focus on the similarities of a population that lead to patterns of behavior, qualitative work may legitimately be more concerned with the variation and differences within the population as a way of gaining insight into processes that are partly influenced by personal characteristics.

The qualitative data does allow exploration of causation at the level of a small number of individuals. The small sample size and the means by which it was selected (to reflect both 'typical' and 'atypical' cases based on the patterns identified in the quantitative study) does not allow the qualitative data to be used in some sort of triangulation or 'cross-checking' comparison with the quantitative data. The aims of the quantitative and qualitative research components are complementary rather than supplementary: they produce different forms of data to meet descriptive (quantitative) and explanatory (qualitative) aims in the RQs.

## 3.3.2 Quantitative Research design and implementation

### 3.3.2.1 Hypothesis

In order to fully understand the general burnout condition of Ningbo school counselors, I used the questionnaire in my first round of study. So far, questionnaire has been regarded as an effective tool for collecting survey data that has been most widely used. Data obtained through a questionnaire are presented in figures, which can avoid the prejudice of the researchers (Wilson & McLean, 1994). In this stage, I collected figures which can fully reflect the working situation and burnout situation of Ningbo school counselors. I identified correlations between demographic and work-related factors and their burnout level. The first big question can be divided into three sub questions which have their own hypotheses.

**Research Sub Questions:**

1. What is the level of burnout among Ningbo school counselors?
2. What are the relationships between burnout level and the demographic factors such as sex, age among Ningbo school counselors?

3. What are the relationships between burnout level and the work-related factors such as caseload, organization support and role among Ningbo school counselors?

**Research Hypotheses:**

1. The level of burnout among Ningbo school counselors is moderate.
2. Among the Ningbo school counselors surveyed, there are statistically significant relationships between the demographic factors such as sex, age, working years, the qualification, the partnered status, income and burnout level.
3. Among the Ningbo school counselors surveyed, there are statistically significant relationships between the work-related factors such as workload, organization support, role conflict, working stress, profession development feeling and burnout level.

### 3.3.2.2 Piloting

Sellitz et al (1976) considered appropriate questionnaire items must meet the following requirements. Firstly, items must be well-targeted and consistent with the research questions. Secondly, items must match the educational background of the respondents and easily be understood by them. Thirdly, items must accurately express the researcher's research intention. Fourthly, researcher must arrange the order of these items and set up the way of raising questions based on research needs. For my study, I have to clarify the relationships between the burnout level of Ningbo school counselors and different variables, so I developed three subscales, namely Demographic Factors Questionnaire，Work-related Factors Questionnaire and Burnout Questionnaire. At the beginning, I designed seven items in the Demographic Factors Questionnaire covering sex, age, working years, the highest qualification, the partnered status, yearly income and the counselors' educational background. I also designed six items in Work-related Factors Questionnaire covering caseload, organization support, role conflict and working stress and the school type.

In September 2017, I invited two experienced Ningbo school counselors to participate in a piloting test for initial questionnaire items. In the course of this piloting test, I expected they could provide some valuable suggestions for these questionnaire items. Owing to their suggestions, I finally deleted the counselors' educational background item. In the Work-related Factors Questionnaire, I deleted the item "what is the type of your school?", and added another item "What's your feeling of professional development in the recent 3 years?" In their view, the type of school has no connection with burnout of school counselors, but the feelings of their profession development may have a certain connection with their burnout. In addition, they also modified some items' expression to make them less ambiguous. After some modifications, the question wording was unlikely to be objectionable to the respondent in any way. In October 2017, I finally worked out three formal sub-scales comprising Demographic Factors Questionnaire with six items, Work-related

Factors Questionnaire with six items and Burnout Questionnaire with 15 items. I also found that it took about 10 minutes for the respondents to finish the whole questionnaire which is short enough not to invoke their impatience in the course of piloting test.

### 3.3.2.3 Sample

Cohen et al (1996) was consulted in deciding the sampling strategy: the size of the sample required; how far the sample is representative of research objective; ease of access to the sample. In this course, I should have as many respondents as possible. According to the latest data provided by Ningbo Education Bureau, at least 150 school counselors are currently working in Ningbo. These, therefore, constitute my target population and it is small enough for me to try to reach everyone by contacting all schools. My sampling strategy is therefore to obtain maximum coverage of the population, rather than to select a particular sample. But, access issues arising from a few principals' reluctance to allow the research in their school prevented me from conducting the survey in those schools, but comprised only 10% of the total number in Ningbo. This sample was self-selected by those who responded. In detail, I have chosen nearly 85% of the whole population of the school counsellors in Ningbo.

In order to raise the rate of return of the questionnaire, I combined personal distribution of the questionnaire in paper form with distribution by email. The respondents suitable to my research had to meet two basic requirements. They must hold both a psychological health education certificate and a teacher certificate. Also, they must actually be providing students with counseling services in schools.

From October to December 2017, I collected all the data from Ningbo school counselors. In all, 134 questionnaires were distributed and 130 were recovered which will be described in detail later in this chapter. The rate of recovery was 94.01%. If some basic information about a respondent was missing or a single scale had more than 3 missing items, then this questionnaire was deemed as invalid. Of these 130 questionnaires, 127 were valid. The rate of valid completion was 97.69%. The basic information of the sample is given in Table 3.1. According to it, of the 127 respondents, female counselors accounted for three fourths. Those counselors aged in 30-39 accounted for almost a half. In addition, married counselors accounted for 70%.

**Table 3.1 Basic information of the sample (n=127)**

| Variable | Level | Number | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 31 | 24.4 |
| | Female | 96 | 75.6 |
| Age | 20——29 | 35 | 27.6 |
| | 30——39 | 60 | 47.2 |
| | 40——55 | 32 | 25.2 |
| Working Years | 0——5 | 34 | 26.8 |
| | 6——10 | 60 | 47.2 |
| | ＞10 | 33 | 26.0 |
| The highest qualification | Bachelor | 86 | 67.7 |
| | Master or doctor | 41 | 32.3 |
| Partnered status | Unmarried | 38 | 29.9 |
| | Married | 89 | 70.1 |
| Yearly income | ＜80,000 | 64 | 50.4 |
| | 80,000-120,000 | 51 | 40.2 |
| | ＞120,000 | 12 | 9.4 |

### 3.3.2.4 Instrument

The questionnaire contains three individual subscales: Demographic Factors Questionnaire, Work-related Factors Questionnaire and Burnout Questionnaire. In Part One, I searched the general information of the respondents with the self-made Demographic Factors Questionnaire. In Part Two, I searched their work-related information with the self-made Work-related Factors Questionnaire. In Part Three, I measured the burnout level of the respondents by using the Burnout Questionnaire used by Chinese psychologist Li Yongxin. In the last section, I asked all participants if they were willing to accept a follow-up interview. If so, they should leave their personal contact information.

**Demographic Factors Questionnaire.** In this part, respondents are required to provide their basic personal information. The self-made Demographic Factors Questionnaire consists of six items such as gender and age. In Demographic Factors Questionnaire, all questions are raised in the form of Dichotomous questions. For instance, the layout of my dichotomous question can be thus: Your Gender? A. male B. female.

**Work-related Factors Questionnaire.** According to the relevant literature, work-related factors can explain more variations in school counselors' burnout than can their individual factors (Maslach & Jackson, 1986). Specifically, weekly consulting time, principal support, and role conflict of school counselors will influence their burnout (Butler & Constantine, 2005; Culbreth et al., 2005; DeMato & Curcio, 2004). However, the effects of these factors on school counselors' burnout are also quite controversial. In particular, I added an item to this Work-related Factors Questionnaire: "What's the counselor's feeling of professional development in the recent 3 years?" This is because the two counselors who took the pilot test both mentioned that the subjective feelings of professional development may influence their burnout levels. So, following the above considerations, respondents were required to fill in six basic work-related items namely: (a) weekly consulting time, (b) student to counselor ratio, (c) principal support, (d) working stress, (e) counselor role conflict, (f) feeling of their profession development. Also, this work-related factors questionnaire was self-designed, piloted and adjusted according to the feedback of the pilot. The items were constructed based on the factors such as workload and role identified in the existing research literature and tested in these studies (Bian,2008; Pu,2013). One additional item came from the pilot study feedback.

In detail, the first two items required the respondents to fill in their own weekly consulting time and their school's student to counselor ratio. I raised the questions in the form of rating scales when investigating the other four factors such as principal support and stress. In fact, the other four factors all reflect counselors' subjective feelings. To enable the use of statistical analysis, I used an objective method to measure their subjective feelings. Specifically, respondents could indicate their opinion by circling or putting a mark on the position on the rating scale which best represents what they feel. For instance, if I asked them about their degree of feeling of the support from principal in school, they can indicate their opinion by putting a mark on a position in a 7-point scale, where 1 means the principal did not support them at all, while 7 means the principal supported them very much.

**Burnout Questionnaire.** I quoted Li Yongxin's Chinese Maslach Burnout Inventory (CMBI) which suits the Chinese cultural background in my research. After performing a big data analysis of teachers, school counselors, policemen, medical professionals, mental health workers and other professions, Li verified the structure of CMBI comprising emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. He found the three-dimensional model would be the best model to fit the big data he obtained (Li, 2007). Although the Maslach Burnout Inventory was considered as the best instrument for measuring the burnout, it has an obvious deficiency: not reflecting Chinese conditions and culture (Lee et al., 2007). In China, some other researchers concerned about burnout of school counselors have also begun to use CMBI for quantitative research (Bian, 2008; Pu, 2013). CMBI, a

relative mature scale in measuring respondents' burnout level, has been tested many times.

CMBI is used to measure the respondents' burnout from three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment, by 15 items. The respondents are required to rate items on a 7-point rating scale regarding their current experience and feeling as a school counselor. Each of the items gives them a possible burnout behavior. The respondents will decide how that behavior is suitable to them on the score ranging from 1 to 7. In this scale, 1 means that behavior is totally nothing to do with them and 7 means they fit that behavior very much. The degree of fitting that behavior will be low to high from score 1 to 7.

According to Prof. Li's findings (Li, 2007), the first factor of this scale "emotional exhaustion" involves the following five items: (1) "I am very tired;" (4) "That my job would affect my emotion;" (7) "I often feel exhausted;" (10) "I become fagged after a day's work;" and (13) "Recently, I was a little depressed." The second factor "depersonalization" involves the following five items:（2）"I do not care about the inner feeling of my students"；（5）"My students will complain about me"；（8）"I work with a cynical attitude"；（11）"I feel I am tired of my students"； and (14) "I will reject requests made by my students". The third factor "reduced personal accomplishment" also involves five items:（3）"I can solve the students' problems effectively"; (6) "I can effectively influence others through my work"; (9) "I can create a relaxed working atmosphere"; (12) "I will be very excited after I have solved the problems of students"; and (15) "I have accomplished a lot of meaningful tasks". Of all of these, items 3,6,9,12,15 require reverse scoring. To sum up, the higher the score a respondent receives, the more seriously he is suffering from burnout.

### 3.2.2.5 Data collecting and analysis

From October 2017, I collected questionnaire data. At the beginning, I completed the Research Ethics Checklist for Research Students strongly informed by the ESRC Framework for Research Ethics. With the consent from Research Ethics Panel of the University of Nottingham, I was also approved by Ningbo Education Bureau to carry out a survey among school counselors.

Ningbo is a city in China with a population of about 8,000,000 and which contains 10 counties. In order to get a higher return rate than I expected to get using email, I intended to collect all the data in person at first but, on considering personal energy and time limitations with the survey going on, I also used email as one of my methods to contact possible respondents. I collected the data from the counselors from counties near my school in person at first; and then I collected the data from the counselors from counties very far from my school using e-mail. In the opening paragraph of the survey instrument, I stated the purpose of my

questionnaire and guaranteed confidentiality to all the respondents. I also gave all the respondents an informed consent form to fill in (see the Appendix D) before they completed the questionnaire.

In detail, I distributed 84 questionnaires at schools in person and 83 were collected. Most school counselors completed my questionnaire, but one counselor directly refused to complete the questionnaire. In this case, I respected the choice and left the school. Afterwards, I issued another 50 copies by email and 47 were completed and collected.

As described earlier, the whole questionnaire contains three individual sub-scales: Demographic Factors Questionnaire, Work-related Factors Questionnaire and Burnout Questionnaire (all can be seen in the Appendix A). My questionnaire normally took about 8 minutes in practice for each counselor to complete. Only a few counselors spent a longer time to answer the questions. Participants were assured that all data obtained from them would be strictly stored in a firewalled computer. All printed research data would be stored in the researcher's office for three years. After three years, the researcher would destroy all documents and data related in this survey.

After collecting all the original data, I loaded them onto the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for detailed analysis. Prior to the analysis of these data, I encoded the demographic variables and typed all the other scores directly. After that, I calculated the mean, standard deviation, range, maximum and minimum values, skewness and kurtosis of the burnout score of the 127 Ningbo school counselors who completed the questionnaire. I also judged the burnout level of these people according to Li Yongxin's evaluation criteria (Li, 2007). Then, I presented the basic descriptive statistics for different age, gender and other demographic variables in the form of tables. I conducted a T-test and one-way ANOVA afterwards to examine the relationships between burnout level and the demographic factors. Finally, I reported the mean, standard deviation, range, max., min., skewness, and kurtosis about their stress, role and workload. I conducted the correlation analysis of work-related factors and burnout by utilizing a Pearson's Correlation Coefficient. Finally, I typed all work-related factors into the regression equation as independent variables. By using multiple regression analysis, I explored the relationships between these factors and burnout level.

### 3.3.3 Qualitative Research design and implementation

Quantitative research uses various statistical indicators to reflect the overall situation and general patterns amongst the collected data. The purpose of my first big research question is to depict the current burnout situation of school counselors in Ningbo using questionnaire data. However, I also aimed to obtain some deep, pertinent information from the individuals about their burnout. So, my following qualitative research was designed to reveal the possible reasons and development

process of counselors' burnout. More specifically, this round of qualitative research was intended to answer another two questions: (1) What are the possible reasons for the observed levels of Ningbo school counselors' burnout? (2) How does burnout develop among Ningbo school counselors?

In this research stage, I did not carry out "voice research", which means giving a voice to an unheard minority group: school counselors. I wanted to go beyond 'what they say', to interpreting and explaining 'why they say it', from a perspective that is 'beyond the individual voice' or experience. I wanted to give a clearer picture of whether this group had experienced burnout, how it manifested itself, and why. The qualitative research only seeks understanding of how and why the phenomenon actually operates. Personal perspectives and variations of burnout, rather than group patterns were explored in the qualitative research process.

In this qualitative research stage, interview was my main research method. Interview is a research method employed by a researcher to collect the data relating to psychological characteristics and behaviors through oral communication with the research participants. Also, interview is defined as a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for a specific purpose (Cannell & Kahn, 1968). In this process, the interviewer should always follow the respondent's description, prediction and interpretation of a problem. Oppenheim (1992) considered that compared to a questionnaire, an interview will stimulate the respondent's involvement motivation.

In my qualitative research, I used semi-structured interviews. According to Patton, a respondent in such an interview will be asked all questions prepared beforehand. However, the interviewer can decide the sequence and working of questions in the process of the interview. In Patton's view, the advantages of semi-structured interview reside in its comprehensiveness, flexibility of the result and reduced prejudice of the interviewer (Patton, 1980). He argued that semi-structured interview demonstrates both the benefits of interviewer-guided interviews and standardized open-ended interviews (Patton, 1980: 206).

#### 3.3.3.1 Sample

For the qualitative research, I did not select the interviewees randomly. The reasons are as follows. Firstly, for reasons of manageability the choice of interviewees must be limited and targeted. Secondly, the general pattern of Ningbo school counselors' burnout had been revealed in the quantitative study. Lastly, the quantitative research showed the distribution of Ningbo school counselors' burnout scores was quite scattered, showing considerable variation from individual to individual, and it is this variability that needs further exploration in depth. I therefore used non-probabilistic rather than probabilistic sampling.

Many researchers used "purposive sampling" in their qualitative researches (Patton,

1990:169; Chen, 2019). Patton (1990) claimed that purposive sampling can provide large amounts of information for researchers based on the specific research goals. Chen (2019: 103) points out that qualitative research focuses on deep explanation or understanding of the research participants and to achieve this in a reasonable length of time means the number of research participants will usually be quite small. She goes on to argue that the main risk in using purposive sampling is that this method mainly depends on the researchers' subjective judgment or experience. If some errors happen as a result of the researchers' subjective judgment, the trustworthiness of the qualitative findings can be seriously influenced. In my case, however, my judgment in selecting the school counselors to be interviewed was based on the previous quantitative research results. These results provided a clear framework for selecting interviewees.

Chen (2019) and Patton (1990) put forward some detailed sampling techniques in "purposive sampling" such as extreme or deviant cases sampling, 'typical' cases sampling, maximum variation sampling or critical cases sampling. They both claim that the purpose of using the above sampling techniques in qualitative research is not to generalize the conclusion to the population, but to gain profuse information about the research participants.

**Table 3.2 Characteristics of semi-structured interviewee (N=7)**

| Code | Gender | Age | Partnered | Burnout Score | Reason for Election | Interview Time |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Male | 38 | Married | 78 | 'typical' case | 40 min |
| 2 | Male | 37 | Married | 74 | 'typical' case | 55 min |
| 3 | Female | 38 | Married | 72 | close to 'typical' case | 35 min |
| 4 | Female | 42 | Married | 70 | close to 'typical' case | 36 min |
| 5 | Male | 35 | Married | 25 | counter-case | 38 min |
| 6 | Female | 40 | Married | 31 | counter-case | 42 min |
| 7 | Female | 27 | Unmarried | 82 | extreme case | 59 min |

In my "purposive sampling" process, I used 'typical' cases sampling and extreme or deviant cases sampling together to gain a deep, but also comprehensive and explorative understanding of Ningbo school counselors' burnout reasons and processes (see Table 3.2). In detail, according to my quantitative research findings, which will be clearly set out in chapter 4, I discovered counselors' age, marital status and gender significantly affect their burnout levels. So, these factors were the key dimensions by which I selected the interviewees purposefully. The general pattern is that male, married, middle-aged counselors have higher burnout levels than others, based on the quantitative results. So, two middle-aged married male counselors as 'typical' cases and two middle-aged married female counselors close to 'typical' cases were selected randomly. It was felt that widening the range of variables would require a considerable larger sample if meaningful insights were to

be obtained. Adding one extra 'factor' would require the sample size to be doubled, if interaction between this new 'factor' and those actually used for selection is to be explored.

Two 'counter cases', both with low burnout scores, that contradicted aspects of the basic pattern revealed by the quantitative data were also selected. Moreover, a young unmarried female counselor was selected as an 'extreme' case because she revealed an extremely high burnout score, totally opposite to the general pattern. These three cases contributed to the aim of selecting for diversity so as to capture at least some of the variation in the findings. These cases can also help in developing and refining the underlying explanatory model, since they represent 'failures' in that model and may help us to fill in gaps in it. From February to March 2018, I interviewed all these seven counselors. I decided not to select any further interviewees as I felt that, by the time I was interviewing the last ones, no significantly new insights were emerging.

### 3.3.3.2 Instrument

Before the formal interview, I drafted the interview outline with reference to domestic and foreign related studies about burnout of school counselors. After that, I carried out a pilot interview with two experienced school counselors and modified the interview questions. Through reading extensive literature, I first identified the main framework for the interview. Under this framework, personal background, working situation and subjective experience of burnout were three main categories. Initially, I designed 22 questions. After the pilot interview, I deleted some items and modified the way of raising the question for certain items.

It should be noted that my interview questions do not refer to my research interests, namely the possible causes and process of burnout all the time because the counselor's burnout problem is a sensitive topic. In the formal interview, if the interviewer mentions this topic all the time, it is possible that negative emotions in respondent will be aroused. So, I mentioned the burnout with the formal interview going on which can reduce the possibility of any respondent feeling hurt. Meanwhile, in order to reduce the possible researcher effect. I encouraged respondent to recall his professional career and tell me more about their provision of counseling services in school in detail. I prepared the formal interview outline with 15 questions (see the Appendix B). In the process of piloting the interview, I estimated that a full interview takes at least half an hour. In the formal interviews, the most likely interview duration was expected to be 0.5-1 hours.

### 3.3.3.3 Data collecting

Before the formal interview, I explained to each of them the following items in advance. First, the purpose of interview clearly expressed to them. Second, I told them that all recorded materials would be kept strictly confidential and used only for data analysis. Third, respondents were reminded that they attended the

interview on their own accord. Fourth, all respondents were told they are entitled to refuse to answer any question or leave in halfway. Fifth, a respondent who had an interest in data or research paper would have an access to the transcript of her/his interview session. In addition, all respondents were required to sign an Informed Consent form (see the Appendix F). Copies of Informed Consent had been maintained separately by respondents and researcher. All the above actions had been done before the formal interview took place.

Between February and March 2018, I completed all the interviews. I was fully aware that interviewing is essentially a process of social interaction rather than merely an exercise of data collecting. Before each interview, I reviewed all the questions again and again. I intended to raise questions in the most appropriate tone and wording so as to obtain the interviewees' answers. I did not know any of the respondents, so, before the formal interview, I had contacted the respondents in advance, and had made an appointment after explaining the purpose of interview. In doing so, the respondents were able to know the interview purpose fully so that they could feel at ease and be open to the interviewer. Before the formal interview, I asked if each respondent consented to have the interview recorded. In the end, only one female counselor refused to record the interview. She argued that her mood will be affected if the interview is recorded. Given this, I only took a note of key points when interviewing her. During the formal interview, I tried to control the timing and navigate the process to improve the interview efficiency. Finally, the average duration for these interviews was 40 minutes. In each interview, I spoke clearly, and behaved politely, in a non-threatening, friendly way and was personable consistently. Only in this way could respondents feel safe.

