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¹Zihan Li
²Xiang Liang
²Junhao Liao
²Mao Jiao Li
²Feng Bao Ji
³Wang Xiao

Technologies to support the psychological health and well-being of social workers in China

¹ Southwest Minzu University,
Luzhou Psychosocial Service and Crisis Intervention Center,
Key Research Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences in Southwest Minzu University,
State Ethnic Affairs Commission, China
li.tszihan@yandex.ru

² Southwest Minzu University, China
dobestxdd1010@163.com
e1476983845@qq.com
1280811617@qq.com
2321388341@qq.com

Southwest Medical University
Luzhou Psychosocial Service and Crisis Intervention Center, China
wangxiao@mail.ru

Abstract. The role and importance of social work in overcoming global social cataclysms has been updated. The key risk factors that have a direct impact on the psychological health and well-being of people employed in the field of social services are being investigated. The data of a survey conducted to assess the impact of financial and psychological support of social workers from the labor collective on their morale and psychological well-being are presented. The Chinese experience shows that the psychological health support system for social workers, guided by the model of humanism and cognitive behavioral therapy, helps to reduce the workload of staff, and, consequently, increase the confidence of recipients of social services in recovery, improve cognitive functions and behavior of patients, and their successful psychosocial rehabilitation. Examples of tools for financial and moral support of social workers in the conditions of the labor collective in modern China are given. Recommendations are formulated for improving the model of financial and moral support for social workers, considering the Chinese experience.

Keywords: psychological health; mental well-being; social work; psychological support; training of social workers; career of social workers

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Исследовательская статья

¹Ли З.
²Лян С.
³Ляо Ц.
⁴Ли М. Ц.
⁵Цзи Ф. Б.
⁶Сяо В.

**Технологии поддержки психологического здоровья
и благополучия социальных работников Китая**

¹⁾ Юго-западный университет Миндзу,
Лучжоуская психосоциальная служба и центр кризисного вмешательства;
Ключевой научно-исследовательский институт гуманитарных и социальных наук в Юго-За-
падном университете Миндзу;
Государственная комиссия по делам национальностей, Китай
li.tszihan@yandex.ru

²⁾ Юго-западный университет Миндзу, Китай
dobestxdd1010@163.com
e1476983845@qq.com
1280811617@qq.com
2321388341@qq.com

⁶⁾ Юго-западный медицинский университет;
Психосоциальная служба Лучжоу и Центр кризисного вмешательства, Китай
wangxiao@mail.ru

Аннотация: Актуализированы роль и значение социальной работы в преодолении глобальных социальных катаклизмов. Исследуются ключевые факторы риска, оказывающие непосредственное влияние на психологическое здоровье и самочувствие лиц, занятых в сфере социального обслуживания. Представлены данные опроса, проведенного для оценки влияния материально-психологического обеспечения социальных работников со стороны трудового коллектива на их морально-психологическое самочувствие. Китайский опыт показывает, что система поддержки психологического здоровья социальных работников, руководствуясь моделью гуманизма и когнитивно-поведенческой терапии, способствует снижению нагрузки на персонал, а, следовательно, повышению уверенности получателей социальных услуг в выздоровлении, улучшению когнитивных функций. функции и поведение больных, их успешная психосоциальная реабилитация. Приведены примеры инструментов материальной и моральной поддержки социальных работников в условиях трудового коллектива в современном Китае. Сформулированы рекомендации по совершенствованию модели материальной и моральной поддержки социальных работников с учетом китайского опыта.

Ключевые слова: психологическое здоровье; психическое благополучие; социальная работа; психологическая поддержка; обучение социальных работников; карьера социальных работников

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Introduction. China is a country that has always paid great attention to the practice of social work services in the field of mental health. In accordance with the Chinese concept of building a progressive society, mental health is a key means and tool for a prosperous existence and progress (Yang, Wang, 2011).

