
MENTAL HEALTH OF TOUR GUIDES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF BURNOUT

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Abstract

This paper attempts to disclose the influence of job burnout on the mental health of tour guides. A total of 200 tour guides were randomly selected, and their mental health was evaluated against scales like Maslach Burnout Inventory-Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) and the Symptom Check List 90 (SCL-90). Then, the information of these tour guides was subjected to correlation analysis and regression analysis. The results show that job burnout is a common problem among tour guides, and the mental health of tour guides is poorer than the general population; there is a significant positive correlation between the MBI indices and SCL-90 indices of tour guides. On this basis, several measures were proposed to maintain the mental health of tour guides from individual and organizational levels. The research findings lay the basis for further research on the job burnout and mental health of tour guides.

Key words: Burnout, Mental Health, Tour Guide.

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of burnout was first proposed by the American psychologist (Freudenberger, 1974) and described as a state of exhaustion experienced by the people in helping professional due to over-long daily working time, large workload, and excessive work intensity. Once this concept was raised, it immediately attracted widespread attention. For this, many scholars have proposed different definitions. Maslach & Jackson (1981) thinks that burnout is a kind of psychological integrated disease, and proposes that burnout includes three dimensions, namely Emotional Exhaustion (EE), Depersonalization (DP) and Personal Accomplishment (PA). EE is the core dimension of burnout, which is manifested in the extreme fatigue of individual emotions and feelings; DP shows that the individual treats the work and the people around with a negative attitude; PA means a tendency to negatively evaluate themselves, accompanied by a decline

in work experience and achievement experience (Shirrom, 2002).

With the increasingly fierce competition in modern society, burnout has become a common phenomenon worldwide. The relationship between burnout and mental health caught the attention of foreign scholars in the 1980s. Research found that burnout has a negative impact on mental health and is an important factor affecting mental health (Qin, Jiang, & Yu, 2004; Liu, Wu, Li et al., 2018). The tour guide is a special occupation that requires a lot of emotions, strong work continuity, and high expectations of clients. It becomes a high-risk group for burnout. The tour guide's burnout has a serious and negative effect on the individual's physical and mental health and work performance, thereby influencing the quality of tourism services and the healthy development of tourism (Calogero, 2009; Dierdorff, Bell, & Belohlav, 2010; Hackman, & Oldham, 1975; Hunsley, & Meyer, 2003; Maslach, 1976; Pines, & Maslach, 1978; Wyatt, Henter, Leary et al., 1995). Domestic research on burnout and mental health has just started. From the existing literature, the research subjects are mainly teachers, medical staff and police. But there have been few

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studies on tour guides' burnout and mental health, and most of them are qualitative descriptions. Therefore, this study aims to explore the current situation of tour guides' job burnout and mental health in China as well as their relationship, in order to promote the mental health of tour guides, improve the quality of tour guide services, and enhance the healthy development of tourism (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001).

RESEARCH OBJECTS AND METHOD

Research objects

In this study, a random sampling method was used to conduct a questionnaire survey. A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed, 192 were returned, 8 invalid questionnaires were deleted, and 184 were valid, with the effective rate of 92%.

Research methods

(1) Burnout measure. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) scale developed by American psychologist Maslach is the most commonly used burnout measure for researchers. This study used the MBI-HSS (Maslach Burnout Inventory-Human Services Survey) scale for the service industry. The measure consists of 22 questions at 3 dimensions, namely the EE (9 items), DP (5 items) and PA (8 items). 7-point scale was used, 0 for "strongly agree" and 6 for "strongly disagree". The score for each dimension was the average for all items in this dimension. The scores of the EE or DP is positively correlated with the degree of burnout, while the PA is negatively correlated with the degree of burnout.

(2) Symptom Check List 90 (SCL-90). The mental health survey uses the SCL-90 which has good reliability and validity.