Kvale (1996) insists that interviewer is required to navigate the process of the interview. He also argues that the interviewer is required to fully encourage the respondents to express their thoughts, emotions, opinions and experience. Given this, I used multiple interview techniques such as smiling and giving positive responses so as to stimulate their desire to speak to me. In the interview, I did my best to avoid using embarrassing or offending words or questions. To protect the privacy of the interview, most interviews were arranged in the school's psychological counseling center. In this place, respondents were less likely to be disturbed by others. Also, in the interview, I showed a keen interest in the topic and maintained the stance of neutrality.

### 3.3.3.4 Data analysis

After the end of the interview, I sorted each recording by myself. I sorted the recordings by repeatedly listen to the recordings and checked the integrity and correctness of information. To ensure that there is validity in the accuracy of the findings，participants were given a transcript of their interview. They could provide feedback on the accuracy of the analysis of the data. The participants therefore were encouraged to reflect on the evidence. This joint construction of the data

between the researcher and the participants – or 'respondent validation' - can help to ensure consistency, enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, and help reduce any tendency to bias or the selectivity of certain data (Rose & Sullivan，1993).

## Thematic analysis for Research Questions 2

To properly answer "What are the possible reasons for the observed levels of Ningbo school counselors' burnout?", I mainly used coding and thematic analysis. Rose & Sullivan (1993) considered that when processing the qualitative research materials, coding is a strong analytical instrument. Firstly, I transcribed all the transcripts of their explanation to the question" What do they attribute burnout to?". Then, through coding and thematic analysis, I explored the master themes of burnout among these counselors.

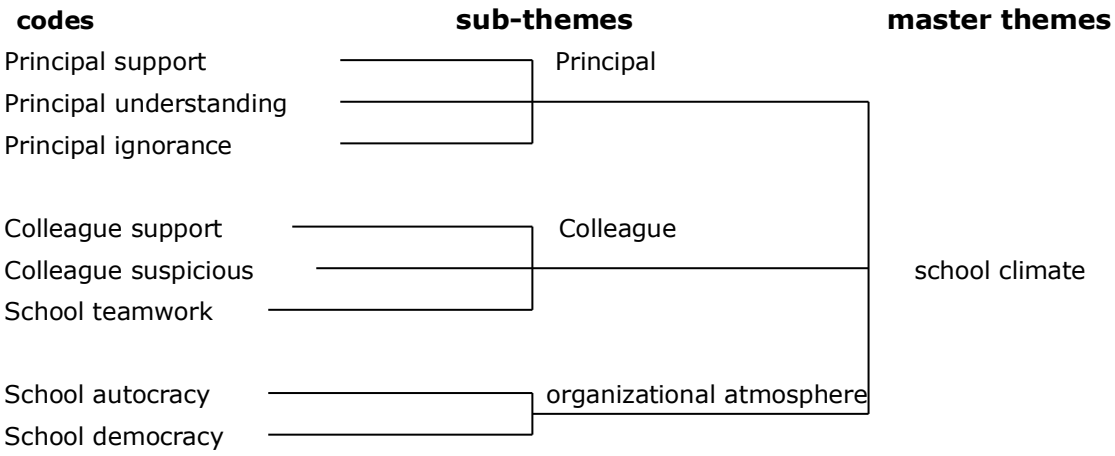
The first step was to implement coding. I coded all of my transcripts one by one. Basically, this means taking each bit of what the respondent said (sentence, sentences, paragraph, phrase, whatever) and asking 'what is this about?'. Then, I gave it a name (the code). Through coding, I initially conceptualized all the original data. Table 3.3 shows a very short part of this coding process.

The second step was to sort and classify all these codes with thematic analysis. Gradually, within all these codes, I built up sets of comments that are about the same thing. Some of these 'things' were associated together and some of them can be subdivided into sub-themes. Sub-themes then were constantly compared and corrected, while redundant ones were deleted. In doing so, all codes were gradually peeled some sub-themes. Meanwhile, from these sub-themes can be extracted out some more abstract categories namely master themes. I used thematic analysis to differentiate between the sub-themes and master themes. The master themes can be seen as the main reasons which affect their burnout level. Fig.3.1 shows exactly an example of how thematic analysis operates.

**Table 3.3 Coding for a short part of original data**

| Original pieces of data | Code |
|---|---|
| 1. As a master student, I am simply writing or printing documents from day to day, my profession cannot be reflected. | professional role |
| 2. For example, one day I had three classes in the morning. I would provide counseling services at noon and afternoon. After that, I have to take notes and reflections. | work intensity |
| 3. In school, my job performance can hardly be recognized by school leaders, which is quite different from other disciplines such as Chinese or Mathematics. | school prejudice |
| 4. But, if I visit some womanish or pussy boys, I also will feel very anxious. I expect them to directly tell problems or symptom. | gender expectation |
| 5. Sometimes, I choose to take part-time job in the evening, at weekends or outside the school. My wife is about to deliver the second child. I have to do more works. | financial stress |

**Fig.3.1 Process of thematic analysis after coding**




## Narrative analysis for Research Questions 3

With a view to addressing my third research question, "How does burnout develop among Ningbo school counselors?", I performed narrative analysis, a method of qualitative research in which the researcher listens to the stories of the research participants, attempting to understand the relationships between the experiences

of the individuals and their social framework (Bamberg, 1997). Considering the different burnout processes described by the counselors, I used narrative analysis in which the interviewees can depict their own experiences that they think are important or meaningful. The biggest advantage of using narrative analysis is the authenticity and richness of the research content as long as the interviewee is given adequate 'space' to tell their own story.

In this narrative analysis process, I present the burnout process of the counselor in the form of individual life stories. Labov (1972) believed that each word and sentence, even every expression made by the respondent when telling a story will be meaningful. However, when a researcher retells the interviewees' life stories, it is inevitable that the researcher may leave out some information, since when the interviewees' stories were relayed in the form of words, a lot of information such as rhythm, accent, and tone may be omitted in transcription.

Riessman (1993) suggested that narrative analysis contains four steps: listening, transcribing, analysing and presenting. The most important process of narrative analysis is analysing all the information the interviewee presents and 'making sense' of it as a narrative. Interviewer selection of information at too early a stage can distort the narrative towards the interviewer's bias.

In my narrative analysis process, I read all the relevant information and explored the core stories and the main content of the stories. Then, I read each transcript many times to identify the key words, critical events, participants' feelings, core ideas. In the meantime, I tried to find the whole structure of story including its time, place, events, conflicts, changes, management and the ending. Finally, I integrated each story in the form of text according to the time sequence. These stories' content is rich, complete, meaningful, contextualized and logical. From reading the stories, the reader can understand the counselors' burnout process more deeply than simply an association of factors provided by the quantitative data.

## 3.4 Credibility of research

In this section, I discuss the credibility of this research. In modern social sciences, the reliability and validity of research are two primary indicators used to assess whether research is scientific (Kvale, 1996, p. 229). Research reliability means the degree of consistency and stability of the facts and data obtained. In general, the degree of research reliability indicates if the research and its findings can be reproduced. Given the same conditions and method, different researchers should obtain the same findings at different times (Brown & Sime, 1981). Research validity means the trustworthiness of data and explanations.

Research reliability and validity are closely associated. Reliability is the precondition and foundation of validity. A piece of scientific research should be reliable only to

ensure that its findings can reveal the factual truth. But a stable and reliable research does not necessarily demonstrate high validity. A growing number of researchers claim that reliability and validity are two important standards for evaluating a research (Bell, 1999; Wilkinson, 2000). I agree with this as a starting point when evaluating qualitative research but it is important to be clear what the terms 'reliability' and 'validity' mean in relation to such research and that these meanings may be different from those in quantitative research. 'Trustworthiness' may replace 'consistency' as the measure of reliability, although trustworthiness is more a matter of judgement than of precise measurement. Next, I will conduct an in-depth discussion on how to ensure reliability and validity or trustworthiness in my research.

## 3.4.1 Validity and reliability in questionnaires

Belson (l986) thought that the validity of the questionnaire mainly means whether the respondent can complete the questionnaire in a willing and accurate manner. The higher the validity of the questionnaire is, the closer to reality the respondent's answer will be. During the survey, I adopted two methods to improve the validity of the questionnaire. First, I engaged in a pilot testing before distributing the formal questionnaires. After the pilot testing, I adjusted the way of stating certain items and deleted sentences with ambiguous or sensitive words. Second, before starting each questionnaire, I stated clearly the importance, purpose and respondent anonymity of the research by which participants can relieve any stress they may feel in answering.

Belson (1986) thought the reliability of the questionnaire means consistency and stability of the questionnaire results. The reliability of the questionnaire is affected by random errors. The greater the chance of random errors is, the lower the reliability will be. In my research, checks on the reliability of the questionnaire include internal consistency reliability and split-half reliability measures. In Chapter 4, I will report various indicators of reliability for burnout scales. Due to the available time being limited, the test-retest reliability could not be verified, which may be one of the deficiencies of this research.

## 3.4.2 Trustworthiness in interviews

Possible researcher bias is the main factor that influences the trustworthiness of an interview (Bell, 1999; Kvale, 1996). This bias arises from the characteristics of the interviewer, the characteristics of the respondent and the substantive content of the questions. More specifically, the expectations, opinions and attitudes of the interviewer over the interview will influence the interview process. Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) claimed that during the interview, the interviewer will subconsciously influence the interviewee when they interact with each other. In addition, Lee (1993) indicated that when it comes to a sensitive topic - such as burnout - the interviewee will unconsciously protect his right to avoid secondary

damage. Gadd (2004) reported that when the interviewee feels threatened by a sensitive question, he will be less cooperative to respond.

In this qualitative research stage, I have no research hypotheses. I only position myself as a researcher and analyse the large amount of qualitative data by thematic analysis and narrative analysis. I am a counselor, and this gives me 'insider' knowledge of the expected roles and routines of counselors in Ningbo. While carrying out the research, however, I made an effort to keep my role as a researcher separate from that as a counselor. This is important to prevent possible bias based on my own, individual experiences acting as a 'filter' in interpreting my participants' responses. I understand my researcher role and adopted a non-interventional relationship with potential participants. I maintained my professional duty as a researcher to interpret the responses I received, rather than leaving such interpretation to individual respondents. Clarifying my positioning at this stage will enhance the trustworthiness of my qualitative research.

During my interview, measures were adopted to promote the interview trustworthiness. First, I did not ask about the burnout experience of interviewee all the time. I asked two experienced school counselors to attend the pilot testing. After that, I deleted some sensitive words and embarrassing items. During the formal interview, I requested the participants to recall their professional career and tell me about their own job and life stories. In this way, their sensitivity to these questions was hopefully reduced. I exploited some useful interview techniques such as giving respondents a smile, allowing them to take enough rest, and changing topics if appropriate or necessary. In this interview process, I always ensured all interviewees were safe, physically and emotionally. Second, I only organized the interview rather than interfered or commented too much on the thoughts or opinions shared by the respondents which can reduce any display of prejudice in the process. Glaser (1977) and Strauss (1987) suggested that during the interview process, it is appropriate to have the same person search and analyze the data. They claimed that in doing so, the researcher will be fully immersed in the data he researched so that he can find more profound and meaningful knowledge from the data. I interviewed all the respondents and analyzed all the data by myself.

## 3.5 Ethical issues

Ethical issues need to be discussed in this account. In detail, I completed the UNNC Research Ethics Checklist for Research Students strongly informed by the ESRC (2012) Framework for Research Ethics. In line with the BERA guidelines, participants were given a 'Participant Consent Form' for them to sign which confirms that they have understood the nature and purpose of the research and their involvement in it. The form emphasized their right to withdraw from the research at any stage. It made clear to the participants that all the research will be conducted in confidence and with anonymity, and all research notes would be kept in a locked

draw in my desk in my school in three years. The research was planned to be carried out at times convenient to the participants with negotiations to ensure minimal disruption to the participants' schedules. Every effort would be made not to place a burden on the participants.

All the interviews took place in my counselling room which was viewed as a relatively quiet and secure place. During the interview, I posted a very obvious sign: 'Don't disturb', outside the counselling room to avoid eavesdropping. So, the entire interview process went through smoothly without any external disruption. Also, all the recordings were stored in my personal computer disk with a complex password needed to access it.

During my research process, I requested all the respondents to read the "Participant Consent Form". Only after they fully understood the content in "Participant Consent Form", would they start completing the formal questionnaire. At the end of the formal questionnaire, I intentionally stated that I would hold semi-structured interviews and some respondents would be needed. If the participants liked to attend it, they could leave their contact information, which was also a way to fully respect the will of all participants to cooperate. Also, considering the security issues, I emailed to the potential participants through 163 or Tom which are viewed as the most secure mail-boxes by relevant experts in China.

Burnout itself is a sensitive topic. So, the interview may involve the privacy of respondents, possibly making them feel unpleasant, which should be paid special attention. In view of the ethical issues involved, conducting the qualitative parts of my study needed careful attention, given the sensitive and potentially traumatic effect of talking about burnout. The privacy of interview results was carefully protected. To make the interview agreeable and reduce any awkwardness by respondents when asked any sensitive question, I tried to ensure these interviewees felt at ease when describing any negative working experiences. If a respondent appears to be emotionally unstable or disturbed, I immediately stopped the interview or changed to some other interesting topics. I also used open-ended questions, allowing respondents to fully express their views and emotions. I also used more familiar words in questions as these can reduce a sense of threat in addressing sensitive matters and help the respondent to feel more relaxed. In the whole interview process, I tried to keep researcher neutrality and not move into therapeutic mode. I tried to minimize the risk of re-traumatizing the interviewees.

I gave some chocolates to both the participants who completed my questionnaire in person and the seven counselors who took part in my interviews. Also, I posted chocolates to those counselors who completed my questionnaire online. This is recognized within Chinese culture as a way to express researchers' thanks to their research participants with some small, low-value gifts.

# Chapter4: QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

The purpose of the quantitative part of this research is to understand the overall situation and patterns of burnout of Ningbo school counselors. In this section, I begin with the testing of the reliability and validity of the burnout scale to ensure its credibility. Next, I will reveal the level of burnout among Ningbo school counselors. Then, I will examine the relationships between burnout level and demographic, work-related factors.

## 4.1 The reliability and validity of Burnout scale

All raw data were imported to SPSS 19.0 and Lisrel 8.50 for the purpose of data analysis. 127 valid cases were used. The Cronbach's Alpha for the whole burnout scale was 0.71. The Cronbach's Alpha values for the emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment sub scales were 0.82, 0.72, and 0.67 respectively. Moreover, the Guttman Split-Half values for the whole burnout scale and three sub-scales were 0.67, 0.79, 0.61, and 0.63 respectively. Based on these data, the homogeneity reliability and split-half reliability for the burnout scale was between 0.61 and 0.82 which basically meets the requirement of psychometrics (Li, 2007).

Some Chinese researchers have verified that this Chinese Maslach Burnout Inventory (CMBI) has good construct validity (Li, 2007; Pu, 2013), and, I tested the construct validity of this scale by Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). I proposed a hypothetical three-factor model which means that all 15 items were loaded on emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. After all data covered by 127 valid cases were imported into Lisrel8.50 for CFA, I discovered that this three-factor model was supported by the data (see Table 4-1).

According to statistical principles (Zhang, 2002), if the value of RMSEA（root-mean-square error of approximation）is in the range of 0.05-0.08, it means that the hypothetical model matches well with the data. If RMSEA is greater than 0.10, it means that the model matches poorly with the data. The closer GFI (goodness of fit index), CFI (comparative fit index), TLI (Tucker-Lewis index), NFI (normed fit index), IFI (incremental fit index) or AGFI (adjusted goodness-of-fit index) approach 0.9, the higher the degree of fit between hypothetical model and data will be. In this sense, it can be confirmed from the data listed in Table 4.1 that 15 items were loaded on three major factors. In other words, the three-factor structure of this burnout scale was validated effectively in my survey.

Table 4.1 Fit index of the three-factor model by Confirmatory Factor Analysis (N=127)

| Index | RMSEA | TLI | NFI | CFI | IFI | GFI | AGFI |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Fit index | 0.07 | 0.82 | 0.86 | 0.89 | 0.88 | 0.81 | 0.87 |

## 4.2 The burnout level among Ningbo school counselors

As the first step, I carried out a normal distribution test on burnout total score, emotional exhaustion score, depersonalization score and reduced personal accomplishment score. If the form of these data conforms to a normal distribution, then we can describe them using the mean and standard deviation. In this process, I used "One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test" to test if these data conform to a normal distribution. As tested, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z values for the four groups of data were 0.716, 0.618, 0.782, and 0.525 respectively which indicates that the distributions of the four groups of data sets were normal. So, I present the mean, standard deviation, extreme value, range and skewness, kurtosis of the four groups of data of 127 Ningbo school counselors in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 reveals that the score for emotional exhaustion was higher than that of depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. This means that the emotional exhaustion dimension contributed more (40%) than the other two (27% and 33%). The mean of the burnout score is not so high, only reaching 47.91. However, the range for burnout score was 56. Its skewness and kurtosis were 0.014 and -0.614 respectively which means that the data were quite scattered.

Table 4.2 Descriptive Statistics for Burnout Scales (N=127)

| Variable | Items No | Mean | SD | Max | Min | Range | Skewness | Kurtosis |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| EE | 5 | 18.97 | 6.436 | 34 | 5 | 29 | 0.143 | -0.594 |
| DP | 5 | 13.01 | 4.838 | 26 | 5 | 21 | 0.591 | -0.411 |
| RPA | 5 | 15.94 | 4.698 | 31 | 6 | 25 | 0.322 | 0.251 |
| BO | 15 | 47.91 | 10.444 | 82 | 25 | 56 | 0.014 | -0.614 |

Note. EE=" Emotional Exhaustion", DP =" Depersonalization", RPA=" Reduced Personal Accomplishment", BO=" Burnout".

In China, most researchers used Li Yongxin's judging criteria of burnout level which is equal to Maslach's (Bian,2008; Pu,2013). Basically, I used Li Yongxin's three burnout dimensions' critical values based on which each participants' burnout level in my survey can be determined. In his previous research, Li used CMBI in

surveying 293 helping professionals and explored his criteria for judging burnout level (Li,2007). He calculated the critical scores of each dimension of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment reached respectively 23, 11, 16.

Li went on to explain the criteria by which he judged each participant's burnout level. Similar to Maslach, any participants for whom one of the factor scores exceeds its critical score can be defined as a "low burnout person". Any participants for whom two of the factor scores exceed their critical scores can be defined as a "moderate burnout person". Any participants for whom all three factor scores exceed their critical scores can be defined as a "high burnout person". Any participants for whom none of the factor scores exceed their critical scores can be defined as a "zero burnout person".

According to Li's judgement criteria, I judged each participant's burnout level and counted the number of different levels of burnout among these 127 school counselors (see table 4.3). We can see that the number of counselors with moderate burnout is the largest. The number of counselors with low burnout is the second largest. And the number of counselors with zero burnout is the least.

So, we can conclude that modal level of burnout among these Ningbo 127 counselors is 'moderate' (as defined in Section 2.3.4 and repeated immediately above). That is, after allocating each counsellor to one of the four groups (zero, low, moderate or high burnout), the largest number of counsellors are in the 'moderate' burnout category. In Chapter 2, I have mentioned that this judging criterion is purely a quantitative-based criterion.

Table 4.3 Numbers in different Burnout level based on Li's criteria(N=127)

| Zero burnout | | Low burnout | | Moderate burnout | | High burnout | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| 16 | 12.2% | 41 | 33.8% | 51 | 40.1% | 19 | 14.9% |

## 4.3 The relationships between burnout level and demographic factors

Table 4.4 Relationships between burnout and gender (N=127)

| Variable | Sex | Number | Mean | SD | t | df | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| BO | Male | 31 | 53.97 | 11.179 | 3.918**** | 125 | 0.000 |
| | Female | 96 | 45.96 | 9.455 | | | |
| EE | Male | 31 | 20.29 | 6.497 | 1.319 | 125 | 0.190 |
| | Female | 96 | 18.54 | 6.392 | | | |
| DP | Male | 31 | 16.65 | 5.395 | 5.309**** | 125 | 0.000 |
| | Female | 96 | 11.83 | 4.018 | | | |
| RPA | Male | 31 | 17.03 | 6.102 | 1.500 | 125 | 0.136 |
| | Female | 96 | 15.58 | 4.124 | | | |

Note. EE=" Emotional Exhaustion", DP =" Depersonalization", RPA=" Reduced Personal Accomplishment", BO=" Burnout".
*p<0.05, **p<0.01，**** p<0.001

The scores of male counselors and female counselors are compared for each dimension of burnout. According to the results given in Table 4.4, the total burnout score and depersonalization score for male counselors were significantly higher than that of female counselors at a statistically significant level ($p<0.01$). The effect of gender effect on the other two dimensions of burnout was not significant ($p>0.05$). The data identify that at school, male counselors are more likely to feel burnout than women. And, the depersonalization data suggest that they are more likely to be reluctant to help students who come for counseling than female counselors. Also, male counselors may have more impatience and indifference to the students who come for counseling than the female counselors.