Today, China is undergoing a period of global economic and social transformation. Under such conditions, the pace of people's lives noticeably accelerates, the pressure of competition increases, individual psychological and behavioral problems become more visible, both at the level of individuals and on the scale of the whole society (Yang, 2021).

On the one hand, from year to year in China, as well as around the world, the number of people with abnormal psychological behavior, mental disorders, extreme personal emotional manifestations are increasing, which are key risk factors that directly affect social stability and national public security.

On the other hand, the system of service and mental health care is imperfect, even in such developed and progressive countries as China. The policy and rules for providing psychological support, the mechanism of socio-psychological counseling still have significant imperfect areas. In many ways, this entails the emergence of social problems, irrational and extreme interpersonal conflicts, aggressive behavior, group incidents, illegal crimes, which are largely associated with the unhealthy psyche of people (Yang, 2021). The situation has noticeably worsened over the past few years due to the pandemic and the long-term forced restriction of the freedom of movement of such a massive number of people.

One of the factors of innovative social management, building social harmony and

stimulating public life in modern China is social work. The very profession of a social worker originated in China in the era of industrial society (since the 1980s) and is a measure to combat social risks. Social workers are the most important link in solving problems and crises (Yang, Wang, 2011). They contribute to the restoration of the moral well-being of a society affected by natural disasters, epidemics, spiritual crises; they assist the government in assessing the social and psychological needs of the population; thanks to their activities, the population of the Celestial Empire successfully copes with anxiety, stress, and depression (Gu, Lena, 2020).

All this suggests that the role and importance of social work in modern China and around the world is difficult to overestimate. In this regard, the need for a comprehensive and comprehensive study and strengthening of the mechanism for the functioning of social services, as a response to social development and global change, is inevitable.

Methodology and Methods. *Risk factors for mental health and well-being of social workers in China.* The psychological difficulties faced by social workers in their professional activities in modern China may be due to the action of external and internal factors. This is primarily due to the profession itself, which involves the continuous inclusion of social feelings, as well as the need to take care of society (Zhang, 2008). At the same time, if a social worker is in an unsatisfactory moral state, then, alas, it is not necessary to talk about his professional suitability.

By reflecting on our own professional experience and systematizing relevant data obtained from scientific and academic literature,

we detail the key risk factors for the psychological health and well-being of social workers in China:

1) *Working pressure.* On the one hand, the peculiarities of the profession of social work itself require a specialist to constantly update and improve their knowledge, improve their quality to fully be able to meet the current social needs of society, meet the requirements of state social reforms. On the other hand, along with multiple reforms and transformations, social workers are also forced to compete to move up the career ladder and be able to claim better working conditions. All this contributes to the growth of psychological pressure within the work team, which can lead to both temporary and permanent personal crises.

2) *Pressure from family and inner circle.* In addition to the directly complex and responsible social and scientific work, social workers also bear the burden of the family. Many workers combine several roles at the same time and are often unable to cope with growing work and family difficulties, especially in stressful conditions such as the past pandemic, when in addition to direct recipients of social services, social workers had to take care of their loved ones, experiencing a double level of stress and anxiety (Huang, 2011). All this leads to various inconveniences and emotional problems, making social workers more fragile and sensitive, both from a physical and psychological (moral) point of view.

3) *Interpersonal stress.* Workers in the field of social services in modern China are people rich in knowledge, delicate in emotions, with a high self-esteem, which is due to the general prestige of this profession in the country. Faced with certain problems (material or moral), many employees, for one reason or another, tend to close in on themselves, they cannot easily make contact, they do not feel the desire to share and talk with their colleagues due to some, possibly public prejudices, and personal prejudices (Zhang, 2018). And this even though open interpersonal communication with managers and colleagues often helps

to strengthen internal confidence and, as a result, improve the psychological health of social workers.