(3) Statistical processing. The data was analysed using the SPSS 20.0 software package.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Basic characteristics of tour guide burnout

(1) Overall situation of tour guide burnout. According to the survey by the MBI measure, the preliminary analysis was conducted to obtain the current situation of tour guide burnout (Table 1). This questionnaire used a 7-point scale from 0 to 6 points, and 3 was a medium-level value for each indicator. It can be seen from Table 1 that the tour guide's burnout score was 3.20, which has not yet reached the severity level, but in terms of the burnout distribution, the problems of tour guide burnout

have existed widely; among them, the EE and DP problems were relatively serious.

(2) Group analysis of tour guide burnout. The results of gender differences in guide burnout showed that female tour guides generally had higher levels of burnout than male guides (see Table 2). Female tour guides had significantly higher EE and DP than male guides, and there was no significant difference in PA in terms of genders. This means that female tour guides feel hard, stressful and exhausted. Compared with male guides, they are more likely to have negative attitudes towards tourists such as indifference and coldness. This is mainly because females are more psychologically and physiologically stressed than males under the influence of their physiological and psychological characteristics.

Table 1. Scores of the dimensions for tour guide burnout (N=184)

Dimension	M	SD
EE	3.423	0.97
DP	2.999	1.34
pa	3.301	1.06
Burnout	3.282	1.01

Table 2. Gender differences in tour guide burnout

Gender	Number of tour guides	EE M±SD	DP M±SD	PA M±SD
Male	26	3.141 ±1.05	2.931 ±1.16	3.245 ±1.02
Female	158	3.470 ±1.39	3.010 ±1.28	3.310 ±1.37

In addition, through data analysis, there were no significant differences in the three dimensions of burnout in terms of age and education background.

Basic characteristics of the tour guide's mental health

In this study, the scores of the guides' SCL-90 factors were compared with the domestic norm (Table 3), finding that the scores of the guides on each factor were higher than the norm, especially in terms of interpersonal sensitivity and hostility. This indicates that the mental health of the tour guide is lower than that of the general population, which is consistent with the most research results for the guide mental health.

Table 3. Mental health scores of tour guides

Factor	Tour guide (n=184)	National norm (n=12160)
Somatization	1.49±0.56	1.37±0.46
Obsessive compulsion	1.75±0.54	1.66±0.58
Interpersonal sensitivity	1.63±0.57	1.51±0.55
Depression	1.60±0.59	1.45±0.53
Anxiety	1.52±0.53	1.40±0.48
Hostility	1.59±0.60	1.48±0.57
Phobic anxiety	1.38±0.63	1.23±0.39
Paranoid ideation	1.54±0.55	1.41±0.50
Psychoticism	1.42±0.50	1.34±0.44

Relationship between tour guide burnout and mental health status

(1) Correlation of tour guide burnout and mental health status. In this study, the same subjects were tested for burnout using the SCL-90 questionnaires. Pearson correlation was used to analyse the correlation between the factors in the SCL-90 scale and the three dimensions of burnout. The analysis results are shown in the Table 4.

The results of this study showed that there was a significant positive correlation between the tour guide burnout and the scores of SCL-90 factors. The cumbersome, role multiplicity, and insignificant effect of the tour guide's work cause emotional exhaustion in their work, often showing symptoms such as fatigue, irritability, allergies and emotional stress (Wimo, Jonsson, & Winblad, 2006). It's also found that the EE had the greatest influence on mental health. DP is a negative attitude towards the client. This is a manifestation of the imbalance of mental state, and therefore has a certain relationship with mental health. The tour guides have to face a lot of people all day with a strong sense of service. They have a cooperative and competitive relationship with

the colleagues, and make coordination with the partners. Thus, complex interpersonal relationships are easy to bring professional pressure to the tour guides, forming a self-defensive atmosphere and generating a negative response attitude. PA represents the level of self-evaluation for burnout. At present, tour guide company and travel agencies have an imperfect incentive mechanism and evaluation mechanism, and the society has a very low recognition of tour guides, but the guests expect them to do their best at work, which results in the tour guide's doubt about their value and effort. When the tour guides find less feedback from their careers, the strong frustration shall make them lose hope and confidence in their work.