Table 4.5 Relationships between burnout and age (N=127)

| Variable | Age | Number | Mean | SD | F | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| BO | 20-29 | 35 | 43.74 | 9.620 | 2.843* | 0.047 |
| | 30-39 | 60 | 48.67 | 10.086 | | |
| | 40+ | 32 | 44.03 | 11.465 | | |
| EE | 20-29 | 35 | 17.69 | 5.845 | 1.068 | 0.347 |
| | 30-39 | 60 | 19.68 | 7.031 | | |
| | 40+ | 32 | 19.03 | 5.828 | | |
| DP | 20-29 | 35 | 12.17 | 4.004 | 1.706 | 0.227 |
| | 30-39 | 60 | 13.57 | 5.127 | | |
| | 40+ | 32 | 12.97 | 4.707 | | |
| RPA | 20-29 | 35 | 15.89 | 4.164 | 1.144 | 0.322 |
| | 30-39 | 60 | 15.42 | 4.760 | | |
| | 40+ | 32 | 16.97 | 5.096 | | |

Note. EE=" Emotional Exhaustion", DP =" Depersonalization", RPA=" Reduced Personal Accomplishment", BO=" Burnout".
*p<0.05, **p<0.01

The scores of 127 school counselors in different age groups are compared for each dimension of burnout and the results are given in Table 4.5. From Table 4.5, I find that young counselors suffer less burnout than middle-aged and older counselors, at a statistically significant level (p<0.05). And, the middle-aged counselors suffer a higher burnout than other two groups.

Table 4.6 Relationships between burnout and working years (N=127)

| Variable | Years of working | Number | Mean | SD | F | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| BO | <5 years | 34 | 46.78 | 8.920 | 0.668 | 0.515 |
| | 6-10 years | 60 | 48.79 | 10.336 | | |
| | ＞10 years | 33 | 49.06 | 12.964 | | |
| EE | ＜5 years | 34 | 18.33 | 5.902 | 1.433 | 0.243 |
| | 6-10 years | 60 | 20.56 | 6.986 | | |
| | ＞10 years | 33 | 18.48 | 6.699 | | |
| DP | ＜5 years | 34 | 12.07 | 4.411 | 2.581 | 0.080 |
| | 6-10 years | 60 | 13.35 | 4.960 | | |
| | ＞10 years | 33 | 14.36 | 5.219 | | |
| RPA | ＜5 years | 34 | 16.38 | 4.342 | 1.187 | 0.308 |
| | 6-10 years | 60 | 14.88 | 5.168 | | |
| | ＞10 years | 33 | 16.21 | 4.794 | | |

Note. *p<0.05, **p<0.01

The scores of school counselors with different number of working years are compared for each dimension of burnout. The results are showed in Table 4.6. Working years has no significant influence on burnout score and all its three dimensions. It means that the difference burnout between different ages may not be attributed to the working experience at school only.

Table 4.7 Relationships between burnout and educational levels (N=127)

| Variable | Educational levels | Number | Mean | SD | t | df | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| BO | Bachelor | 86 | 48.62 | 9.865 | 1.209 | 125 | 0.274 |
| | Master | 41 | 46.44 | 11.554 | | | |
| EE | Bachelor | 86 | 19.17 | 6.452 | 0.271 | 125 | 0.604 |
| | Master | 41 | 18.54 | 6.462 | | | |
| DP | Bachelor | 86 | 13.01 | 4.714 | 0.000 | 125 | 0.990 |
| | Master | 41 | 13.00 | 5.148 | | | |
| RPA | Bachelor | 86 | 16.43 | 4.825 | 2.982 | 125 | 0.087 |
| | Master | 41 | 14.90 | 4.294 | | | |

Note. EE=" Emotional Exhaustion", DP =" Depersonalization", RPA=" Reduced Personal Accomplishment", BO=" Burnout".

The scores of school counselors with different educational levels are compared for each dimension of burnout. The results are given in Table 4.7. We find that educational levels also have no significant influence on burnout score and its three dimensions.

Table 4.8 Relationships between burnout and marital status (N=127)

| Variable | Marital | Number | Mean | SD | t | df | P |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| BO | Unmarried | 38 | 45.24 | 8.967 | -2.059* | 125 | 0.043 |
| | Married | 89 | 49.06 | 10.861 | | | |
| EE | Unmarried | 38 | 18.05 | 5.141 | -1.048 | 125 | 0.297 |
| | Married | 89 | 19.36 | 6.906 | | | |
| DP | Unmarried | 38 | 11.97 | 4.377 | -1.584 | 125 | 0.116 |
| | Married | 89 | 13.45 | 4.980 | | | |
| RPA | Unmarried | 38 | 15.21 | 3.677 | -1.140 | 125 | 0.256 |
| | Married | 89 | 16.25 | 5.059 | | | |

Note. EE=" Emotional Exhaustion", DP =" Depersonalization", RPA=" Reduced Personal Accomplishment", BO=" Burnout".
*p<0.05, **p<0.01

According to Table 4.8, the burnout score of unmarried school counselors was significantly lower than that for married school counselors at a statistically significant level ($p<0.05$). Data shows that married counselors are more vulnerable to burnout than the single in school.

Table 4.9 Relationships between burnout and income levels (N=127)

| Variable | Income | Number | Mean | SD | F | Sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| BO | ＜80,000 | 64 | 47.06 | 10.844 | 0.450 | 0.639 |
| | 80,000-120,000 | 51 | 48.92 | 9.535 | | |
| | ＞120,000 | 12 | 48.17 | 12.401 | | |
| EE | ＜80,000 | 64 | 18.63 | 6.509 | 0.430 | 0.651 |
| | 80,000-120,000 | 51 | 19.04 | 6.299 | | |
| | ＞120,000 | 12 | 20.50 | 6.948 | | |
| DP | ＜80,000 | 64 | 12.83 | 4.713 | 0.111 | 0.895 |
| | 80,000-120,000 | 51 | 13.25 | 5.071 | | |
| | ＞120,000 | 12 | 12.92 | 4.852 | | |
| RPA | ＜80,000 | 64 | 15.61 | 4.593 | 1.091 | 0.339 |
| | 80,000-120,000 | 51 | 16.63 | 4.787 | | |
| | ＞120,000 | 12 | 14.75 | 4.845 | | |

Note. EE=" Emotional Exhaustion", DP =" Depersonalization", RPA=" Reduced Personal Accomplishment", BO=" Burnout".

Table 4.9 shows that income levels of school counselors also have no significant influence on burnout score and its three dimensions.

In summary, I previously assumed that all the six demographic variables would significantly impact burnout level. However, by using T-test and one-way ANOVA, I identify counselor's gender, age and marital status are the significant demographic factors in the development of burnout. However, the counselors' education levels, income levels and working years do not significantly impact their burnout score and all its three dimensions.

## 4.4 The relationships between burnout level and work-related factors

Table 4.10 Descriptive Statistics for work-related factors (N=127)

| Variable | N | Mean | SD | Max. | Min. | Range | Skewness | Kurtosis |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| WCH | 127 | 3.95 | 2.232 | 10 | 1 | 9 | 0.795 | 0.189 |
| SCR | 127 | 1083:1 | 731.320 | 4000:1 | 125:1 | 3875 | 1.427 | 2.403 |
| PS | 127 | 4.69 | 1.424 | 7 | 2 | 5 | 0.004 | -0.892 |
| WS | 127 | 5.17 | 1.220 | 7 | 2 | 5 | -0.589 | -0.067 |
| RC | 127 | 4.57 | 1.824 | 7 | 1 | 6 | -0.420 | -0.892 |
| PD | 127 | 3.67 | 1.380 | 7 | 1 | 6 | 0.376 | -0.035 |

Note.WCT=" Weekly Consulting Hours", SCR =" Student to Counselor Ratio", PS=" Principal Support", WS=" Working Stress", RC=" Role Conflict", PD=" Professional Development".

Table 4.10 shows the whole working situation variables of 127 Ningbo school counselors. According to the data listed in this table, they do not spend too much consulting time with students. But the consulting time varies considerably from person to person. According to the "student to counselor ratio" data, their caseload was quite high. On average, a counselor needs to serve nearly 1,100 students which is much higher than specified in the American School Counselor Association's criteria (250:1).

Data from PS to PD shows that most participants can recognize their principals' support. Most counselors can feel their working stress. The mean value for stress is as high as 5.17 which deserves attention. And, the counselors were assigned many other tasks unrelated to students' counseling and their professional expertise. Most of them felt they were developing slowly in their professional expertise.

Table 4.11 Pearson Correlation Coefficients between work-related factors and Burnout (N=127)

| Variable | WCH | SCR | PS | WS | RC | PD | EE | DP | RPA | BO |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| WCH | 1 | 0.04 | 0.13 | 0.03 | -0.04 | 0.21* | 0.19* | 0.32** | -0.23* | 0.16 |
| SCR | | 1 | -0.18* | -0.12 | -0.17 | 0.10 | -0.03 | 0.01 | -0.04 | -0.03 |
| PS | | | 1 | -0.18* | -0.08 | 0.18* | 0.03 | -0.15 | -0.25** | -0.16 |
| WS | | | | 1 | 0.12 | 0.06 | 0.31 ** | -0.03 | -0.11 | 0.12 |
| RC | | | | | 1 | -0.215* | 0.27 ** | 0.09 | 0.13 | 0.27** |
| PD | | | | | | 1 | -0.12 | -0.06 | -0.36 ** | -0.27** |
| EE | | | | | | | 1 | 0.34 ** | -0.28 * | 0.72 ** |
| DP | | | | | | | | 1 | 0.32 * | 0.70 ** |
| RPA | | | | | | | | | 1 | 0.54 ** |
| .BO | | | | | | | | | | 1 |

Note.WCH=”Weekly Consulting Hours”, SCR =”Student to Counselor Ratio”, PS=”Principal Support”, WS=”Working Stress”, RC=”Role Conflict”, PD=”Professional Development”, EE=”Emotional Exhaustion”, DP =”Depersonalization”, RPA=” Reduced Personal Accomplishment”, BO=”Burnout”. *p<0.05, **p<0.01

Table 4.11 shows the inter-correlations between work-related factors, burnout and its three dimensions. According to the data listed in Table 4.11,” Weekly Consulting Hours” of school counselors is significantly correlated to all the three burnout dimensions.” Student to Counselor Ratio”, however, has no significant correlation with burnout and its three dimensions.” Principal Support” of school counselors is correlated to their reduced personal accomplishment negatively. And,” Working Stress” of school counselors is correlated to their emotional exhaustion positively. But it has no significant correlation with burnout total score.” Role Conflict” of school counselors is correlated to their emotional exhaustion and burnout positively. “Professional Development” of school counselors is correlated to their reduced personal accomplishment and burnout negatively. Moreover,” Professional Development” of school counselors is correlated to their “Weekly Consulting Hours”,

"Principal Support and" Role Conflict" significantly. However, the correlation between these work-related factors and burnout does not imply a direction of causality.

Clarifying the inter-correlations between these factors, I used these six work-related factors as predictors, burnout score and its three factors scores as dependent variables for multiple regression analysis.

Firstly, a standard multiple regression model was examined for these work-related factors' power to predict the emotional exhaustion (see Table 4.12). I entered all six work-related factors to the prediction equation. Data shows that all these six work-related factors can explain 18.2% of emotional exhaustion. This regression equation showed statistical significance ($P<0.01$). According to the table, "Weekly Consulting Hours", "Student to Counselor Ratio", "Principal Support", and "Professional Development" cannot predict emotional exhaustion significantly ($P>0.05$). So, I removed these variables but retained "Working Stress" and "Role Conflict" as predictors. Then, I entered these two predictors to the regression equation again (see Table 4.13). According to the data listed in Table 4.13, this rectification regression equation still showed statistical significance ($P<0.01$). But, the predictive power of these two were slightly weakened ($R^2=0.151$). Moreover, "Working Stress" and "Role Conflict" can significantly predict emotional exhaustion ($P<0.01$). According to the standardized partial regression coefficient β, we believed that the predictive power of "Working Stress" to emotional exhaustion ($\beta=0.280$) was slightly stronger than "Role Conflict" ($\beta=0.237$). It implies that with the more intense working stress and role conflict in school, the counselors can feel more emotional exhaustion.

Table 4.12 Prediction of Emotional Exhaustion Based on all work-related Variables (N = 127)

| Variable | B | SE | β | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (Constant) | 7.801 | 3.545 | | 2.200 | 0.030 |
| Weekly Consulting Hours | 0.401 | 0.234 | 0.147 | 1.715 | 0.089 |
| Student to Counselor Ratio | 0.000 | 0.001 | 0.049 | 0.569 | 0.570 |
| Principal Support | 0.048 | 0.394 | 0.011 | 0.121 | 0.904 |
| Working Stress | 1.455 | 0.451 | 0.276 | 3.228 | 0.002 |
| Role Conflict | 0.810 | 0.306 | 0.230 | 2.651 | 0.009 |
| Professional Development | -0.606 | 0.410 | -0.130 | -1.478 | 0.142 |

Full model: $F=4.461$, $p= 0.000$. $R^2=0.182$

Predictors: (Constant), Weekly Consulting Hours, Student to Counselor Ratio, Principal Support,Working Stress, Role Conflict, Professional Development"

Dependent Variable: Emotional Exhaustion

Table 4.13 Prediction of Emotional Exhaustion Based on Working Stress and Role Conflict (N = 127)

| Variable | B | SE | β | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (Constant) | 7.512 | 2.551 | | 2.945 | 0.004 |
| Working Stress | 1.478 | 0.440 | 0.280 | 3.360 | 0.001 |
| Role Conflict | 0.837 | 0.294 | 0.237 | 2.855 | 0.005 |

Full model: F=11.017, p= 0.000. $R^2$=0.151

Predictors：（Constant）, Working Stress, Role Conflict

Dependent Variable: Emotional Exhaustion

Secondly, a standard multiple regression model was examined for these factors' power to predict depersonalization (see Table 4.14). I entered all six work-related factors to the predictive equation. Results show that all six work-related factors can explain 17.3% of the depersonalization. Only "Weekly Consulting Hours" and "Principal Support" can significantly predict depersonalization (P<0.05). So, I retained "Weekly Consulting Hours" and "Principal Support" as predictors. Then, I entered these two to the regression equation again (see Table 4.15). According to Table 4.15, the predictive power of these factors was slightly weakened ($R^2$=0.150). Moreover, "Weekly Consulting Hours" and "Principal Support" can significantly predict depersonalization (P<0.05). And, the predictive power of "Weekly Consulting Hours" to depersonalization (β=0.361) was stronger than "Principal Support" (β=-0.190). It implies that the school counselors can have more negative attitude to the students who came for counseling with the high consulting time and less principals' support in school.

Table 4.14 Prediction of depersonalization Based on all work-related Variables (N = 127)

| Variable | B | SE | β | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (Constant) | 14.383 | 2.680 | | 5.366 | 0.000 |
| Weekly Consulting Hours | 0.810 | 0.177 | 0.395 | 4.586 | 0.000 |
| Student to Counselor Ratio | 0.000 | 0.001 | -0.024 | -0.273 | 0.785 |
| Principal Support | -0.553 | 0.298 | -0.163 | -1.858 | 0.046 |
| Working Stress | -0.264 | 0.341 | -0.066 | -0.773 | 0.441 |
| Role Conflict | 0.218 | 0.231 | 0.082 | 0.945 | 0.346 |
| Professional Development | -0.339 | 0.310 | -0.097 | -1.095 | 0.276 |

Full model: F=4.182, p= 0.001. $R^2$=0.173

Predictors：（Constant）, Weekly Consulting Hours, Student to Counselor Ratio, Principal Support,Working Stress, Role Conflict, Professional Development"

Dependent Variable: depersonalization

Table 4.15 Prediction of depersonalization Based on Weekly Consulting Hours and Principal Support (N = 127)

| Variable | B | SE | β | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (Constant) | 13.295 | 1.456 | | 9.129 | 0.000 |
| Weekly Consulting Hours | 0.741 | 0.171 | 0.361 | 4.334 | 0.000 |
| Principal Support | -0.646 | 0.283 | -0.190 | -2.281 | 0.024 |

Full model: F=10.971, p= 0.000. $R^2$=0.150

Predictors：（Constant）, Weekly Consulting Hours，Principal Support

Dependent Variable: depersonalization

Thirdly, a standard multiple regression model was examined for these work-related factors' power to predict the dimension of Reduced Personal Accomplishment (see Table 4.16). I entered all six work-related factors to the predictive equation. Results show all six work-related factors can explain 18.2% of the Reduced Personal Accomplishment. This regression equation also showed statistical significance (P<0.001). Only "Professional Development" and "Principal Support" can significantly predict Reduced Personal Accomplishment (P<0.05). So, I removed other four variables but retained "Professional Development" and "Principal Support" as predictors. Then I entered them to the regression equation again (see Table 4.17). According to Table 4.17, this rectification regression equation still showed statistical significance (P<0.001). But, the predictive power of these factors was slightly weakened ($R^2$=0.166). Moreover, "Professional Development" and "Principal Support" can significantly predict Reduced Personal Accomplishment (P<0.05). According to the standardized partial regression coefficient β, we believed that the predictive power of "Professional Development" to Reduced Personal Accomplishment (β=-0.330) was stronger than "Principal Support" (β=-0.189). It implies that if the counselors obtain more professional development and support from their leaders, they can feel their work to be more valuable, useful and enjoyable in school.

Table 4.16 Prediction of Reduced Personal Accomplishment Based on all work-related Variables (N = 127)

| Variable | B | SE | β | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (Constant) | 23.230 | 2.589 | | 9.242 | 0.000 |
| Weekly Consulting Hours | -0.176 | 0.171 | -0.088 | -1.029 | 0.306 |
| Student to Counselor Ratio | 0.000 | 0.001 | -0.038 | -0.442 | 0.660 |
| Principal Support | -0.584 | 0.288 | -0.177 | -2.029 | 0.045 |
| Working Stress | -0.237 | 0.329 | -0.062 | -0.720 | 0.473 |
| Role Conflict | 0.122 | 0.223 | 0.047 | 0.546 | 0.586 |
| Professional Development | -1.001 | 0.299 | -0.294 | -3.345 | 0.001 |

Full model: F=4.44, p= 0.000. $R^2$=0.182

Predictors：（Constant）, Weekly Consulting Hours, Student to Counselor Ratio, Principal Support,Working Stress, Role Conflict, Professional Development"

Dependent Variable: Reduced Personal Accomplishment

Table 4.17 Prediction of Reduced Personal Accomplishment Based on Professional Development and Principal Support (N = 127)

| Variable | B | SE | β | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (Constant) | 22.977 | 1.554 | | 14.787 | 0.000 |
| Principal Support | -0.024 | 0.275 | -0.189 | -2.271 | 0.025 |
| Professional Development | -1.122 | 0.284 | -0.330 | -3.956 | 0.000 |

Full model: F=12.378, p= 0.000. $R^2$=0.166

Predictors：（Constant）, Professional Development，Principal Support

Dependent Variable: Reduced Personal Accomplishment

Finally, a standard multiple regression model was examined for these work-related factors' power to predict total burnout score (see Table 4.18). I entered all six work-related factors to the predictive equation. Results show that six work-related factors can explain 19.6% of the burnout. This regression equation showed statistical significance (P<0.001). By analysing the data listed in Table 4.19, "Professional Development", "Role Conflict", and "Weekly Consulting Hours" can significantly predict burnout score (P<0.05). So, I removed other three variables but retained "Professional Development", "Role Conflict", and "Weekly Consulting Hours" as predictors. Then, I entered these three factors to the regression equation again (see Table 4.19). According to Table 4.19, this rectification regression equation still showed statistical significance (P<0.001). But, the predictive power of the three were slightly weakened ($R^2$=0.168). Moreover, "Professional Development", "Role Conflict", and "Weekly Consulting Hours" can significantly predict burnout (P<0.01).

According to the standardized partial regression coefficient β, we believed that the predictive power of "Professional Development" to burnout (β=-0.272) was the strongest, followed by "Weekly Consulting Hours" (β=0.234) and "Role Conflict" (β=0.223). The standardized predictive equation is as follows. Burnout=β1WCH+β2RC+β3PD+Constant. Burnout score=0.23* WCH+0.22* RC-0.27*PD+ Constant. We can predict the school counselors' burnout though their consulting time, role conflict and feeling of Professional development in school.

Table 4.18 Prediction of burnout Based on all work-related Variables (N = 127)

| Variable | B | SE | β | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (Constant) | 46.114 | 5.705 | | 8.083 | 0.000 |
| Weekly Consulting Hours | 1.036 | 0.376 | 0.234 | 2.754 | 0.007 |
| Student to Counselor Ratio | 0.000 | 0.001 | 0.002 | 0.025 | 0.980 |
| Principal Support | -1.090 | 0.634 | -0.149 | -1.719 | 0.088 |
| Working Stress | 0.955 | 0.726 | 0.112 | 1.316 | 0.191 |
| Role Conflict | 1.150 | 0.492 | 0.201 | 2.339 | 0.021 |
| Professional Development | -1.947 | 0.660 | -0.257 | -2.951 | 0.004 |

Full model: F=4.873, p= 0.000. $R^2$=0.196

Predictors:（Constant）, Weekly Consulting Hours, Student to Counselor Ratio, Principal Support,Working Stress, Role Conflict, Professional Development"

Dependent Variable: burnout

Table 4.19 Prediction of burnout Based on Professional Development, Weekly Consulting Hours, Role Conflict (N = 127)

| Variable | B | SE | β | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (Constant) | 45.818 | 3.754 | | 12.207 | 0.000 |
| Weekly Consulting Hours | 1.036 | 0.374 | 0.234 | 2.768 | 0.007 |
| Role Conflict | 1.276 | 0.482 | 0.223 | 2.645 | 0.009 |
| Professional Development | -2.061 | 0.653 | -0.272 | -3.156 | 0.002 |

Full model: F=8.281, p= 0.000. $R^2$=0.168

Predictors:（Constant）, Professional Development, Role Conflict , Weekly Consulting Hours

Dependent Variable: burnout

I previously assumed that among the counselors surveyed, there are statistically significant relationships between all the six work-related factors and burnout in chapter 3. However, by analyzing the data listed in above tables, we can find not all work-related factors would impact burnout and its three dimensions significantly. Results show that for the 127 school counselors surveyed, there are significant relationships between their working stress, role conflict levels and emotional

exhaustion. And, weekly consulting time and principals' support can significantly impact their sense of depersonalization. Principals' support and their perceived professional development can significantly impact their Reduced Personal Accomplishment levels. Their perceived professional development has the strongest power to predict burnout score. Their role conflict levels and weekly consulting time also can significantly predict burnout score.

## 4.5 Summary

Limited native literature shows that Ningbo school counselors are subject to burnout in school (Xu, 2003). So, in order to identify the general patterns and influential factors on burnout of Ningbo school counselors, I conducted a survey among 127 Ningbo school counselors using a self-prepared Demographic Factors Questionnaire, Work-related Factors Questionnaire and Professor Li Yongxin's Burnout scale (CMBI). Through analysis of data by SPSS, I found that Li's Burnout scale (2005) shows good reliability and validity in this study.

Results tell us that (1) these 127 Ningbo school counselors' burnout level is moderate according to Professor Li's judgment criteria. (2) The distribution of Ningbo school counselors' burnout scores was quite scattered, showing considerable variation from individual to individual. (3) Demographic variables as gender, age, marital status can impact their burnout levels significantly. (4) All work-related factors except student to counselor Ratio correlate to burnout or any of its three dimensions. Among these work-related factors, the predictive power of perceived professional development to burnout is the strongest. Their role conflict levels and weekly consulting time also can significantly predict their burnout. These four conclusions can answer my first question "What is the current situation of Ningbo school counselors'' burnout?". Individual interviews were carried out following the survey. Personal perspectives and variations of their reasons and process of burnout will be explored in the qualitative research process, and the results will be presented in the next chapter in details.

# Chapter5: QUALITATIVE RESULTS

In order to support my analysis based on the interviewees' responses, I will quote the interviewees' words where appropriate. For the purpose of maintaining anonymity, I will use pseudonyms for all interviewees in this chapter. As I described in Chapter 3, I purposefully selected seven school counselors for my interviews. The main purpose of the interviews is to explore burnout in greater depth from the perspectives of those counselors who are experiencing it or have experienced it. I want to explore the reasons why these counselors suffered from burnout and how they deal with it.

## 5.1 How do they see burnout?

In the semi-structured interview, I mainly intended to discover and explore the possible causes and process of the burnout among the counselors. The opinions of these counselors on burnout itself or the definitions they give to burnout also captured my close attention. Two significance points can be revealed by focusing on their interpretation of burnout. Firstly, their understandings about burnout can test, to some extent, the validity of the burnout scale that I used in the survey. Secondly, I can compare these results with burnout theories in the literature and find whether their ideas 'fit' with existing burnout theories or models or whether these need revisions.

Counselors expressed their general understanding of burnout. Some stated that burnout means a wish to resign. Mrs. Xu defined burnout as "*a mental situation in which an individual wants to resign because he works for a long time."* Mr. Wang defined burnout as "*one has the intention of ending his job".* Others stated that burnout means loss of working interest. Mrs. Cao defined burnout as" a *process during which one gradually loses his interest, happiness and passion for the work."* Still others thought burnout means obtaining no professional fulfilment in working. For example, Mrs. Wang claimed that "*the so-called burnout only arises when an individual cannot manage his work."* Mrs. Jiang similarly felt that "*burnout refers to a sense of confusion and helplessness over his professional prospect."* Other counselors viewed burnout in terms of negative physical or emotional behaviour. For example, Mr. Lu viewed burnout as "a *phenomenon of physical and mental fatigue in their working."* These counselors already referred to some negative responses in burnout such as having no sense of professional fulfilment or experiencing negative physical or emotional behaviour, which fit with the existing burnout theory in the literature (Pines & Aronson, 1983; Maslach & Jackson, 1986). Also, loss of working interest and considering the possibility of resigning are both stated in other researchers' burnout definitions (Chemissa, 1980; Sarason, 1992).

## 5.2 What are their burnout experiences?

I identified three sub-themes of burnout by coding the relevant transcripts of their interpretation of experiences on burnout. Firstly, physical discomfort is a major burnout experience. For example, Mrs. Cao claimed, "*I suffered from insomnia when I served a student for many times."* Mrs. Wang, who is currently counseling at a key middle school, complained "*Once I served four individuals in the afternoon and felt as if my head were going to blow off."*

Secondly, emotional irritability is also a common burnout experience. Mr. Xu add, "*When I dealt with some difficult cases, I was easily irritated and got angry with my students easily."* Mrs. Jiang mentioned, "*I was very annoyed when providing counseling in these so complex cases."*

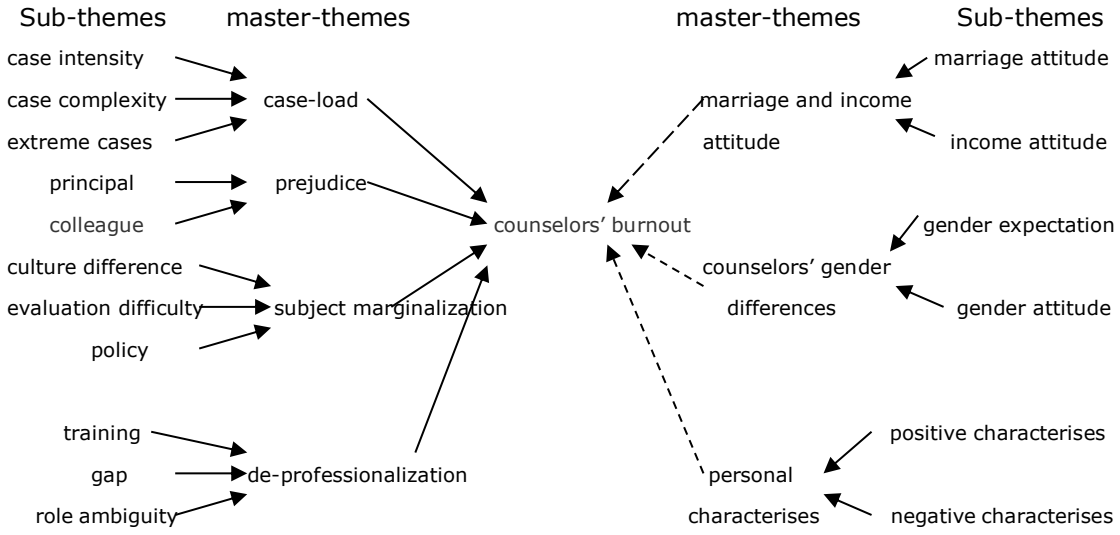
Thirdly, feeling totally dysfunctional as a counselor is shown in their interpretation of burnout experience. For example, Mr. Chen said, "*After a long-time counseling, I couldn't concentrate on the students' words anymore. To put an end to the counseling session as early as possible, I straightforwardly gave them suggestions without listening to their words or complaints anymore."* Mr. Ma expressed a similar idea, "Sometimes, *I would turn a cold manner to the students. I even got distracted and failed to focus on them."* Mrs. Wang mentioned, "*I always lossed my professional confidence and strongly doubted if I am qualified for this profession."* Mrs.Cao added, "*In the individual counseling process, I behaved like an actress taking different roles such as mother, sister or teacher. I can't feel much of a sense of accomplishment."*

In Maslach's formal definition (1986), burnout is a group of syndromes including emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment which occur in helping profession workers (Maslach & Jackson, 1986). In fact, these three aspects of experiences in burnout in my interview have many similar points with Maslach's burnout framework such as experiencing emotional problems or some sense of loss of counseling accomplishment. In some sense, the counselors' perceptions of this term 'burnout' are very similar to the Maslach's definition of 'burnout'. In details, the syndrome of feeling totally dysfunctional as a counselor is similar to the syndrome of depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment in Maslach's definition. And, the quotes from Mr. Chen and Mr. Ma in the previous paragraph also suggest emotional exhaustion, or emotional disconnection, to some extent. But they also reveal only a little difference between Maslach's burnout definition and my findings. That is, my findings expand the 'burnout' a little more than the Maslach's burnout definition in terms of emotional irritability. However, whether the formal burnout literature needs some revision to accommodate my new findings needs cautious consideration.

## 5.3 What do they attribute burnout to?

My initial coding of all the relevant original transcripts to the question "What do they attribute burnout to?" identified a total of 59 codes. I carried out thematic analysis using these 59 primary codes and extracted 17 common factors as sub-themes. I re-analyzed these interdependent 17 sub-themes and extracted the more abstract properties as the master themes. Finally, I decided that seven master themes could contain most of the meanings of the primary codes. These master themes also provide the main possible causes for explaining the burnout of Ningbo school counselors (see Fig.5.1). These themes are case-load, 'perceived' prejudice, subject marginalization, de-professionalization, attitude to marriage and income, counselors' gender and personal characteristics. From Fig.5.1, we can see the four school-related factors on the left side as the primary factors, while the three personal factors on the right side act as mediating factors. In the following section, these seven possible causes of school counselors' burnout will be discussed in depth.

Fig.5.1 Possible reasons of school counselors' burnout by thematic analysis




### *5.3.1 Case-load*

The literature reviewed in chapter 2 shows that the case-load on school counselors is usually taken to be reflected in just the number of the students to whom they provide counseling services (Herr, 1995). However, during the interview, only one respondent, Mrs. Wang, mentioned that the more individual cases she had to deal with meant the more serious burnout she suffered. She complained, "*My weekly*

*consulting hours are usually 13-15 hours……I think my case-load is generally appropriate. But in these two months, the number of weekly cases exceeds 15; that makes me so exhausted."* Though in the existing literature, researchers only simply interpreted 'caseload' as just the number of students who come to counseling, my interviewees had a more complex understanding of this term. The case-load to which they attributed their burnout mainly includes three sub-themes: 'intensity' of individual counseling services, complexity of individual cases and increase in extreme cases.

The intensity of counseling services refers to the circumstance under which school counselors have to deal with several problematic students in a very short time. In detail, the counselors interviewed felt burnout when they were expected to serve 3-4 students continuously without any break. They thought if they could serve the same number of students with some rest, they would feel much better. So this shows that the 'intensity' not only means the counseling time or numbers of students they see, but also includes situations when they have no time to recuperate during counseling over a certain length of time. Mr. Lu and Mr. Chen are both counselors who had strong feelings about counseling services intensity.

Mr. Lu complained,

> "*Yesterday, I served three students in the afternoon. I gave counseling to each student in one and a half hours with no rest between them. However, if I can provide these three individuals with counseling in the morning, afternoon and evening respectively, the exhausted feeling will be much reduced."*

Mr. Chen also complained, "*I feel exhausted when one student after another comes to my office to seek my counseling advice, which makes me so tired. It consumes too much physical strength and emotional energy in this case."* In his opinion, every May or June when the *Gaokao* (university entrance examination) is held in China, he always feels exhausted, when he is expected to serve students one by one for the whole afternoon or evening. He said*, "In these two months, I am always in a negative mood and hold bad feelings during the process of my last student's counseling if I have served so many students before that one."* In their words, they are not afraid of just the number of the students who come to see them, but the continuous nature of counseling one student after another.

Some counselors also maintained that the psychological problems of students are becoming increasingly complex, which in turn inhibits their own sense of accomplishment and efficacy in their counseling work. Case complexity means that the psychological problems of students can be attributed to multiple factors including family, society or physiology. Some students can also exhibit very complicated physical, emotional or behavioural symptoms. Given these two types of case complexity, counselors find it more difficult than previously to address these

students' problems. Mrs. Wang recognized the growing complexity of her task and the reasons for it. She said, "*Our living standards are greatly improved now. For this reason, the students' psychological and behavioural problems are getting more and more complex than in the past."*

The increased case complexity can cause two negative outcomes. Firstly, it can cause the school counselors emotional exhaustion. For example, Mrs. Xu told me,

> "*In the past two years, I took over some students with very complex symptoms. It seems that their symptoms were somewhat improved after my counseling. However, their problems recurred after a certain period of time. Such a long counseling process was making me exhausted".*

Clearly, she was not satisfied with her counseling success, which affected her emotions. She illustrated her emotional exhaustion from case complexity using an example,

> "*I once served a boy with mild autism which was a very complex case for me to deal with. People around him showed little patience with him. After counseling with him, I began to help him identify all the reasons. In this difficult period, I tried many treatment options, such as staying with him or listening to what he was telling me, so as to support him, which made me so* exhausted. *After all, I spent so much time and energy in dealing his case."*

Because of the complexity of this case and the iterative counseling process, she experienced symptoms burnout.

Secondly, case complexity can cause loss of a sense of counseling competence. Some of the counselors interviewed have taken part in some complex cases. With their gradual greater involvement in the counseling, they began to feel it was becoming full of difficulties or challenges. For example, Mrs. Jiang felt less sense of professional competence when she dealt with a girl student who had modest obsessive-compulsive disorder. She told me,

> "*I really wanted to adjust her behaviour because she was such a nice and well-performing girl in school. After fifteen counseling sessions, she performed only a little better. I confused that if I could give her more support*".

Mrs. Jiang began to doubt her own professional ability as the case was not an easy one to be involved in. Mrs. Cao revealed she had experienced similar feelings,

> "*I served a student with borderline personality disorder. After very many counseling sessions, I felt that I can't offer any more help to this kind of student."*

So, this discouragement from counseling led to a strong sense of burnout in that counseling period due to the case complexity.

It is also important to note that an increase in the number of extreme cases is a cause of their burnout. Some counselors considered that dealing with extreme cases consumed too much energy. For example, Mr. Wang said,

> "*Whenever I consulted a student with severe anxiety or depression, my brain ran quickly, which made me so tired. I was especially nervous that if I speak a sentence or word by mistake it might lead to their extreme behaviours such as self-harm."*

The potential counseling risk of the extreme cases is the thing he considered more when discussing burnout. Some counselors also admitted that the process of dealing with extreme cases is so hard and painful for them. Mr. Chen told me a story: "*Just half a year ago, I served a girl who had been self-harming. She often cut her arms with a knife due to persistent anxiety and earlier traumatic experience. I consulted her so many times and found it too exhausting to make her feel better."* So, with the increase of extreme cases, the counselors felt more severe burnout symptoms.

Other counselors thought dealing with such extreme cases is a big challenge to them. Mrs. Wang admitted that she was very unhappy when dealing with students who had attempted suicide. Mrs. Xu also stated,

> "*The number of girls' extreme cases is more than that of boys. Furthermore, it is more difficult to deal with the psychological problems of girls. When a crisis occurs in school, such as student suicide or self-injury, I would deal with it immediately. But when I couldn't deal with the problem properly, I would blame myself."*

In this case, the counselors perceive their responsibility to help the students. So, as a consequence of their perceived responsibility and a perceived failure to meet it, self-blame from a professional perspective can affect their emotions afterwards. This illustrates a developed sense of professional identity, ethics and responsibility, which in turn increases their concerns when they feel they have in some way 'failed'.

### *5.3.2 Perceived prejudice*

Perceived prejudice is the second essential reason that may cause counselors' burnout level and can influence their views and actions in school. Firstly, any perceived prejudice of principals or school leaders against school counselors will significantly impact their working emotions. Mr. Chen told me, "*The principal in my school only requires our counselors to keep students safe……He had no interest in*

*my other work progress."* Mrs. Cao said her principal also showed a cold attitude toward her,

> "*In order to help our school apply to be the provincial-level high performance psychological counseling center, I did not take a good rest for six months. It is so disappointing that he didn't encourage me at all after the successful application."*

It can be seen that these counselors felt they were ignored by their school leaders.

In addition, some counselors stated that when a subject teacher in the school - such as a Math or Chinese teacher - performed well, the leaders praised him or her a lot in public. In contrast, these counselors felt they received much disrespect in the school, which caused them to be angry or disappointed. Mr. Chen argued that these conflicts were attributed to the school's differential valuing of the safety and the academic performance of students. In his view, if school leaders believe the school must focus more on students' development or safety, they will respect the counselors more. Otherwise, even if they feel that the students' sense of safety and wellbeing will encourage better academic performance, they believe the school must focus much more on students' academic performance in examinations. In this case, they will respect the counselor less and emphasize the subject teachers more.

The counselors also attributed this prejudice to the principals not being familiar with psychology or psychological counseling. The counselors perceived the principals know little about the present situation of school counselors or their duties. For example, Mr. Chen bluntly said,

> "*Our principal knows not much psychology as he is a physics major. He doesn't know much about how hard it is to provide counseling services. To be honest, he has received little knowledge about psychological counseling."*

Mr. Chen went on to claim that he himself was aware of and respected the principal's role and responsibilities in the school but felt that the principal did not reciprocate by understanding a counselor's role, a position that he described as being *"totally unacceptable".*

Secondly, some colleagues' prejudices against school counselors will also impact on their sense of burnout. Some counselors admitted that other colleagues' disregard and misunderstanding make them unhappy. For instance, Mrs. Jiang told me, "*If my work is always overlooked by leaders or can't be recognized by other teachers, I may easily question myself and my working value. I often question myself as to why I should work so hard if all the people around me think I am incompetent……*" Mrs. Wang faced a similar situation,

> *"I often hear my colleagues judging my job to be very easy. Gosh, my job is not easy at all. Every day, I have to serve students with their complex psychological problems. And there are more and more visitors. Sometimes they said I was doing something meaningless and there was no meaning for the school in hiring me……Some teachers also said that counseling is nothing but only talking with students. As for me, compared with setbacks at work, this prejudice and misunderstanding make me feel even more disheartened. Actually, I have talked with other school counselors. It seems that they also face the same bad situation as me."*

Their perception of prejudice among some colleagues will influence their views and actions towards them. For example, a young man Mr. Ma said, *"Actually, as to their unfair expressions, I will not explain too much. On the contrary, I don't care about their real thoughts."* Mr. Ma explained that many times he had heard some colleagues saying that psychology is a useless discipline in school. In the end, he thought it made no sense to talk with these people who disrespect him in school. From his words, it is this perceived prejudice that has influenced their relationships to some extent.

Mr. Lu is in a better situation in school than Mr. Ma. He said his principal knew a lot about psychology and his colleagues gave him positive support in his work. In his view, his principal valued him and his counseling work. He described it as being very concrete,

> *"My principal always providing me a chance of training, attending classes or acquiring new knowledge of psychology. Whenever I organized students' events, my leaders did whatever he could to help me, such as appropriating adequate funds."*

He felt moved by his principal giving a positive response to him and the progress of his counseling work. In this way, Mr. Lu felt happy and relaxed with a strong sense of working achievement in the school: *"It is my great honor to serve this school leader. No one in school can underestimate me as a counselor."*

Moreover, he does not feel there is prejudice from his colleagues. He often discusses with his colleagues how to carry out psychological activities among students. He stressed that, *"They supported me and never disregarded me."* He gave me an example, *"Last week, we carried out a psychological health measurement among students. Before the measurement, I and my colleagues were busy in working until 1:00 am."* He claimed that he was enjoying the school because of its good atmosphere towards psychological health.

### *5.3.3 Subject marginalization*

In addition to the above two factors, the underprivileged status of psychology in school can also have a considerable impact on counselors' sense of burnout. In schools, counselors have to deal with a lot of problematic student cases and take classes to help students relieve learning and exam pressure. Almost all counselors mentioned that their burnout can also be attributed in part to the marginalization of "psychology" in schools.

In many countries, including the United Kingdom, psychology is an elective course in secondary school. In Chinese schools, however, psychology is not an examination subject (Bian, 2008). Some counselors see this as one factor contributing to their underprivileged status in schools. For example, Mr. Ma, who has worked for just three years, complained to me,

> "*Previously, I took it for granted that psychology is highly respected in secondary school because there are so many students' problems. But until I began to work, I found I was wrong. Psychology is not an exam subject in schools. It is because our students don't need to attend the psychology exam that even they see psychology classes as classes only for fun.*"

In his view, the low status of psychology, compared to other examination subjects such as Chinese or Physics, made them feel embarrassed in schools.

Mrs. Wang also expressed a similar opinion,

> "*In Ningbo, psychology is not paid much attention to by the local educational department, compared to other subjects. In Ningbo, we don't even have psychological textbooks for us to use to teach."*

Mrs. Wang considered this marginalization of psychology as "*totally unfair", a situation which* could reduce their working enthusiasm in school. Mr. Chen attributed this unfairness to the current Chinese educational system: "*The schools always prioritize the subjects that contribute to improving students' academic results. It is the big educational background."*

A few interviewees attributed the marginalization of psychology primarily to its nature as a discipline which lacks the 'objective' outcome evaluation possibilities of other subjects such as Chinese, Mathematics or Physics. Mr. Wang provided an example:

> "*If one student improves his academic grade by over 20 points, this teacher will be welcomed. However, as a counselor, I can't make it publicly known that I solve someone's psychological problem."*

In this case, it is difficult for the working effort of the counselors to be fully recognized by the school, which can reduce their sense of personal achievement. This sense of loss of professional competence can accelerate the counselors' burnout, even to the point where they will give up their working position as a counselor. Mrs. Jiang was one such counselor: "*I viewed the school counselor's professional prospect to be so bleak over the past few years that, this February, I decided to give up this counselor's job.*"

The marginalization of psychology also can be shown in policy implementation. Some counselors claimed that their education department discriminated against psychology. Mr. Wang pointed out that, "*In the spring of 2015, an important and authoritative leader in Zhejiang Education Bureau declared that psychology is not a very effective subject in schools, which hit me badly."* Also, the counselors argued that some policies were not fair to them. For example, as one of the earliest school counselors in Ningbo, Mrs. Xu added, "*Many policies have not been effectively taken up in Ningbo such as the counselors' professional title or our income."* As a counselor, she has worked in schools for 15 years but she had not yet been granted the 'senior teacher' title, whereas other subject teachers with the same working years as her have been granted this title, which has implications for status and salary.