(2) Regression analysis for burnout and mental health status of tour guides. In order to further understand the effect of tour guide burnout on mental health, Stepwise multiple regression analysis was used by taking the three dimensions of burnout as independent variables, and the SCL-90 factors as dependent variables. The results are shown in Table 5.

The analysis showed that the determination coefficient of occupational burnout was relatively higher in somatization, interpersonal relationship, depression, anxiety and paranoid ideation, namely 24.8%, 20.6%, 28.3%, 26.7% and 24.5%, respectively, indicating that burnout has a great influence on somatization, interpersonal sensitivity, depression, anxiety and paranoid ideation. Comparatively speaking, the determination coefficient of burnout on obsessive compulsion symptoms, hostility, Phobic anxiety and psychoticism was relatively low, 10.1%, 13.6%, 14.8% and 13.7%, respectively, indicating that burnout has less impact on obsessive compulsion symptoms, hostility, Phobic anxiety and psychoticism. Through further analysis, it's found that when the factors in the SCL-90 were taken as the dependent

Table 4. Correlation analysis of guide mental health and burnout

	EE	DP	PA	Total burnout
Somatization	0.141**	0.179**	0.091**	0.429**
Obsessive compulsion	0.113**	0.138**	0.169**	0.290**
Interpersonal sensitivity	0.215**	0.1129**	0.216**	0.381**
Depression	0.317**	0.238**	0.285**	0.412**
Anxiety	0.247**	0.251**	0.289**	0.473**
Hostility	0.176**	0.169**	0.226**	0.345**
Phobic anxiety	0.203**	0.131**	0.291**	0.362**
Paranoid ideation	0.191**	0.135**	0.189**	0.479*
Psychoticism	0.111**	0.098**	0.118**	0.341**
Total amount of mental health	0.148**	0.179**	0.095**	0.435**

Note: * P<0.01, ** P<0.005

Table 5. Regression analysis for guide burnout on various factors of mental health

Dependent variables	Independent variables	R ²	B	t	P
Somatization	EE	0.248	0.070	2.945*	0.003
	DP		0.013	0.594	0.553
	PA		-0.034	-1.789	0.077
	Total burnout		0.022	6.345**	0.000
Obsessive compulsion	EE	0.101	0.021	1.043	0.296
	DP		-0.03	-0.755	0.461
	PA		0.024	0.847	0.398
	Total burnout		0.015	3.287**	0.001
Interpersonal sensitivity	EE	0.206	0.035	1.051	0.295
	DP		-0.016	-0.548	0.589
	PA		0.012	0.403	0.689
	Total burnout		0.017	3.308**	0.001
Depression	EE	0.283	0.083	3.019**	0.004
	DP		0.022	0.734	0.463
	PA		0.031	1.223	0.234
	Total burnout		0.016	0.4753**	0.001
Anxiety	EE	0.267	0.038	1.66	0.101
	DP		-0.0087	-0.350	0.724
	PA		0.027	1.289	0.176
	Total burnout		0.021	5.8169**	0.000
Hostility	EE	0.136	0.026	1.022	0.308
	DP		0.017	0.563	0.577
	PA		-0.006	-0.248	0.798
	Total burnout		0.016	3.799**	0.000
Phobic anxiety	EE	0.148	-0.005	-0.161	0.872
	DP		-0.044	-1.482	0.138
	PA		0.051	2.140	0.034
	Total burnout		0.014	3.698**	0.000
Paranoid ideation	EE	0.245	0.012	0.410	0.685
	DP		-0.002	-0.039	0.965
	PA		0.010	-0.347	0.281
	Total burnout		0.045	6.364**	0.000
Psychoticism	EE	0.137	0.029	1.089	0.968
	DP		-0.003	-0.067	0.732
	PA		-0.025	-0.732	0.481
	Total burnout		0.020	4.273**	0.000

Note: * P<0.01, ** P<0.005

variable, the EE dimension of burnout entered the regression equation, and reached a significant level through the probability test, indicating the good regression results. This also fully demonstrates that EE is the core of burnout and the most typical characteristics at the beginning of burnout process. Tour guides can alleviate somatization, obsessive compulsion, interpersonal sensitivity, anxiety, hostility, phobic anxiety, psychoticism and sleep problems by relieving emotional exhaustion (Charlson, Baxter, Cheng et al., 2016).