The *'General Guideline for Psychological Health Education in National Primary and Secondary Schools'*, issued in 2012, clearly states that school counselors should be earning the same income as class administrators in schools. Most schools in Ningbo, however, have not executed this policy, which would benefit counselors. Mr. Wang, for example, argued," My income has remained at the lowest level in school for about 10 years as a counselor."

In all, the counselors perceived that 'psychology' as a discipline and as a school subject is marginalized in schools, as manifested in its evaluation and lack of relevant policy implementation. This can contribute their becoming dysfunctional as a counselor and reduce their sense of working belongingness or worth, which may further intensify their sense of 'burnout'.

### *5.3.4 De-professionalization*

Besides case-load, perceived prejudice and subject marginalization, the situation of their professional development is also an important reason influencing their burnout level. Regarding their situation of professional development, these interviewees focused on three themes: professional knowledge and skills training, the gap between reality and their expectations and role ambiguities in their school.

They argued that more training time means they can obtain more knowledge and development opportunities. Conversely, less training time means that their skills

may not cope with the development of current students' problems which can reduce their confidence during the counseling. For example, Mr. Lu maintained that his extremely high level of burnout several years ago was associated with less professional training. He asserted that as a school counselor between 2005 and 2008, his practical counseling skills of were not so proficient, which reduced his counseling confidence. When he dealt with some complex cases, he felt very exhausted:

> "*Sometimes I feel helpless in the counseling process because of my insufficient counseling skills. If the school can arrange more training in professional skills for me, the situation will be changed."*

He went on to claim that when he obtained more professional knowledge and skills, such as family therapy, one of the new counseling skills, his confidence improved and he felt relaxed even when he was facing a very complex case.

Some counselors such as Mr. Chen considered the lack of professional training to be the fault of the school: "*On many occasions, the school will not pay for our professional training……I had to attend the training at my own expense."* A lack of professional training can cause their loss of professional competence. For example, Mrs. Jiang said,

> "*My professional development has been retarded over the past three years. So, I have little confidence in dealing with cases. Even before serving some students, I am not sure whether I will be capable of managing it."*

When Mrs. Wang mentioned this point, she attributed her ability to manage her burnout to her continuous professional training to some extent.

> *"Once, I had a cold manner to the students who came to me and I thought I was totally useless in counseling. My burnout status lasted about one year. I began to attend more professional training to regulate my emotions. Just last year, I attended three professional training in Shanghai. Anyway, I paid the training fee……I thought that my working confidence and sense of counseling competence were boosted when I could attend more training and acquire more skills. Moreover, these trainings could expand my social relationships. Only in this way, was I satisfied with my counseling work……*"

The counselors claimed the gap between their expectations and reality is also associated with their burnout level. Mrs. Cao, a young school counselor, who graduated from the Psychology Department at Ningbo University, complained she has seen "*no professional progress"* in these years. She doubted whether she had chosen the right job. She said, "*I believed that I could help a lot of people. But when I went to the school, I found I can only help a very limited group of children*

*with psychological problem.……"* She had a big gap between her expectations of her abilities as a counselor and the practical counseling effect. This gap led her to doubt her worth and values in school.

In addition, the role ambiguity perceived by counselors influences their burnout level. In school, the counselor's expected work is often different from their actual work, which makes them perceive their professional status as greatly challenged. For example, Mrs. Jiang mentioned,

> "*I don't know why the leaders always assign a lot of work outside of my responsibilities, e.g.: writing a plan, maintaining student discipline. These trivial things consume a lot of my energy so that I always exhausted ……If this situation is not improved, I cannot assure my professional development.*"

The recognition difference between counselors and principals on the counselors' role is a key factor that causes counselors' role ambiguity. For example, Mr. Ma insisted on, "*The* principal *expected me to take on more administrative duties, but I prefer to seek professional development*……" The counselors can feel very tired when they must deal with so many requirements simultaneously. For example, Mr. Chen said,

> "*The principal treats us as teachers rather than professional counselors, while parents and other subject teachers treat us as psychological experts in solving student problems. It can be a contradiction to some extent.*"

They considered these tasks unrelated to counseling work to be a big workload for them that ruins their 'professional status' in the school. Also, it can influence counselors' role awareness. For counselors, they are more concerned about their professional development and image to establish their dignity and status in school. Mrs. Wang 's comments were representative. She commented,

> "*Probably the school leaders think I have so much free time compared to other teachers that they will arrange a lot of other work for me……My role in school is too vague……Oh gosh, these too many works have nothing to do with my profession at all……These things cannot fully reflect my professional value. What identity am I supposed to have? Who am I? How can I assure my professionalism? Where is my professional image? It is too annoying!*"

Above all, excessive case-load, perceived prejudice in school, subject marginalization, the de-professionalization of school counselors are the four big school-related factors influencing their burnout level. Another three master factors to which they attribute their burnout are somewhat personal-related, analyzed as follows.

### *5.3.5 Attitudes towards marriage, family or income*

Many research reports in the relevant literature have found that married counselors will be more vulnerable than single counselors to burnout (Bian, 2008; Pu, 2013). In my interviews, all married counselors talked about their marriage. They considered that their attitude towards marriage or family can impact their burnout level to some extent. If an individual tends to be negative about his marriage, this attitude will become an "accelerator" for his burnout. For example, Mrs. Jiang perceived her marriage as a "*failure"* and this intensified her burnout. As a middle-aged woman, she mentioned her marriage was "*totally disappointing*". She complained that she manages all the family life affairs, describing her husband as a "*useless*" person who cannot deal with family issues. She argued that," *I am so busy at school. I am playing a major role in supporting my family. With a lot of work to do at home and school, I am getting more exhausted……*". With so much work to do both at home and at work, she felt very disappointed and exhausted. Clearly, she took a negative attitude towards her marriage. She went on to claim that when she felt burnout in school, she felt helpless at home which in turn made she felt more exhausted in school. In this case, this attitude towards her marriage is becoming an "accelerator" for her burnout.

However, some other counselors presented a positive view of their marriage or family. They maintained that their marriage or a family member can help them grow better or have a positive effect on their work in school. In this situation, their burnout level in school will be reduced. For example, Mr. Wang argued that his marriage was "*happy"*. In his view, his rich knowledge of psychology can make him do better in his family. In turn, his wife or son can make him feel relaxed at home. He said,

> "*When I feel exhausted in school after dealing with so many complex cases, I could feel at ease at home as soon as I see my wife and lovely son. Marriage is definitely to me a happy thing. At home, I can enjoy my life all the time. My son's growth can give me lots of motivation in my work."*

Mrs. Xu also admitted that her happy marriage can reduce her burnout level in school. She claims she has suffered from a lot of inequalities in her treatment at school. The occurrences of extreme cases and emergencies made her very exhausted. However, she can calm down and feel comfortable at home,

> "*As a woman, family is the most important thing……My husband and children are the two most important people to me in this world. I really think my marriage is harmonious.*"

Mr. Chen considered his wife supported his work, and this can reduce his burnout at school. He mentioned that in the last two years, he often got angry at home. He

considered it as one of the negative outcomes of burnout. Even sometimes, he shouted at his wife and mother. But his wife gave him much encouragement to overcome it. He commented, "*My wife is kind to me and* encouraged me a lot. *Also, she advised me to control my emotions well. Fortunately, it is the best choice I have made in my life to have such a kind wife."* And, from then on, he gradually began to calm down at home after a busy day working. He took a positive view of his marriage based on this wife's support, which helped to reduce his burnout to some extent.

The divorced Mrs. Wang claimed that even though her marriage failed, it also has some positive meaning for her, and she smiled when she told me about it. She divorced from her husband two years ago but she claimed that she acquired a lot of experience and knowledge from it. She said,

> "*I often recalled these marriage experiences when counseling students whose parents were in trouble. In other words, I would take a more tolerant and positive attitude towards those students whose family were unhappy. My experience can make me understand the bad situation faced by these students much better."*

Mrs. Wang went on to claim that she always felt very exhausted in the process of complex cases counseling, but her marriage experience provided a positive influence on her work, from which she can feel much better. Mrs Wang provides an interesting example of a counselor who, rather than carrying negative emotions from her personal life across into her professional life, seems able instead to learn from her own emotional experiences and put them to good use in her work.

Besides their marriage, the school counselors' views on their income also can impact their burnout level. Mr. Ma, who earned a yearly income of RMB 80,000, spoke with dissatisfaction about his income. He compared his income level with others and complained, "*Why should I earn so little? I often thought what I earn is inconsistent with my caseload. When I thought about my income, I felt more tired."*

Another counselor, Mrs. Xu, earned a yearly income of no less than about RMB 140,000, which is more than the majority of the other counselors in Ningbo, but she also considered her income level was not reaching her expectation. She declared emphatically,

> "*Over the past years, Ningbo's housing price is rising which toughened our life quality. In school, my income is far less than other teachers. The efforts I put on counseling are not proportional to what I earned."*

She claimed that such a level of income leads her to a feeling of "*meaninglessness*" in her work. From their expressions, Mr. Ma and Mrs. Xu both had a negative

evaluation of their income as inadequate for the work they do. This influences their working motivation and efficiency and, this in turn may aggravate their sense of burnout.

### *5.3.6 Counselors' gender*

The counselors declared that their social expectations of different genders can have some influences on their burnout. Some male school counselors insisted that the other people around them always viewed them as *"stronger"* than female counselors. Male counselors have felt the different social expectation between them and female counselors. For example, Mr. Chen thought that society has different expectations of male counselors and female counselors. He said,

> *"As a man, all people around me think I should assume more family responsibilities, especially financial responsibilities. My mother-in-law believes that the role of husband is to actively take primary responsibilities for the family."*

With this perceived social expectation, he complained that he always felt tired and found his work meaningless. Another male counselor stated he felt not only "*economic expectations"* but "*successful expectations"* by society. Mr Wang added,

> *"As a man, most people, such as my wife or my leaders, hope I will become a successful person. Of course, I also want to succeed. But obviously, this job can't satisfy this social expectation."*

He went on to claim that with these social expectations of him as a man, he will not consider counseling as a "*valuable*" job and expected to quit this job sometime.

Compared to the male counselors, female counselors always perceived different social expectations. For example, Mrs. Wang added,

> *"As a female, especially a mother, I definitely would not consider too much about time and money cost in counseling. All people including my husband think I should only take care of the children well."*

She went on to claim that with so little social expectations of her by her family and the people around her, she could enjoy this counseling job more than the male counselors.

Also, an interesting finding is that male counselors stated that they usually have different emotional responses to the students with different genders. They would rather deal with more boys' problem than girls' in the counseling process. For example, Mr. Chen told me,

"*Girls tend to be easily bothered by emotional problems……Many times as soon as our counseling begins, the girls begin to cry and tell me some long stories.*"

Mr. Wang also added,

"Sometimes these girls *kept talking about the sad stories for one hour without allowing me to interrupt. As a man, frankly speaking, I didn't like the way they behaved.*"

Mr. Ma echoed this sentiment,

"*I prefer more straightforward counseling as they ask me about the questions and I tell them the answers. Girls are too emotional! They consume too much of my energy. But, boys are different. They often tell me their puzzles directly and then I tell them my suggestions.*"

From their points of view, the male counselors may incline towards more direct counseling way and logical analysis to the students' problems. However, the female students may be more inclined to want emotional catharsis rather than focusing on one point directly.

One outcome from this conflict is that the male counselors tend to take an indifferent or neglectful attitude towards the girl students who come to consult them. For example, Mr Chen claimed,

"*On most these occasions, I pretended to care and understand these girls. I couldn't concentrate on their words anymore. Actually, I had been impatient and hoped that they could leave earlier, as soon as possible.*"

Mr. Wang even expressed it this way,

"*Sometimes, I would turn a cold manner to the girl students. I even got distracted and failed to focus on them after their emotional catharsis. So, at times, I threw a piece of advice to these girls and hinted to them to leave.*"

From the above excerpts, it seems that male school counselors may be more apathetic and impatient towards female students compared to male students.

Different to the male counselor, female counselors may show slightly different attitudes towards counseling students of different genders. For example, Mrs. Cao added,

*"I have an innately good impression of girls. I am more patient with them. During the counseling with girls, I would be tenderer and care more about their emotions. When serving these boy students, I feel like I was talking with my friends."*

Also, Mrs. Wang commented,

*"As for boys, they do have strong logic but I can catch what they are thinking. And, for girls, I also can understand their emotions."*

From the above, it is may be that the female counselors' greater tolerance influences their lower burnout level compared to that of male counselors.

### *5.3.7 Personal characteristics*

Some of counselors' personal traits such as optimism, humility, or being easy-going can reduce their burnout level, judging from their interviews. For example, Mrs. Xu considered herself to be a *"positive"* woman. She explained,

*"I believe that as a counselor, we can do much to persuade the students to behave well. In other words, we can do something to make them better. I really do believe we can change something."*

With this self-confidence in counseling and an optimistic attitude towards counseling, she told me that she can deal with her burnout to some extent.

Mrs. Wang has experienced high burnout but she also can manage it well. She attributed it to an *"unyielding love of life"* personality trait to some extent. She underlined the point:

*"My work is very busy sometimes. But I will do what I like to do whenever I am free. I also will attend various training sessions to seek self-improvement. I always keep reading or singing, talking to other people when I am in a bad mood. I think my life is under my personal control."*

She went on to argue that this positive personal trait can influence her working status or working motivation.

However, some of these counselors' personal traits such as pessimism or perfectionism can enhance their burnout level. For example, Mr. Chen was that kind of person who pursues perfection. He claimed,

"*My mother always taught me to be cautious with everything when I was a child. During the counseling, I am very concerned about how I am evaluated by students. I hope every problem can be solved by me. However, it is impossible. If a student leaves my office without a smile or the problem cannot be solved very well, I will be sad and blame myself.*"

Obviously, Mr. Chen is a man who is eager to seek perfection in his work. With this perfectionism, he admitted he may feel more exhausted after dealing with complex cases. Similarly, Mrs. Jiang's pessimism and low confidence in counseling also forced her to suffer burnout a lot. She said to me,

"*I always suspect that I can't deal with students' problems. Sometimes, even if the student's problem was solved, I thought that it was not due to my contribution. This feeling haunted me and made me always sleepless. I always thought I was less capable…….*"

By coding all the relevant original transcripts to the question, "What do they attribute burnout to?", the possible reasons for counselors' burnout, according to their own perceptions can be classified by seven master themes: case-load, perceived prejudice, subject marginalization, de-professionalization, attitude toward marriage, family or income, counselors' gender and personal characteristics. In the above, I have explored the effects of these factors on burnout in detail.

## 5.4 What is the process of their burnout?

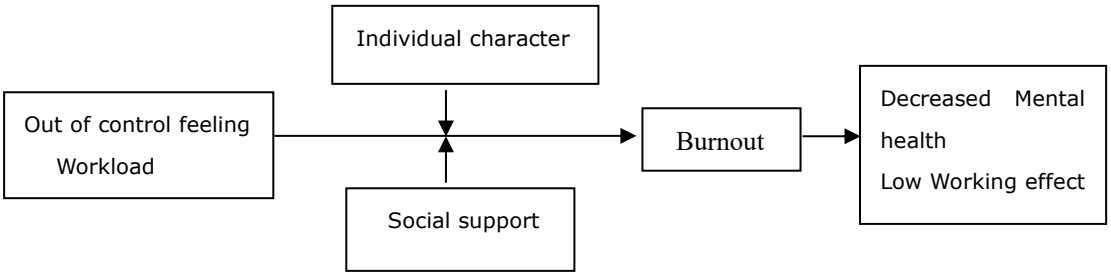
### 5.4.1 School counselors' burnout development process model

As I mentioned in chapter 2, researchers have pointed out some possible models of the burnout development process. For example, Cherniss (1980b) argued that with a large workload and in a negative working environment, workers begin to feel burnout. They begin to feel dissatisfied and complain about their work, followed by the lowered levels of accomplishment in their work. He pointed out, however, that their personality has a mediating impact on their burnout. Li Yongxin in China also proposed a possible burnout process after surveying 370 policemen and nurses based on his data (Li, 2007).

He claimed their burnout development process is as shown in Figure 5.2. As the feeling of being out of control and the workload increase, workers begin to feel dissatisfied and complain about their work and emotional discomfort, followed by low accomplishment in their work. In other words, their accumulated feelings of being out of control and an increased workload can cause their burnout. At the same time, they try to obtain some social support to deal with their burnout. Their personality in this case also has a mediating impact. With the burnout continuing,

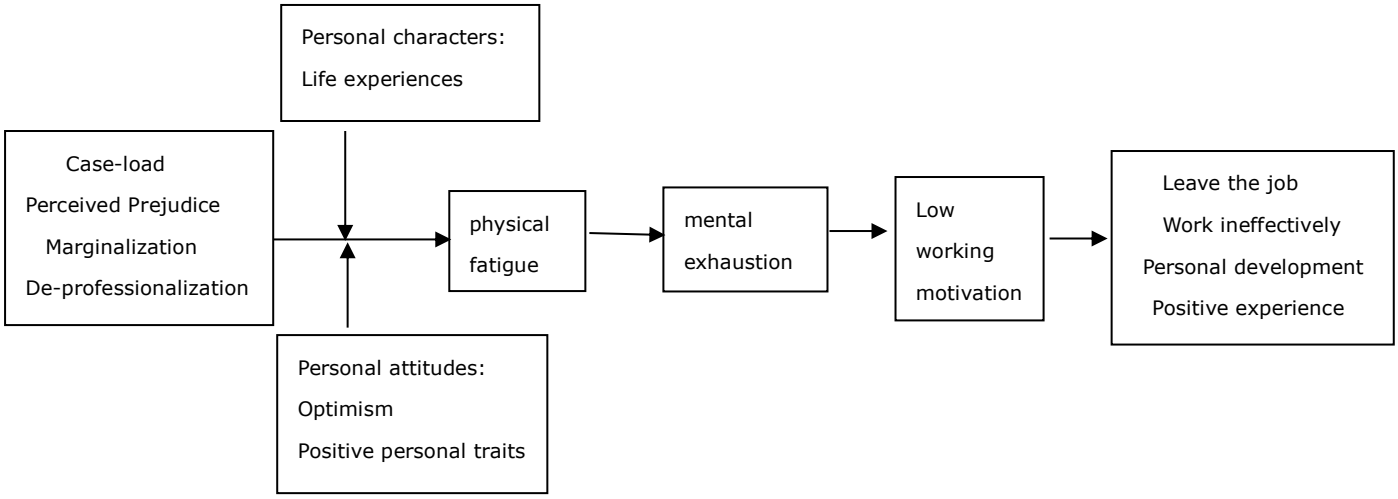
some negative outcomes can occur, such as a decrease their mental health or reduced effectiveness in their work. Li's burnout process model has been considered the most complete burnout development model so far in the Chinese literature (Bian, 2008; Pei, 2006). I added much psychological aspects of information to improve and expand Li's model.

**Fig.5.2 Li's（2007）burnout development process model**




I expanded Li's burnout development model to some extent with the use of the results of my interview study. I have built my own model of burnout based on the school counselors' experiences in Ningbo, as a way to enrich the existing body of literature on burnout which has been dominated by the school experience of western countries. Based on my interview data, I found that the direct reasons for their burnout are school-related factors such as subject marginalization, large case-load, de-professionalization and their perceptions of prejudice around them. Meanwhile, some individual factors such as their personal characters or their personal attitudes can have some moderating influence on their burnout. The black box of 'burnout' can be divided into three continuous stages: physical fatigue, mental exhaustion and reduced working motivation. In detail, a school counsellor can have some feeling of physical fatigue at the beginning of his burnout. He will feel bodily discomfort such as bad appetite or sleep. Then, he can feel mental or emotional exhaustion such as feeling sensitive to the working object or depressed during the counselling in the second stage of burnout. He can feel very low working motivation at the last stage of his burnout. These three burnout development steps can make my new model robust to some extent. I also found that if they can handle the burnout well, they will feel low burnout. If they cannot, they will feel high burnout. I also found that, although their burnout can have some negative influences on them, the counselors can also feel some positive personal development or obtain some positive experience after the burnout (see Fig.5.3).

**Fig. 5.3 A proposed burnout development process model of school counselors based on literature and interview data**




Compared to Li's model, my proposed model applies to a particular group of people: school counselors (unless or until it is tested with other groups). The causes of burnout of counselors may vary from individual to individual. Different counselors have their own burnout development process. Moreover, for every school counselor, the consequences arising after burnout may be different. For example, some of them may leave their job, whereas others may gain some personal development after burnout.

Also, my proposed model reveals some degree of the detail, systematic and explicit 'stages' of burnout. In this progression model, what comes first and what follows next of the 'burnout stages' can be manifested to some extent. However, my relatively rough three continuous stages of burnout are not described as precisely as they are shown in clinical or psychological-based models such as Leiter & Maslach's which used longitudinal methods to only focus on the burnout stages. In addition, my model can display some detail of Li's 'black box' of burnout stage.

My proposed model manifests this complexity and individual differences during the burnout process development among school counselors. We can understand the counselors' burnout process by this model to some extent which should be tested by the large-scale quantitative research. It is useful to reveal individual differences in the burnout development process by narrating different counselors' stories. These cases' stories can show some experiences of the school counselors' burnout process that illustrate the diversity in the process while still, to some extent, representing 'typical' cases, as discussed below.

### 5.4.2 School counselors' burnout development stories

In this section, the question," How does burnout develop among Ningbo school counselors?" will be answered through narrative analysis. Narrative analysis is a method of qualitative research in which the researcher listens to the stories of the research subjects, attempting to understand the relationships between the experience of the individuals and their social framework (Bamberg, 1997). From the interviews with all the seven school counselors with different backgrounds, I found that the complex burnout development process varies from individual to individual.

Given this, I will tell the reader the counselors' burnout process in forms of individual stories. In these narratives, some of the critical events in their career or lifetime will be mentioned. By reading these stories, readers can appreciate the whole process of burnout of individual counselors. Also, in these narratives, readers can see how school-related factors interact with each other, how the burnout happens, how the counselors handle their burnout, and what the burnout outcomes are for them. The readers can obtain the knowledge of how burnout actually develops step by step throughout the following stories to some extent. My qualitative data in this section also speaks of steps/stages in the burnout development of my participants.

I have chosen three 'typical' school counselors. The reason why I chose them is that these counselors stand for three different tendencies or paths in the burnout development process. In detail, Mr. Chen stands for those counselors who cannot manage their burnout very well and burnout leads to their low working efficiency and motivation, but they continue with their counseling position. Mr. Wang stands for those counselors who are suffering from high burnout which finally leads to changes in their working position. Mrs. Wang stands for those counselors who manage their burnout well and also gain lots of positive experience from it. The reason I did not choose any story of young counselors is that their working years are too short to reveal the entire process of burnout development.

Weiss（1994）stressed that the personal analysis of the researcher cannot be ignored in the presence of the individual story. However, he went on to argue that the researcher should use his personal analysis in the story very cautiously. So, some of my personal analysis appears in my presentation of the narratives. The important point is to remain faithful to the narrative in the terms in which the interviewee has expressed it; putting it succinctly, I must not change their story, but I might help myself and them to understand it. At the beginning of each story, I will introduce the background of the individual cases. Then, I will provide their personal stories. I sent each story to the respective counselor when I had finished writing it. All of them gave me some useful feedback from which I revised some details.

**Story A**

Mr. Chen's story

**Background**

This story is of a male school counselor, who taught in the school for 15 years, and holds a bachelor degree in Educational Psychology. He is a very independent, ideological and creative counselor. He always hopes to help those students with psychological disorders by using his own professional knowledge and skills. According to his interview responses, he was somewhat discontented with his working situation as a school counselor. He even complained about the policies released by the local Education Bureau. This following story directly reflects Mr. Chen's career development and working situation, and his burnout situation.

**Story**

When he was an undergraduate, his supervisor often praised his kindness and honesty. He suggested Mr. Chen worked as a school counselor after his graduation. In 2004, under the recommendation of the supervisor, he was employed by a key high school in Ningbo, as a school counselor. On his first working day, his vice-principal showed him around the 'Psychological Room' in which the counseling takes place. Mr. Chen considered that the room was spacious and contained a few functional areas with several psychological measuring instruments in place. The vice-principal told him that the school would support his counseling work and committed himself to supporting him at any time if he had problems. He was so touched at hearing these words and thought he was so lucky to work there. At that time, he was confident and enthusiastic about his job.

Compared to many teachers in the school, he perceived the school counselor can do a lot of things when he was free. For example, he learned some new knowledge, attended a lot of training sessions and read many books at weekends. However, from 2014, he found that his work was not up to his previous expectations. He suffered much exhaustion at work. He perceived there were quite a lot of students with so many complex problems seeking his psychological advice. Many times he had to carry on counseling one after another without any rest between them. He was often sleepless and had poor appetite after some complex counseling sessions. He viewed physical fatigue as his first burnout stage. In this stage, he often had bad physical symptoms. He wanted to adjust this negative body state.

He remembered one night when he returned home after counseling a girl with obsessive-compulsive disorder at 10:00 pm. He felt very exhausted. He wanted to stop talking to the students after long hours but he had to continue. Sometimes, some students or their parents rang him and asked for his help at the weekends or in the holiday, which annoyed him very much. His principal even warned him that if the students cannot connect to him as soon as possible when they have mental trouble, he may have to take some responsibility for their problems or outcomes.

A year later, his burnout developed as the burnout symptoms became more severe than before. He even felt mentally pained sometimes. When he went home, he could feel emotionally collapsed. He sometimes could not help crying at home. As a man, he thought this was a bit shameful. His wife always supported him a lot but the effect was very limited.

However, even though he worked so hard to serve the students, many other teachers in his school were prejudiced against him or his work. He remembered one teacher who taught Chinese once said to him, 'It's enviable to be a school counselor. You are the person with less workload and more salary. If I were you, I would be very happy.' He was unhappy when he heard these words. He considered that there was a great gap between others' evaluation and his personal understanding of his job.

He had no idea about the roles of school counselors in other countries. In his school, he was often forced to help the leaders or carry out on his own many affairs unrelated to his profession, such as inspecting the hygiene of the canteen, which kept him busy every day. Because of these affairs, he had insufficient time to prepare his psychology classes; and, he was envious of those teachers who attended so many professional training sessions. Over the long time since he was employed by the school, he was given so few chances of professional training. Although many social organizations outside school are delivering psychology technical training, the school leaders could hardly ever allow him to attend such training after considering the expenses. He often asked himself that if he were employed by an enterprise, would he be better off than he is now. He perceived his burnout symptoms to be peaking when he felt so depressed or exhausted in his work. He was eager to change another kind of work. He even wanted to leave the school and he hated the school system in which he felt he could not develop his own ability.

He had no other methods to manage his burnout in the school. However, he felt that his wife supported his job very much. His elder son, who was 10 years old, often asked him why he always working so hard. Whenever he heard these words, he felt sad. He was very sorry for his children and wife. He considered that, as a middle-aged man, he had failed to fulfill his responsibilities to his family. He also considered himself as an incompetent husband and father. He tried to adjust his working emotions but failed all the time. Actually, he tried to work well in school, but he felt so desperate about his working. At home, he sometimes lost his temper, but his wife encouraged him much when he was in a bad mood. He even perceived that his heath condition was getting worse, especially when he had to take too many classes or do many complex counseling services without any break.

**Summary**

According to Mr. Chen's story, due to the accumulation of multiple negative factors

such as a heavy caseload or role ambiguity, his burnout level was increasing over these years. Also, his physical fatigue and mental exhaustion were always subduing him. His burnout reduced his working efficiency or enthusiasm. He tried methods to manage his burnout but failed, but his family members supported him. His burnout was somewhat so severe that he was often confused about his working role and value.

**Story B**

Mr. Wang's story

**Background**

This story is of a male school counselor who is currently working in a vocational school. Mr. Wang, with 17 years of working experience, graduated from Zhejiang University and holds a bachelor degree in pedagogy. He likes psychology and psychological counseling and enjoys engaging in deep communication with students. He met many challenges when he was working as a counselor in school. He has applied for transfer to another position in his school. He is considering not being a school counselor in the future.

**Story**

In 2002, Mr. Wang graduated with a pedagogy major and worked as a teacher in a vocational high school. At the beginning, he only provided psychological counseling services as part-time work in school. At the same time, however, he thought psychology was very useful. Three years later, his school leader expected him to provide psychological counseling services as full-time work. He turned down this request at the beginning just because psychology was not his study major. His leader tried to persuade him several times. He hoped that Mr. Wang could try his best to provide students with psychological health services; he hoped that Mr. Wang could become a school counselor. At last, he agreed to accept the leader's request. In the first two years of carrying out the students' counseling as a full-time job, he suffered a lot of setbacks in the school. Because he was not a psychology major, he could not handle some students' problems, which made him very anxious and depressed. As a result, his school supported him to attend many psychological skills training sessions. Later, he found he could deal with many students' problems with ease.

After 2006, he began to be the teacher in charge of one class as well as a school counselor. In the following years, he felt that his caseload became so huge. As a counselor in vocational school, he felt so exhausted sometimes. Students in this school were naughty and difficult to manage. They often fought with each other; sometimes, one group of male students fought with another group. What made him most exhausted was that the students' problems tended to be very complex and even rather dangerous to themselves. In these times, his headache or the pressure he felt in hist chest was often so painful. He went to see the doctor and

the doctor told him to get enough rest. However, his symptoms became even serious after he dealt with some extreme cases in school.

He gave me an example. Two months ago, a girl jumped off a building because she had just broken up with her boyfriend who was also studying in this school. Just before the event, this girl went to Mr. Wang's office. She said something to the counselor. This crisis event stirred a negative response in both the school and the local educational bureau. As the only school counselor, Mr. Wang was criticized by the Director of the Education Bureau. This was not the first time he had been involved in such negative events. During that time, he was so busy that he did not return home for the whole week. He needed to provide counseling services for many people in his school, including this girl's roommates, parents and other students in her class. In that time, he became emotionally exhausted and easy to be offended. He was so sensitive to certain negative words. He tried to manage his emotions by watching lots of exciting movies or playing with his daughter. He could gain some positive power in his communication with his daughter but it was so temporary. He understood his burnout situation was a bad influence on his work and emotions.

He blamed himself for these events, thinking that if he had done better in the process of counseling, this girl would perhaps not have behaved this way. He felt himself to be an incompetence counselor, who could do nothing to help these students with severe mental problems. Every month, he would consult complex cases in his school, including self-harm or students fighting. Gradually, he became tired of psychological counseling in school. He thought the counselling process was so meaningless to the students and also himself. He would not devote all his ability and energy to his job. Also, he was often concerned why he could not get much positive feedback from the students who came for counseling, even though he invested so much time and emotion in the counseling process. Then, he gradually felt alienated from the students, to the extent that he often could not focus on students' words when they were in a counseling session. Sometimes he would unconsciously tremble whenever he heard the phone ring from a student who wanted to make a counseling appointment.

Although he was exhausted and totally dysfunctional as a counselor in his school, his school leader supported and encouraged him. He declared that he would never forget what his principal's words. In one afternoon, his principal came into his office and said to him, "What you've done is difficult to measure in an objective manner. I can fully understand your efforts. Also, your dedication in school is hard to be measured by money. I am grateful for your great efforts on behalf of students and their parents." After the school leader had spoken these words, Mr. Wang was so moved. Feeling he was appreciated in his principal's encouragement, he thought these were the warmest words he had ever heard. In his own feeling, his suffered from burnout so much that he had to leave his counseling position. He had a very

contradictory mood. On one hand, he enjoyed the whole process of counselling but on another, he felt burnout in this process.

Like Mr. Chen, Mr. Wang suffered a lot from his burnout. But, unlike Mr. Chen, he gained some positive meaning from his experience. For example, he felt he knew himself deeper than before. He began to know what he liked to do and disliked to do. Also, he focused more on his health after his burnout. Since his burnout experience, he has much deeper understanding and love towards his wife and child, whom he cherished very much. Even though his principal regarded him as important and he gained something positive effects from his burnout, Mr. Wang has considered leaving this counseling position and taking up another position in school.

**Summary**

Mr. Wang experienced high burnout, just as Mr. Chen did. But, unlike Mr. Chen, he considered leaving his counseling position in his school. He is presented here as a 'typical case' of the people who cannot go on with counseling work after burnout. His large caseload and self-blame are the two key reasons for his burnout as a counselor in his school. In the process of his burnout, he obtained some support from his school leader, but this cannot reduce his burnout level. Besides suffering a lot in his burnout, however, he also obtained some positive effects, such as cherishing his family more and taking greater care of his health.

**Story C**

Mrs. Wang's story

**Background**

Mrs. Wang is a female school counselor, 42 years old, who is currently working in a key middle school in Ningbo. She graduated as a psychology major and has 18 years of working experience. She is good at researching students' psychology. She shows an innate curiosity and interest for psychology and adolescent psychological counseling. She experienced a high level of burnout one year ago, but she managed it well. Due to her persistence in progressing her professional skills and her reading many books, she has overcome her burnout a lot.

**Story**

Mrs. Wang thinks she is suitable to work as a counselor in school. In her school, she thinks her caseload is large. Many times, she is expected to serve three to four students a day which exhausts her. In addition, in each week, she takes another 15 classes, on average. She said she feels burnout sometimes after one day's work. She thinks her burnout arises mainly from her cases. Whenever she was free, however, she reads books on psychology and in many other fields such as philosophy. She has also taken part in many professional skills training sessions. Although she has always perceived her cases to be difficult and complex, she has not withdrawn from counseling at all. Although her burnout time was somewhat

short, she was able to summarize her burnout process into three stages. In her first stage of burnout, she felt bodily discomfort; in her second stage of burnout, she felt emotional irritability; and, in her last stage of burnout, she felt she had no motivation to go on with her job.

She gave me a case example. Three years ago, she counselled a student with depression. This boy was congenial to her and relied on her. He was at a similar age to her son. She accompanied him for a total of three years. In these three years, she spoke with him and listened to what he said. She also played together with him. Many times, she thought of giving him up, she did not. Although his problem was not solved in the end, she could perceive some changes in him. Sometimes she dealt with so many complex cases in a short time that it made her experience burnout, but, whenever she felt burnout, she went to read a lot of psychology, pedagogy or other medical books in a place with few people present. During this process of reading, she felt calm and relaxed.

Although so many students come to ask for her help, she thinks she is obliged to do something for them. More interestingly, she has obtained some positive meaning from her burnout. She admitted that with talking so much with students of a similar age to her son, she can understand her son much deeply than before. In addition, she believes her burnout experience taught her how to face various setbacks in her work. After experiencing burnout, she feels she can take more positive perspectives of her counseling work than before.

**Summary**

According to Mrs. Wang, the caseload problem is the main factor for her burnout. But, she has managed it well. Her extensive reading and professional training were seen as the key methods to deal with her burnout. Moreover, she also obtained positive effects in her personal growth in her view of her work.

From the three 'typical cases' stories, some of the diversity in different counselors' burnout development processes have been illustrated. Overall, each school counselor's experience of the burnout process is different from that of others. For each school counselor, the burnout process is complex to varying extents. In their detail, the reasons given for their burnout are different, and the approaches through which they managed – or attempted to manage - their burnout are different. Someone managed their burnout successfully while others failed. Similarly, the final outcomes for their burnout are different: some suffered while others obtained some positive value after their burnout. By narrating counselors' stories and my proposed burnout development process model of school counselors, their complex and individual burnout process can be illustrated to some extent. Also, some different stages of burnout are shown in these stories, so how burnout actually happens and develops has been explored in this section.

## 5.5 Summary

To answer the second and third question in my research, I used a qualitative research approach with thematical and narrative analysis. The main purpose of the interviews is to explore burnout in greater depth from the perspectives of those counselors who have experienced it. We can gain knowledge of both the causes and development process of school counselors' burnout. In detail, I identified three sub-themes of burnout by coding the relevant transcripts of their interpretation of experiences on burnout: physical discomfort, emotional irritability and feeling totally dysfunctional as a counselor. The experience of burnout among these counselors is very similar to the Maslach's burnout definition (1986).

By coding the relevant transcripts among counselors to the question, "What do they attribute burnout to?" and carrying out thematic analysis, I discovered and integrated seven master-themes which can explain their burnout. These master themes are the possible causes they perceived for explaining the burnout of school counselors. These reasons are case-load, 'perceived' prejudice, subject marginalization, de-professionalization, marriage and income attitude, counselors' gender and personal characteristics. In these reasons, case-load, 'perceived' prejudice, subject marginalization, and de-professionalization are identified as the primary factors for their burnout, while the remaining three personal factors are mediating factors in the emergence of their burnout. These can answer my second question" What are the possible reasons for the observed levels of Ningbo school counselors' burnout?"

Based on Li Yongxin's burnout process model (2007) and my interview data, I have proposed a model for the development process of school counselors' burnout. This proposed model indicates that the burnout of school counselors is a complex process. Also, by narrative analysis of three typical school counselors' stories, we can gain a deeper insight into the development process of their burnout. Each school counselor experienced a burnout process that is different from the others. Their burnout processes reflect complexity and diversity. In detail, the reasons attributed to their burnout are different. The approaches they used to manage their burnout are different; one managed her burnout successfully but the others failed. The final outcomes of their burnout are also different. These above can be viewed as the answers to my third question "How does burnout develop among Ningbo school counselors?"

# Chapter 6: DISCUSSIONS

In this chapter, I will compare some related literature with my findings to clarify their similarities, differences and the possible causes, with a view to indicating possible directions for future research and linking the different conclusions between my research and others'.

## 6.1 Overall situation of school counselors' burnout

I used the CMBI prepared by Li et al. (2005) to explore the burnout situation of school counselors in Ningbo. In China, researchers have also used this tool to explore the burnout situation of school counselors. Based on the numbers of participants in different burnout levels according to Li's criteria,40.1% of Ningbo school counselors are at moderate levels of burnout, which is in line with my research hypothesis and consistent with other researches' conclusions elsewhere in China (Bian, 2008; Pu, 2013).

Other researches, however, have found that school counselors exhibit a low level of burnout (Pei, 2006). The different burnout levels observed can be due to the use of different survey tools or the different countries, schools, cities, etc., the counselors are in. Besides, the research conclusions may vary in their different burnout judging criteria. A counselor's burnout level rated as 'low' based on one researcher's criteria but can be rated as 'medium' based on another researcher's criteria.

According to the average scores of three dimensions of burnout, the burnout of school counselors in this study is mainly reflected in their levels of emotional exhaustion, which is consistent with the conclusions drawn from relevant researches elsewhere (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001; Huebner, E. Scott, 1992; Bian, 2008; Pu, 2013). Rupert (2005) described emotional exhaustion as being the 'core symptom' of school counselors' burnout.

Some researchers found that demographic variables have little impact on workers' burnout levels (Smith, 1992; Ross, 1989). However, some Chinese researches have shown that some demographic variables can have a significant effect (Bian, 2008; Pei, 2006). I hypothesized that all six demographic variables collected have an impact on level of burnout, but only gender, age and marital status showed a significant correlation with burnout levels. It is worth considering that the sample size for the quantitative research is only 127, which is a 'modest' sample size. We should be cautious in generalizing these conclusions.

The survey results showed that the burnout level of male counselors was significantly higher than that of their female counterparts ($p<0.01$), which is consistent with some other researchers' findings (Jiang & Xu, 2004; Pei, 2006;

Vredenburgh et al, 1999). Pei (2006) suggested that the higher level of burnout among male counselors might be explained by men's relative lack of patience. They may, Pei proposes, be focused more on power and independence and pursue professional success more than female counselors. In my subsequent qualitative research, some possible reasons for this were explored, which will be discussed later.

The sharpest controversy between my findings and many other research conclusions is whether the burnout levels of young counselors are relatively high or low. Findings from my research show that the burnout levels of middle-aged counselors were significantly higher than that of both younger and older counselors ($p<0.05$), which contradicts the conclusions drawn by many other researchers. These other researchers found that counselors' burnout levels gradually decreased with increased age, so their burnout level was highest when they were young (Hellman & Morrison, 1987; Ross & Altmaier, 1989; Rogers & Dodson, 1987; Pu, 2013). For example, in Pu's (2013) survey, the burnout levels of counselors aged 20-29 were the highest. The explanation offered for this phenomenon varies from researcher to researcher. Maslach (2006) proposed that counselors accumulate more skills for mature job adaptation as they get older, which they can utilize to reduce their sense of burnout. Young counselors, however, do not yet have and cannot instantly acquire these skills and face many challenging problems in their work.

In my research, however, the burnout levels of young counselors were the lowest. One possible explanation is that although young school counselors aged 20-29 have just begun their professional counseling career and face more challenges in schools, they show greater passion for their work, have higher expectations, and are more excited about future prospects, which all mitigate against raised burnout levels. Counselors aged 30-39, on the other hand, often have to deal with greater caseloads and other non-counseling work, and are more likely to have to deal with their own lot of family affairs, which lead to their burnout levels peaking.

Moreover, I assumed that the effects of working years on burnout would be similar to that of age on burnout, but my findings did not show that trend. No significant relationship was identified between working years and burnout ($Sig>0.05$). It implies that the impact of age on school counselors was not solely a matter of working years. This might point to issues such as 'maturity' or greater life experience as being important for counseling, but this would require further research focused on this issue.

One other conclusion is that income has no significant impact on these counselors' burnout levels, which is again inconsistent with the conclusions drawn from some other researches. Gao (2013) asserted that the counselors whose monthly income is more than RMB 6,000 showed lower burnout levels than those whose monthly income is less than RMB 3,000. He proposed that high income would improve the

work motivation of counselors, thus reducing their sense of burnout. In the interviews I asked about the influence of salary and found that there was no simple relationship between salary and motivation. Given the small scale of my qualitative research, it is not possible for me to make definitive suggestions, but it does appear to be an area that needs further exploration. Various explanations of this finding are possible but would need further research. For example, one possible explanation of my conclusion is that, although high income can motivate their self-image of their working status, it is also associated with longer working hours or more cases, which can contribute to physical and mental exhaustion. Conversely, low income can reduce their sense of working accomplishment but, it may also mean less working responsibility which in turn contributes to a reduced sense of burnout. From the above reasons, the effect of counselors' income level may not influence their burnout significantly. There are hints here, however, of the need for a 'model' that includes factors such as income, workload, motivation, self-esteem and burnout, for which further research would be needed.

It has been suggested that work-related factors 'explain' more variations in burnout level than demographic factors (Schaufeli & Janczur, 1994; Skovholt, 2001; Bian, 2008; Pu, 2013). Nonetheless, most researchers observed the correlation between just one work-related factor and burnout level. In my quantitative research, some work-related data were collected for comparison with burnout levels. Findings showed that some work-related factors were statistically significantly correlated with burnout and its three dimensions, to varying degrees ($0.1<r<0.4$). Subsequently, regression analysis was used to examine the predictability of burnout level offered by these variables. In such analysis, the standard partial regression coefficient β can be considered as an indicator of a variable's predictive power (Zhang, 2002). My findings reveal that weekly time spent on counseling, perceptions of role conflict and perceived professional development can all predict burnout levels to some degree ($0.2<\beta<0.3$).