In summary, it's found that the sense of tour guide burnout promotes the change of mental health status to a certain extent through the correlation analysis and regression analysis using the SCL-90 and MBI scale.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

More attention should be paid to the current stress and mental health of tour guides by the travel agencies, tour guide service companies, and the whole society. Burnout is an important factor affecting the mental health of tour guides. Maintaining the mental health of the tour guide is not only an effective measure for the tour guide to reduce the problem of "burnout", but also beneficial to their physical and mental health. This shall further enhance the enthusiasm of the tour guide and promote the healthy development of the tourism industry. Therefore, it is especially important to build a complete mental health maintenance system of tour guides.

Individual level

At present, there are many researches on the prevention methods of burnout from the individual level, mainly focusing on two aspects: self-maintenance of individual psychology and seeking for positive coping style. Among them, the most core preventive measure is the self-maintenance of individual psychology, which is an important measure to improve the mental health of tour guides, and also the core link to strengthen and maintain their mental health. Therefore, guides should meet the requirements in their work and life as follows:

(1) Improve professional self-identity. Guides should be able to correctly understand and evaluate themselves, give themselves a reasonable positioning, and make rational expectations of their work, so as to reduce the sense of loss caused by excessive expectations and the frustration brought by comparison with others. Meanwhile, guides should also strengthen their professional knowledge and improve professional ability, which is conducive to increasing the effectiveness of tour guide work, improving the guide's affirmation of self-worth, and enhancing their sense of accomplishment, thereby maintaining the mental health at a good level.

(2) Learn to make self-psychological adjustment. Tour guides should learn to make self-psychological adjustment, give full play to their subjective initiative, maintain a positive and optimistic attitude, harmonious interpersonal relationships and enrich their own spare time, thus effectively relieving tension and pressure in work, and regulating physical and psychological functions.

Organizational level

The research on psychology finds that the co-adaptation between work environment and human has become a key factor in preventing burnout and psychological problems; only the organic combination of organization and individual is the most effective preventive measure for psychological problems and burnout.

(1) Establish a reasonable salary guarantee system. Government departments should establish relevant laws and regulations, require travel agencies and tour guide service management institutions to sign legal labour contracts with tour guides, establish a fair and transparent tour guide compensation system, and handle relevant insurance, so as to ensure the legitimate rights and interests of tour guides such as basic wage income and social security, and further maximize their work enthusiasm. At the same time, the tourism authorities should formulate relevant laws and regulations to constrain the relevant

enterprises in the tourism industry represented by travel agencies, improve the tourism law, and promote the relevant tourism legal reform, so that the behaviour of tourism enterprises can be subjected to strong constraints, and the tourism environment can be purified, which provide legal protection for the tour guides' work.

(2) Improve the social environment for the tour guide work. At present, the tour guides in China are faced with an extremely bad social environment. The media has continuously magnified the negative news reports of individual tour guides, which leads the whole tour guide industry to become the synonym of the "cheater and liar" in the eyes of the public with an extremely low social reputation, which has brought far-reaching negative impact on the work life of the tour guide and increased their work difficulty and professional pressure. China's tourism authorities should make full use of their powers and influences to improve the social environment of tour guides and lead the social media to pay attention to the tour guide industry in an all-round way. They should not only report the negative examples of tour guides, but also report the positive examples. In addition, they should also correct the one-sided reports of individual media, creating an objective social environment for the tour guides in the society.

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