One interesting issue raised by the regression analysis of my data is that all six work-related factors investigated (weekly counseling time, counselor-student ratio, principal support, role conflict, working stress and their perceived professional development) account for only 19.6% of the burnout variance ($p<0.001$). In contrast, Ashforth, in his study in the USA, however, found that all work-related variables such as working stress, caseload and role conflict can explain 34% of the burnout variance (Ashforth, 1996). Ashforth did, however, use a set of work-related variables that did not entirely match mine, so simple comparisons are unwise. Nonetheless, a comparison here does point to the need for more detailed study of work-related factors and conditions that may identify how these factors have an impact on burnout in different contexts.

## 6.2 Possible reasons for the observed levels of school counselors' burnout

My quantitative research was intended to examine the relationship between counselors' burnout levels and other selected variables. It was also used to identify subsequent participants for the interviews were the source of data for qualitative analysis. The qualitative research was intended to gain deeper insight into the influential factors and the development process of their burnout. Through interviews with seven school counselors, I identified and integrated seven possible themes leading to their perceived burnout: case-load, perceived prejudice, subject marginalization, de-professionalization, attitude to marriage and income, counselors' gender and personal characteristics.

After reviewing relevant literature, Pu (2013) proposed a framework for the causes of school counselors' burnout. She claimed that all possible causes leading to counselors' burnout can be summarized under just two categories: school-related causes and personal-related causes. Based on the Pu's framework (2013), counselors' case-load and their de-professionalization can be viewed as school-related causes, while counselors' attitude to marriage and income, counselors' gender and characteristics can be viewed as personal-related causes. Most of the factors I identified can fit in Pu's framework, but whether counselors' perceived prejudice or subject marginalization can be included in Pu's framework remains to be discussed. What is hidden behind these two causes can be related to educational policies or even Chinese social culture. In other words, their perceived prejudice or the marginalization of Psychology as a subject in schools can be, at least in part, attributed to Chinese 'exam-oriented' culture.

Most researchers have focused on either personal-related causes or school-related causes, but they have ignored – or failed to see - the impact of culture on counselors' burnout. In this regard, I have enlarged Pu's framework from "School-Person" to "Culture-School-Person". Whether this framework is reasonable or not remains to be tested in follow-up research. What the model does allow, however, is a greater sensitivity to the wider context within which counseling takes place, beyond the school and the individual counselor. As I pointed out in the literature review (Chapter 2), a very large proportion of the research on counseling and burn-out comes from studies in America. There is a danger in making simplistic transference of findings from one society to another. Awareness of this is what led Li (2007) to propose an alternative, modified scale for researching burnout in China, better suited to Chinese contextual conditions. By adding 'culture' to the previous dipolar model, the possibilities for more valid comparative studies in this field is opened up.

Most research shows that school counselors' burnout may arise from more than one reason; my conclusion concurs with this. A school counselor may be subject to burnout for multiple, possibly concurrent, reasons instead of single, distinguishable reason. For instance, some counselors are subject to burnout due to caseload and role conflict; others are subject to burnout due to their pessimistic personality and perceived discrimination by others. All counselors' burnout in my qualitative

research can be attributed to the combination of more than two factors.

Overall, my research outcome contributes to knowledge of the factors influencing counselors' burnout to various extents. Firstly, the connotation of 'caseload' is much more enriched. In much previous research, caseload is represented by the time or number of cases which counselors deal with. For instance, Lapan, & Blair (1992) argued that the number of students who are seeking for help would impact on counselors' burnout. Bian (2008) thought that the counseling time spent by counselors dealing with these students would impact on their burnout. In my research, caseload doesn't simply mean their counseling time or number of cases, but stresses that they have no time to recuperate during counseling over a certain length of time. Continuous intensive counseling service will make counselors physically and mentally exhausted.

Counselors considered that the complexity of student problems may also make them emotionally exhausted or even develop a self-perception of a strong sense of counseling incompetence. The complexity of student problems is mainly reflected in the recurrence of students' symptoms and the diversity of their causes. With the rapid development of contemporary society, school counselors have to deal with more student problems than has been the case before. Few relevant research studies suggest that the complexity of cases would impact on their burnout, although Wilkerson & Bellini (2006) claimed that when counselors believe that the counseling difficulty of cases is beyond own control or expectation, they would become vulnerable to burnout. My research conclusion is similar to Wilkerson & Bellini's, which indicates that the counselors' subjective evaluation or awareness of cases can impact on their burnout.

The increase in extreme cases will also speed up their burnout, which is a new finding in my research. When counselors are unable to help students with serious psychological problems in time, they may blame themselves. Dealing with extreme students' cases is a major challenge or threat for them. Previous researchers have not mentioned the relationship between the handling of extreme cases and counselors' burnout. Their identification in my research may relate to the nature of contemporary social environment development. One important indicator of serious implications of recent social change is that the suicide and self-injury rate among students has risen in the last ten years, commonly attributed to increased personal pressure or interpersonal conflicts (Han & Xu,2017). As a result, the extra challenge of dealing with such extreme cases perceived by counselors made them feel higher levels of burnout. In all, therefore, the connotation of 'caseload' can be manifested by the case intensity, complexity and the challenges in handling extreme cases.

Secondly, counselors' de-professionalization was found as an important cause for their burnout, which is similar to some other research findings. For example, Schmidt (2003) found that in Boston those school counselors who carry out a lot of counseling work reported less burnout compared to counselors who undertake

many tasks unrelated to counseling. Agresta (2006b) found that in Australia the 'generalization' of school counselors promotes a self-perception of low status which can contribute to their burnout. Pu (2013) also found that school counselors who often participate in assignments unrelated to counseling are more likely to feel burnout in southern China. Bian (2008) further found in China that when counselors' expected work content largely deviates from their actual content, their professional status will be challenged, followed by role ambiguity and sense of burnout. However, whether the role ambiguity or professional development of counselors' problems has international cross-cultural consistency still remains to be further tested through follow-up research.

My research shows that counselors' professional training can reduce their burnout. Ward-Allen (2002) also found that the duration of participation in professional training is negatively correlated with the counselors' burnout level (Ward-Allen, 2002). Over the last five years, no Chinese researchers have discussed the impact of professional training issue on school counselors' burnout. My qualitative research results suggest that sustained participation in training on professional knowledge or skills can not only improve the counselors' professional development, but also boost their confidence in counseling, which can make them feel less threatened by burnout to some extent.

Thirdly, as I mentioned in Literature Review chapter, there is a complex relationship between burnout and stress. Some researchers support a linear relationship between stress and burnout, so that higher burnout levels would be accompanied by rising stress (Li, 2003; Wolpin, 1988). Other researchers have argued that stress is not the only factor leading to burnout; they argue stress can interact with other factors to impact counselors' burnout level (Lamble, 2007, Pu, 2013). There is adequate evidence to affirm that an individual high sense of burnout may not only arise from high stress (Wilkerson and Bellini, 2006; Lambie, 2007; Pu, 2013). On the basis of my own data, I also support the observation that stress and burnout may not just follow a simple linear relationship. My quantitative findings show that the counselors' working stress cannot significantly predict their level of burnout ($\beta$=0.112). In my subsequent interviews, all counselors who were experiencing a high sense of burnout admitted that they felt little stress themselves, which further challenges the view of linear relationship between burnout and stress. Nonetheless, the relationship between stress and burnout needs to be tested more widely through more empirical research.

Fourthly, my research shows that the prejudice perceived by counselors is also a primary cause of their burnout. Those counselors who have perceived prejudice from their principal or colleagues were more vulnerable to the threat of burnout. A few researchers' findings are similar to my own. Rose (1989) asserted that those school counselors who are highly respected by their colleagues are subject to lower burnout level. Koban and Demir (2004) discovered counselors' burnout levels were significantly associated with their evaluation of their relationship with their leaders

and colleagues. Cankara (2008) alleged that the organizational atmosphere perceived by school counselors is one of the valuables for predicting their burnout. In Cankara's view, the organizational atmosphere perceived by counselors was closely associated with school culture. My research outcome can support his viewpoint to some extent: some counselors argued that perceived prejudice or disrespect towards them in school can be primarily attributed to the school placing more stress on students' academic achievement than their healthy personal development. This "Score Prioritized" culture was considered as the fundamental cause of the prejudice towards them that counselors perceived in schools.

This "Score Prioritized" culture, at least in part, leads to the marginalized status of "Psychology" as a taught subject in schools. Counselors in my research all considered that Psychology is not so highly valued as subjects such as Physics or Mathematics. In the current Chinese educational culture, a lot of schools value more students' academic performance than their well-beings (Zhao,2009). It is this which is highlighted as denoting rapid and significant development of the school, while, psychological counseling cannot contribute to these schools' goals directly. Some of my participants also believe that the local education bureau has not yet taken any appropriate measures to protect their rights, such as their income. It is possible that the "Score Prioritized" culture, the "Psychology" weakness and policy problems all led to their reduced sense of belonging and accomplishment at work, which in turn speeds up their sense of burnout.

Fifthly, gender-based contributions to burnout have been explained from different perspectives among researchers. For example, Bian (2008) claimed that male counselors tend to be more independent and pursue success more urgently, which tends to make their burnout levels higher than those of female counselors. Wang (2013) suggested that, compared to female counselors, male counselors are endowed with more 'social responsibilities' such as earning money, which makes them more vulnerable to burnout. My research outcomes also affirmed these views. In addition, some male counselors in my interviews were more likely to feel more 'gender-based expectations' from other people, which can accelerate their burnout.

I also identified an interesting perspective on the burnout differences arising from gender difference. Some male counselors claimed that they may give completely different emotional responses to male and female students. For instance, they may be averse to those emotionally sensitive girls in counseling sessions; they thought these girls' strong negative emotions can leave them exhausted. In such cases, these male counselors wanted to stop the counseling as soon as possible. In contrast, the female counselors in my interviews did not think they show any differences in attitudes towards male and female students. This observation may explain to some extent why some male counselors felt more burnout during the counseling sessions than female counselors. Further research is required to explore this finding, in both its nature and extent.

All of the above discussion on the causes of burnout should draws our attention to one key issue: both objective and counselor-specific subjective factors can also impact their burnout level. Previous research has shown that objective factors, such as the number of weekly counseling cases, weekly counseling time, time of non-counseling assignments in school, or principal's leadership style can impact counselors' burnout (Lapan & Blair, 1992; Ballsetero & Marshall, 2010; Lee, 2008; Bian,2008). Nonetheless, a growing number of research studies have shown that counselors' perceptions of the organizational atmosphere or principal's attitudes, or their evaluation of their role in school can impact their burnout level (Cankara, 2008; Wilkerson & Bellini, 2009; Pu, 2013). At least, we should not underestimate the effect of counselors' subjective perceptions in their burnout process.

## 6.3 Development process of school counselors' burnout

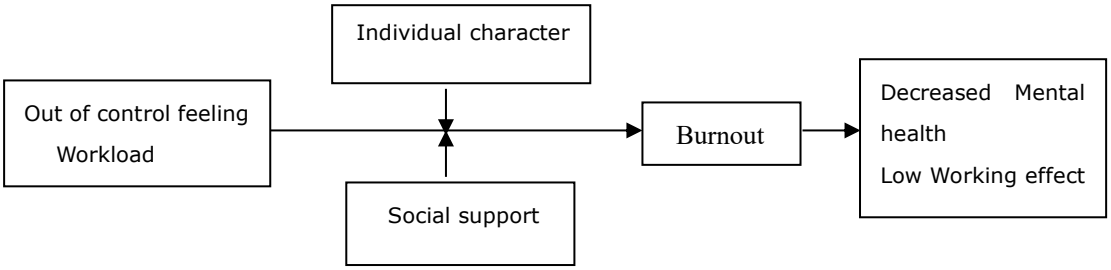
Based on Li Yongxin's burnout process model (2007) and interview data, I have proposed a new model for the development process of school counselors' burnout. There are some other models of the development process of workers' burnout, but many of these models have deficiencies. The models proposed by Spaniol & Caputo (1979) and Leiter & Maslach (2008) only included some of workers' experience when they were subject to burnout. The model proposed by Cherniss (1980) revealed some experiences in different stages after the occurrence of workers' burnout. These earlier models all have been viewed as explanations of clinical and psychological perspectives of burnout 'stages'.

Fig.6.1 presents the comparison between Li Yongxin's burnout development model and my proposed model based on my interview data. Li's burnout model (2007) was considered as a relative complete model in China that can explain some helping professionals' burnout process by some Chinese researchers (Bian, 2008; Li, 2007). His model fully covers the direct causes, regulatory factors and effects of burnout. In his view, workers' burnout is a continuous one-way process. Workers can be subject to burnout due to feeling of out of control and having a large workload; and, they can regulate and manage their burnout. The consequences of burnout are all negative and cause great harm to workers. Li's burnout development model is more complete in explaining the reasons and effects than other models described in the previous paragraph, such as Spaniol & Caputo's. Li's burnout development model is robust when used to explain the burnout process of some service workers such as nurses or policemen. However, as is stated earlier in my chapters 2 and 5, Li's model leaves participants' burnout experience as a 'black box'.

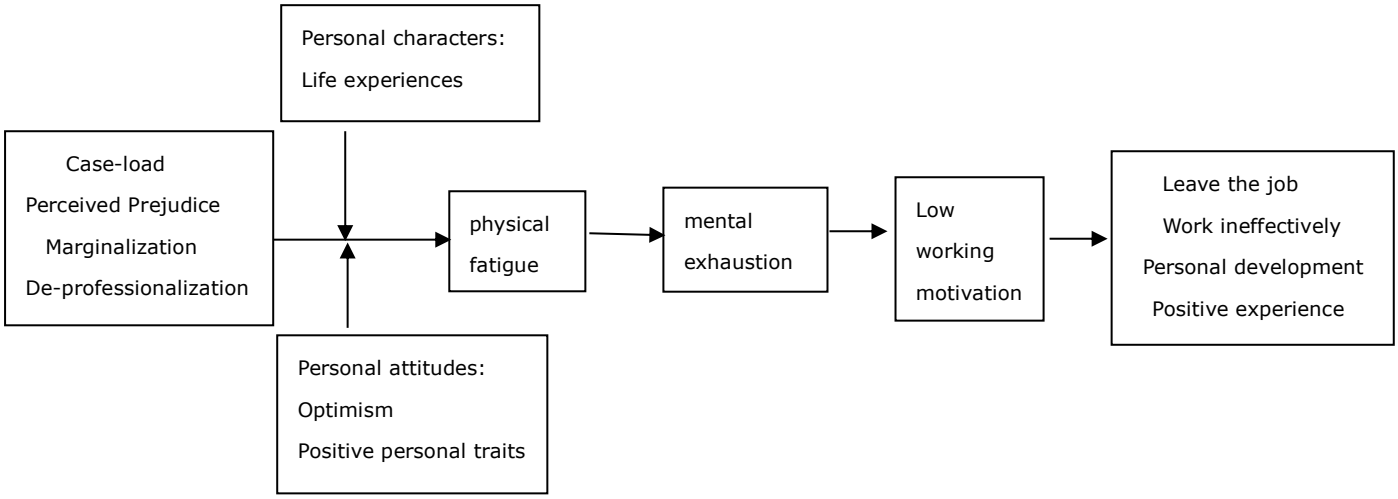
So, my revised model can also make contributions to interventions in school counselors' burnout by adding further detail to it. I have explored three key stages: physical fatigue, mental exhaustion and reduced working motivation in the school counselors' burnout development process in my new model. My proposed model is only specific to school counselors rather than other service workers. Although this proposed model must be tested by large-scale quantitative research in the future,

we can understand the counselors' burnout process by this model to some extent roughly. From this new model, as soon as we recognize school counselors' burnout symptoms or experiences, reasons and effects, we can try to deal with their burnout in time.

**Fig.6.1 Comparison of two models associated with development process of burnout**




**Li's model (Li, 2007, p53)**




**My new model in 2018**

Through the narrative analysis of 'typical' counselors, I revealed different counselors' burnout development processes. Due to differences in school background or individual personality, the possible causes and the paths for their burnout are different. Moreover, they use different ways to ease their burnout, such as participating in more professional training or getting social support. One counselor reduced his burnout level, while the other two increased. These conclusions indicate the complexity and individuality of counselors' experiences of burnout. Also, the data in these stories reflect some degree of how burnout actually

develops. Based on these data, we recognize that burnout can develop in some order. It can develop from physical symptoms to mental symptoms. Clarifying the burnout process can contribute to deal with the counsellors' burnout in certain stage on burnout or as soon as possible rather than the last.

An interesting conclusion is that not all consequences of their burnout were negative which conflicts with the conclusion drawn by many researchers. Through narrative analysis, I found some counselors were more mature in facing their difficulties in life and work after their burnout. Some counselors gained deeper understanding of themselves, their family members and their work after their burnout. These participants benefited from their burnout experience, an observation that has not been much revealed in previous researches in China.

# Chapter 7: CONCLUSION

## 7.1 Objectives achieved

Maslach and Jackson (1986) proposed a widely accepted definition of burnout in 1986. They claimed that burnout is a group of syndromes including emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. Much research literature revealed that teachers, principals, and counselors in schools around the world suffered from burnout. School counseling is a professional service work that provides mental health support to all the students which entails them giving much sympathy to their students, and they have to meet many students with mental problems. This means they might face the mental crisis in themselves. When they feel mental exhaustion, they suffer burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2008). Some evidence shows that school counselors in Ningbo suffered burnout (Xu, 2013; Shao, 2017). Some official data also manifested the challenging situation faced by counselors in Ningbo.

My overall research aim is to explore the burnout situation of school counselors in Ningbo. To achieve aim, three questions were put forward. My first question asks about the general patterns of Ningbo school counselors' burnout, to be answered using quantitative methods. The other two questions explore the possible causes and processes of their burnout, to be addressed using qualitative methods.

- *What is the current situation of Ningbo school counselors' burnout?*
- *What are the possible reasons for the observed levels of Ningbo school counselors' burnout?*
- *How does burnout develop among Ningbo school counselors?*

127 valid research questionnaires were completed by Ningbo school counselors. Though descriptive statistics, T-tests and one-way ANOVA, we can understand that, in general, these counselors' burnout levels are moderate. Certain demographic variables, such as gender, age and marital status significantly influence their burnout level. Though regression analysis, we can identify role conflict, weekly consulting time and their perceived professional development as significant predictors of their burnout level. These findings answer my first question.

In the subsequent qualitative research, semi-structure interviews were carried out. Seven counselors were purposefully selected for my interviews and 15 questions were put forward in these interviews. To properly explore the possible reasons for counselors' burnout, I used coding and thematic analysis of the interview transcripts. Following this, seven master-themes which can explain their burnout were coded and integrated. These factors were case-load, perceived prejudice,

subject marginalization, de-professionalization, marriage and income attitudes, counselors' gender and personal characteristics. These seven factors can answer my second question.

With a view to answering my third question, I carried out narrative analysis. One counselors' burnout model based on relevant literature and my qualitative data was proposed, to shows the complexity of the development process of their burnout. By narrative analysis of three 'typical' counselors' lifetime stories, we can gain a much deeper insight into the development process of their burnout. Each counselor experienced a burnout process that is different from the others': the reasons they perceived for their burnout and the management of their burnout were different. The outcomes of their burnout were various. And, two of them gained positive experience after burnout. These conclusions can be viewed as the answers to my third question.

## 7.2 Implications for counselors, principals and education bureau

### 7.2.1 Recommendations for school counselors

The occurrence and development of school counselor's burnout is an ongoing process. As professionals who are engaged in mental health work in school, counselors should enhance their self-awareness of their own physical and mental state. In particular, when counselors feel very exhausted or dysfunctional in their work, they have to consider whether they are developing a high level of burnout. The sooner they identify their burnout symptoms, the more likely they will take actions to reduce the hazards of burnout.

School counselors should strive to cultivate positive aspects of their character. My research shows some positive personality traits such as optimism or humor may reduce the hazards of their burnout. Thus, they should learn how to enjoy their life and strike a balance between their life and work. Mrs. Jiang suggested "*whenever I finished some complex cases, I will take some time to play with my son. I like going to park or playing with him on grasslands. It makes me feel relaxed.*" I also suggest that counselors can participate in more recreational activities regularly from which they can feel relaxed. Li (2005) suggested that counselors should relax their body or mind after providing an intensive counseling service. Rupert & Kent (2007) suggested that keeping a sense of humor is also a good way for counselors to reduce their burnout. Humor is a very positive personality trait (Bian, 2008). When counselors encounter difficulties in counseling or become misunderstood by their principals, they may try to use humor to relieve their negative emotions. For example, they may read some humorous stories, cartoons or watch comedy movies to release their negative emotions.

Besides, male counsellors should adjust their working emotions regularly. My quantitative research revealed that, compared to female counselors, male counselors are more likely to suffer burnout. Given this, I suggested that these male counselors should do more sports to alleviate the negative impact of burnout on them. My qualitative research also showed that some male counselors considered they had a negative or impatient attitude to some emotionally sensitive girls. Therefore, these male counselors need to learn how to adapt and respond to such girls more effectively. For example, when counseling these girls, they have to learn to control their temper.

Also, school counselors should take part in as many training sessions as possible and try to adjust their counseling objectives. My qualitative research found that the complexity of individual cases and the increased number of extreme cases are identified by the counselors themselves as the main causes for their burnout. These cases make great demands on their emotional energy. Moreover, my quantitative research identified that their level of professional development, as perceived by counselors, negatively predicts their level of burnout. More and more complex cases are undoubtedly a great challenge for them. Therefore, one of the important approaches to preventing burnout is to promote their own professional counseling skills. This requires counselors to take an active part in professional training and academic forums as much as possible. They should read professional books and other materials to help improve their counseling skills and enable them to help more students in school. Furthermore, when dealing with these complex or extreme cases, counselors also need to set more appropriate counseling objective to weaken their sense of loss of counseling efficacy. Skovholt (2001) asserted that setting objectives that are too high or remain unchanged may force counselors to feel helpless in the counseling process, which can lead to their burnout. Counselors should set more reasonable and appropriate counseling objective based on their own professional skills. This may not only benefit the students, but also enables counselors to experience fewer negative emotions during the counseling process.

School counselors should adjust their evaluation of the effect of counselling. Liu (2016) has asserted that the evaluation of the effectiveness of their counseling is one of the primary concerns among counselors. In most cases, it is difficult for them to directly observe changes in the performance of the students, which makes it difficult for counselors to experience the sense of working accomplishment. Also, it can make them doubt their own professional abilities, which can contribute to their burnout. Dealing with this requires counselors to evaluate their counseling effectiveness not only by relying on the performance of students but also from their colleagues' or supervisors' feedback. Only through these comprehensive evaluations can counselors promote their sense of counseling confidence and motivation in order to reduce their burnout.

School counselors should obtain as much as social support as possible. My research

reveals that social support can slow down the burnout level of counselors. For example, the quantitative research revealed that support from the school principal negatively predicts their burnout level. This requires counselors to actively communicate with their principals and make sure they can support their work. In addition, the examples of Mrs. Wang and Mr. Lu revealed that it is vital to seek help from family members when resisting burnout. Li (2007) and Kent (2007) similarly asserted that establishing good family relationships and keeping in contact with friends can effectively reduce burnout of counselors. I also suggest that counselors should keep in close contact with their peers and expand their social support system.

School counselors should view burnout as a more 'positive' outcome in their lives. Most researchers have regarded burnout as a negative outcome (Maslach et al., 2001; Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Li, 2007). However, some counselors, including Mrs. Wang, regard burnout as an opportunity for self-growth. This implies that burnout may have certain positive significance to the counselors. For example, counselors can recognize their work-related problems by summarizing the possible causes of their burnout. If they can fully recognize the value of their burnout, they can obtain more sense of working happiness. In details, the counselors should view 'burnout' more positive. They should recognize that the burnout can help them find the shortcomings of their working skills and promote their professional development. Jeffay A. Kottler (2005) claimed that if the school counselors can view burnout more rational, they will transform the 'burnout crisis' into an opportunity of their personality development. Though their continuous reflection and self-exploration of their burnout reasons and process, the counselors can learn to how to enjoy their lives and promote their working efficiency.

### 7.2.2 Recommendations for principals

Principals should view school counselors more as professionals in schools. Principals' perception of counselors' roles has a significant impact on counselors' sense of burnout (Amatea & Clark, 2005). In my research, participants Mr. Chen and Mr. Wang argued their principals assigned them to a lot of work irrelevant to counseling. As a result of such comments, I suggest that school principals treat these counselors more professionally. Principals should make use of them as psychology experts in their schools and allow them to take more assignments related to counseling and students. In this way their working enthusiasm can be improved and burnout reduced.

Principals should focus more on the students' mental health and safety. In Chinese schools, principals tend to focus more on the academic achievement of students than their personal growth or safety (Zhao, 2014). Against the background of a highly competitive environment, many principals tend to be more concerned about the students' examination scores, just because they are taken as a fundamental indicator for assessing the quality of a school. So, if the principals can balance the development of students' academic achievement and their personal growth or

mental health, the function and status of counselors can be improved to some extent. Then, the counselors can feel the importance of their own in schools which can reduce their burnout level.

Principals should also establish a mental health intervention system for all students in school. Liu (2003) asserted that the mental health of students is the responsibility of not only counselors, but also principals, teachers and their parents. In Ningbo, the psychological problems of students tend to be more complex than before and such problems can hardly be resolved solely by counselors. In this case, many complex and extreme cases will be dealt with through collaboration between teachers, parents, counselors and school doctors. This sharing of responsibility will contribute to an effective reduction in counselors' workloads.

### 7.2.3 Recommendations for Ningbo Education Bureau

Ningbo Education Bureau should strengthen their publicity about the significance of psychological knowledge and psychological counseling to the teachers or principals who do not directly take part in psychological work in schools. For example, Ningbo Education Bureau can publicize psychological counseling through public media such as TV, and some professional newspapers or magazines. This would allow more teachers or principals to better understand the content and function of school counseling, which would then encourage them gradually to accept psychological counseling as a significant contribution to the well-being of the students and the school.

Ningbo Education Bureau should also take relevant measures to protect the professional identity of school counselors. As mentioned in the literature review, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) defined a school counselor as the only professional with counseling skills to promote students' mental health. In China, counselors have dual identities: educators and consultants (Hutchinson, Barrick, & Grove, 1986; Kim, 1993; Burnham & Jackson, 2000). During my interview, counselors admitted that they often did something totally unrelated to student counseling which greatly damages their sense of professional identity and belongingness. Given this, Ningbo Education Bureau should lay down policies to clarify and document the officially recognized professional identity of school counselors. This may ensure the professional status of counselors in schools and shield them against the concern of role ambiguity.

More professional school counselors should be enrolled to Ningbo schools. In Ningbo, the average ratio of students to school counselors is 1083:1, shown in my quantitative research, which is much higher than the 250:1 recommended by the US ASCA (ASCA, 2003). This large number of students per counselor also implies a potential large counseling workload. In this concern, I suggested that Ningbo Education Bureau should recruit more professional school counselors in the following years, based on the various conditions of schools, to meet the growing

needs of ongoing students' mental health problems.

Also, I suggest that the Ningbo Education Bureau should conduct psychological tests on candidates for school counselor positions before recruiting them. After all, applicants' mental health situation should be taken into account and professionally assessed before offering them employment. According to my questionnaire results, male counselors are more prone to burnout; therefore, Education Bureau should be particularly cautious when recruiting male counselors. Finally, Ningbo Education Bureau also needs to provide the counselors with adequate training opportunities to facilitate the sustainable development of their professional skills; this is important for ensuring their professional status in school is justifiably maintained (Shao, 2016).

## 7.3 Limitations and future research directions

I have explored the current situation, cause and development of burnout experienced by school counselors in Ningbo through questionnaire and semi-structured interview. The final results provide invaluable revelations in all three of the target areas – situation, cause and development process. There are still some limitations in this research, however, which should be further clarified.

Firstly, the possibility of generalization of this research is somewhat limited. My research conclusions only represent the burnout status of school counselors in Ningbo rather than other regions. The application of these conclusions to other parts of China remains to be further tested. Also, I proposed a rough model for burnout process of school counselors based on Li (2007)'s model and my interview data. Whether this initial burnout development process model is suited to the experiences of other professional workers or school counselors in other places remains to be tested with diverse samples.

Secondly, the research methods can be improved if necessary in subsequent research. In my quantitative research, I only used correlation analysis and regression analysis between variables and burnout level to examine their relationships. With an increased number of participants, other researchers may be able to use path analysis or structural equation modeling to explore more clearly the influential mechanisms between the relevant variables and burnout level.

Thirdly, the counselors' burnout scales remain to be improved. A few domestic scholars have paid attention to the burnout of school counselors in China, but most of the measurement tools they used were directly derived from Maslach's classic burnout scales (MBI). Li (2007), Bian (2008) and I used CMBI (Chinese Maslach burnout inventory) to measure the burnout level of school counselors. Up to now, CMBI has been regarded as the best tool to measure the burnout level of professional service workers in China. It has been used many times in relevant

research (Bian,2008; Pu,2013) and its items are suited to Chinese culture. Also, CMBI has been revised many times since it was firstly used by Li Yongxin in 2005 (Li,2005). CMBI is derived from and shares the same basic structure as MBI, which can be viewed the most wide-spread and classic tools in investigations of the helping professionals' burnout level. However, CMBI is not a tool specially designed to measure the burnout of school counselors, and this may affect the research validity. Therefore, one of the major directions for future research is to develop a more valid scale specifically for the measurement of school counselors' burnout.

Fourthly, the research content of school counselors' burnout needs to be expanded. In my quantitative study, all six work-related variables can only explain less than 20% of the variance in the burnout scores. Moreover, in my follow-up interviews, some factors associated with social background and culture - such as their perceived prejudice and the marginalization of psychology in the schools - were identified to explain their sense of burnout. This evidence reveals that in addition to school-related factors and personal factors, socio-cultural factors may influence the counselors' burnout, and this should be further explored and discussed in future research. More cross-culture comparative researches can be carried out afterwards.

Fifth, there is also room to get deeper into the inner feelings and school experience of the school counsellors. This could be achieved by taking the perspective of school organization, and making connections between their experience and the school context and caring system in which they work, function and struggle. In the story A of Mr. Chen, some issues relevant to the school organization are revealed, such as the guidelines on the provision of counselling services, student' and parent' expectations, colleagues' understanding of school counselling and the role of school counsellors, the working relations of school counselling and its collaboration with other school teams/departments. So, a further study is needed with a range of schools with different forms of organization as the focus of the research. More details on school factors contributing to burnout would require different research designs, where schools rather than counsellors are the research subjects, and other staff, such headmasters, colleagues or other school caring system teams would become research participants.

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# Appendix A: Questionnaire

## Part 1: Demographic Factors Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions about your basic personal information. Please place a tick (√) at the certain option.

1. Your Gender? A. male B. female
2. Your Age? A.20-29 B.30-39 C.40+
3. How many years have you working as a profession school counselor?
   A.0-5 years B.6-10 years C. more than 10 years
4. The highest qualification you have obtained is?
   A. a Bachelor Degree
   B. a Master or Doctor Degree
5. Your partnered status is
   A. Single B. Married
6. How much is your income one year as a school counselor?
   A. <80,000RMB
   B. 80, 000—120,000RMB
   C. >120,000RMB

## Part 2: Work-related Factors Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions about your work-related information. Write down the information on the line given or place a tick (√) at the certain option.

7. The average time you spent consulting with students is ____ hours a week.
8. What's your student to counselor ratio in your school? _____ (e.g.1500:2)
9. What's the degree of you are feeling of the support from your principal in school?
   （1 means the principal did not support you at all. 7 means the principal supported you very much. 2, 3,4,5,6 mean something between these two.）

   1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6-------7

10. What's the degree of your working stress?
   （1 means you did not feel the working stress at all. 7 means you suffered so much working stress in school. 2, 3,4,5,6 mean

something between these two.）

1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6-------7

11. How much non-counseling duties you have undertaken such as teaching other subjects, administrative or clerical work in school?

（1 means you have taken little non-counseling duties in school. 7 means you took so much non-counseling duties in school. 2, 3,4,5,6 mean something between these two.）

1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6-------7

12. What's your feeling of profession development in recent 3 years?

（1 means you felt no profession development in recent 3 years. 7 means you felt a lot of profession development in recent 3 years. 2, 3,4,5,6 mean something between these two.）

1-------2-------3-------4-------5-------6-------7

## Part 3: Burnout Questionnaire

Answer the following questions regarding your current experience as a school counselor. Each of the following items gives you a possible burnout behavior. Decide how that behavior was suitable to you on a scale of 1 to 7. 1 means that behavior was totally nothing to do with you.7 means you fit that behavior very much. The degree of fitting that behavior will be low to high from score 1 to 7.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

13. I am very tired.

14. I do not care the inner feeling of my students.

15. I can solve the students' problem effectively.

16. I feel worried that my job would affect my emotion.

17. My students will complain about me.

18. I can effectively influence others through my work.

19. I often feel exhausted.

20. I work with a cynical attitude.

21. I can create a relaxed working atmosphere.

22. I become fagged after a day's work.

23. I feel I am tired of my students.

24. I will be very excited after I have solved the problems of students.

25. Recently, I was a little depressed.

26. I will reject the request made by my students.

27. I have accomplished a lot of meaningful tasks.

Dear all the school counselors,

Due to the subsequent deeper investigation, I may need some semi-structured interviewee among you. If you are willing to, please leave your convenient contact at the end of the questionnaire.

Again, all of your data will be strictly confidential. Thanks for your help!

Your telephone No: _____

## Appendix B: A List of Specific Interview Questions

### 1. Personal Background as a school counselor

(1)What's your major in university?

(2)What's your feeling about school counseling job before you graduated from university? And now?

(3)In your view, are you fitting this school counseling job? Are you optimistic all the time as a counselor? Why?

(4)What's your income level?

(5)Do you like your job and why?

.....

### 2. Working situation as a school counselor

(1)When you started counseling job?

(2) How about your workload in school? Please tell me your daily working content.

(3)In your school counseling process, which kinds of cases you often visit?

(4)In your daily job, which disappointed you most? Tell me more about it in details.

(5) In your daily job, which delighted you most? Tell me more about it in details.

.....

### 3. Subjective feeling of burnout as a school counselor

(1)Tell me your own explanation of "burnout".

(2) Are you suffering from burnout now? If yes, tell me more about it.

(3)Which factor(s) do you think will attribute to your burnout mostly?

(4)How does" burnout" happen according to your own experience?

(5)When you feel burnout, what can you do to deal with it?

.....

## Appendix C: Questionnaire Participant Information Sheet

**Participant Information Sheet:** ***Burnout amongst school counselors: a study in a Chinese city***

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this questionnaire survey in connection with my *EDD dissertation* at the University of Nottingham Ningbo. The project is a study of basic *burnout situation experienced by school counselors in Ningbo*.

Your participation in the survey is voluntary. You are able to withdraw from the survey at any time and to request that the information you have provided is not used in the project. Any information provided will be confidential. Your identity will not be disclosed in any use of the information you have supplied during the survey.

The research project has been reviewed according to the ethical review processes in place in the University of Nottingham Ningbo. These processes are governed by the University's Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics. Should you have any question now or in the future, please contact me or my supervisor. Should you have concerns related to my conduct of the survey or research ethics, please contact my supervisor or the University's Ethics Committee.

Yours truly,

Wencheng Chen

Contact details:

Student Researcher: Wencheng Chen; Wencheng.Chen@nottingham.edu.cn

Supervisor: John Lowe; John.Lowe@nottingham.edu.cn

University Research Ethics Committee Coordinator, Ms Joanna Huang

(Joanna.Huang@nottingham.edu.cn)

# 问卷声明（中文版）

论文题目：学校咨询师的倦怠：在中国一个城市的研究

尊敬的参与者：

谢谢您参与这次问卷调查。这次问卷调查是我在宁波英国诺丁汉大学博士论文相联系的。本次调查的目的在于了解宁波学校咨询师最基本的倦怠情况。

您是自愿参与此次问卷调查的。您可以在任何时候选择放弃这次的问卷调查，并要求您提供的信息不被使用在此次调查中。您提供的所有信息都是保密的。在使用您提供的信息时不会涉及您的身份以及个人信息。

宁波诺丁汉大学已根据研究道德检查程序对这项研究项目进行检查。这一程序是在学校关于研究行为和研究道德的行为标准的指导下进行的。如果您现在或将来有任何疑问，请联系本人或我的导师。如果您对我在问卷中的研究行为或研究道德有任何质疑，请联系我的导师或者英国诺丁汉大学的道德委员会。

陈文成

联系方式：

研究员：陈文成； Wencheng.Chen@nottingham.edu.cn

导师：John Lowe; John.Lowe@nottingham.edu.cn

诺丁汉大学研究道德委员会秘书： Ms Joanna Huang (Joanna.Huang@nottingham.edu.cn)

## Appendix D：QUSTIONNAIRE PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

**Project title** ：***Burnout amongst school counselors: a study in a Chinese city***

**Researcher's name：Wencheng Chen**

**Supervisor's name: John Lowe**

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.
- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.
- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential.
- I understand that data will be stored in accordance with data protection laws.
- I understand that I may contact the researcher or supervisor if I require more information about the research, and that I may contact the Research Ethics Sub-Committee of the University of Nottingham, Ningbo if I wish to make a complaint related to my involvement in the research.

**Signed** …… (participant)
**Print name**…… **Date** ……

**Contact details:**
Researcher: Wencheng.Chen@nottingham.edu.cn
Supervisor: John.Lowe@nottingham.edu.cn
UNNC Research Ethics Sub-Committee Coordinator:
Joanna.Huang@nottingham.edu.cn

# 调查问卷参与者同意书（中文版）

**项目标题：**学校咨询师的倦怠：在中国一个城市的研究

**研究者姓名：陈文成**

**导师姓名：**John Lowe

- 本人已阅读声明，项目组织者已经和我解释了研究项目的性质和宗旨。本人理解并同意参与。
- 本人理解项目的目的和在项目中的参与作用。
- 本人明白可以在研究项目的任何阶段退出，不会因此影响现在以及将来的状况。
- 本人明白研究过程中信息可能会被公开，但本人身份不会被确认，个人的调查结果始终是被保密。
- 本人了解数据会根据数据保护相关法律进行存储。
- 本人知道，如果需要进一步有关研究的信息可以联系研究者或者导师，如果需要对参与研究提出投诉则可以联系宁波诺丁汉大学科研伦理小组委员会。

**参与者签名**.....

**日期**.....

**联系方式：**
研究者：Wencheng.Chen@nottingham.edu.cn
导师：John.Lowe@nottingham.edu.cn
诺丁汉大学研究道德委员会秘书：Ms Joanna Huang (Joanna.Huang@nottingham.edu.cn

# Appendix E：Interview Participant Information Sheet

**Participant Information Sheet:** ***Burnout amongst school counselors: a study in a Chinese city***

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview in connection with my *EDD dissertation* at the University of Nottingham Ningbo. The project is a study of *burnout situation experienced by school counselors in Ningbo*. The aim of this interview is to *explore the factors and the whole process of the burnout experienced by the counselors in Ningbo school*.

Your participation in the interview is voluntary. You are able to withdraw from the interview at any time and to request that the information you have provided is not used in the project. Any information provided will be confidential. Your identity will not be disclosed in any use of the information you have supplied during the survey.

The research project has been reviewed according to the ethical review processes in place in the University of Nottingham Ningbo. These processes are governed by the University's Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics. Should you have any question now or in the future, please contact me or my supervisor. Should you have concerns related to my conduct of the survey or research ethics, please contact my supervisor or the University's Ethics Committee.

Yours truly,

Wencheng Chen

Contact details:

Student Researcher: Wencheng Chen; Wencheng.Chen@nottingham.edu.cn

Supervisor: John Lowe; John.Lowe@nottingham.edu.cn

University Research Ethics Committee Coordinator, Ms Joanna Huang

(Joanna.Huang@nottingham.edu.cn)

# 访谈声明（中文版）

论文题目：学校咨询师的倦怠：在中国一个城市的研究

尊敬的参与者：

谢谢您参与这次访谈。这次访谈是我在宁波英国诺丁汉大学博士论文相联系的。本次访谈的目的在于深入了解学校咨询师倦怠的影响因素和整个发生发展过程。

您是自愿参与此次访谈的。您可以在任何时候选择放弃这次的访谈，并要求您提供的信息不被使用在此次访谈中。您提供的所有信息都是保密的。在使用您提供的信息时不会涉及您的身份以及个人信息。

宁波诺丁汉大学已根据研究道德检查程序对这项研究项目进行检查。这一程序是在学校关于研究行为和研究道德的行为标准的指导下进行的。如果您现在或将来有任何疑问，请联系本人或我的导师。如果您对我在问卷中的研究行为或研究道德有任何质疑，请联系我的导师或者英国诺丁汉大学的道德委员会。

陈文成

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导师：John Lowe; John.Lowe@nottingham.edu.cn

诺丁汉大学研究道德委员会秘书：Ms Joanna Huang
(Joanna.Huang@nottingham.edu.cn)

# Appendix F: Interview Participant Consent Form

**Project title** ： ***Burnout amongst school counselors: a study in a Chinese city***

**Researcher's name：Wencheng Chen**

**Supervisor's name: John Lowe**

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.
- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.
- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential.
- I understand that the interview data collection will be recorded.
- I understand that data will be stored in accordance with data protection laws.
- I understand that I may contact the researcher or supervisor if I require more information about the research, and that I may contact the Research Ethics Sub-Committee of the University of Nottingham, Ningbo if I wish to make a complaint related to my involvement in the research.

**Signed** …… (participant)
**Print name**…… **Date** ……

**Contact details**

Researcher: Wencheng.Chen@nottingham.edu.cn
Supervisor: John.Lowe@nottingham.edu.cn
UNNC Research Ethics Sub-Committee Coordinator:
Joanna.Huang@nottingham.edu.cn

# 访谈参与者同意书（中文版）

**项目标题：**学校咨询师的倦怠：在中国一个城市的研究

**研究者姓名：**陈文成

**导师姓名：**John Lowe

- 本人已阅读声明，项目组织者已经向我解释了研究项目的性质和宗旨。本人理解并同意参与。
- 本人理解项目的目的和在项目中的参与作用。
- 本人明白可以在研究项目的任何阶段退出，不会因此影响现在以及将来的状况
- 本人明白研究过程中信息可能会被公开，但本人身份不会被确认，个人的调查结果始终是被保密。
- 本人知道面谈数据将会被录音。
- 本人了解数据会根据数据保护相关法律进行存储。
- 本人知道，如果需要进一步有关研究的信息可以联系研究者或者导师，如果需要对参与研究提出投诉则可以联系宁波诺丁汉大学科研伦理小组委员会。

**参与者签名**.....

**日期**.....

**联系方式：**

研究者：Wencheng.Chen@nottingham.edu.cn

导师：John.Lowe@nottingham.edu.cn

诺丁汉大学研究道德委员会秘书：Ms Joanna Huang (Joanna.Huang@nottingham.edu.cn)