4) *The pressure of the social environment.* On the one hand, the development of information technology in the era of informatization allows social service workers to acquire knowledge and skills through many channels, choosing them independently and based on their own preferences. On the other hand, Chinese society is placing more and more hopes on social workers. To adapt to ever-increasing social demands, social workers in China must constantly learn and improve their skills, while being under constant psychological pressure from society.

All these factors allow us to say that at the present stage, social workers in China are exposed to many psychological health risks. If these risks are not properly managed and controlled, then they can have a truly stifling effect on the development of the entire social services sector in China. In the future, this will lead to the formation of a vicious circle and the development of a real social collapse.

Research methods. To assess the impact of financial and psychological support for social workers on their morale and well-being, a survey was conducted.

The study involved 142 respondents (42 men and 100 women). Most survey participants (79%) have a bachelor's degree in higher education. The remaining 10% is college level education; 9% – master's degree; 2% – secondary technical education and below.

Among all survey participants, 69% have an education not related to psychology. Only 31% of respondents have a professional psychological education (5% of men and 26% of women).

Most respondents have less than one year of experience in the social sector (38% of women and 12% of men). The period of professional activity of the other part of the sample ranges from 1 to 5 years (5% of men and 15% of women); from 6 to 10 years (3% of men and 5% of women); from 11 to 15 years (2% of men and 3% of women); 15 years and older (8% of men and 9% of women).

The collection of empirical data was carried out using the «Questionnaire for the status of a social worker», consisting of four blocks (sections). The obtained results were processed using Student's statistical t-test for two independent samples.

Research Results and Discussion. One of the blocks of the questionnaire used to interview social workers from China involved finding out which sources of financial support, if necessary, were and remain the most preferable for them. Among the response options, the following options were provided: «without any source»; «spouse»; «other family members»; «relatives»; «friends»; «colleagues»; «workplace»; «official or semi-official organizations» (for example, party unions). In accordance with the objectives of the study and the purposes of this article, the category «without any source» was excluded from the distribution. The comparison included data obtained

from interviewed social workers who prefer to use «family» in its broad context (spouse, other family members, relatives) and «workplace» (colleagues, administrative staff, trade unions) as a source of financial support.

The compared variables were such indicators as: «emotional exhaustion»; «enthusiasm»; «sense of achievement»; «life well-being»; «happiness at work»; «human well-being»; «general indicator of happiness».

The subsample of interviewed social workers who prefer the source of «family» for financial support included 78 people (17 men and 61 women), 25 people who prefer the source of «workplace» for financial support (7 men and 18 women).

The empirical data obtained by statistical processing of the initial information using Student's t-test are presented in the following two tables.

Table 1

Student's t-test empirical values for social workers from China receiving *financial support* from various sources

Variables	Average values depending on the source of financial support		t-test	P
	Family N=78	Workplace N=25		
Emotional exhaustion	4	3	3	,003**
Passion	3	3	1,9	,066
A sense of accomplishment	4	4	1,3	,207
Life well-being	26	32	3,7	,000**
Happiness at work	27	34	3,7	,000**
Human well being	29	34	2,9	,004**
Overall Happiness Score	82	101	3,7	,000**

$p=0,05$ (1,97); $p=0,01$ (2,61)

The survey showed that those social workers who in the past had the experience of seeking financial help and support from their colleagues, formal or informal organizations, trade unions, and received it, have a statistically significantly lower rate of emotional exhaustion than those social workers who if necessary, they apply for financial support only to their family members – spouse, relatives (Student's t-test = 3, with a significance level of 0.003**).

Social workers who, if necessary, receive financial support from their professional community, also demonstrate statistically significantly higher indicators of life and human well-being, happiness at work and overall happiness, in contrast to those social workers who prefer only family members and close relatives.

Table 2

Empirical values of Student's t-test for social workers receiving *moral support* from different sources

Variables	Average values depending on the source of moral support		Т-Стьюдент	P
	Family N=69	Workplace N=34		
Emotional exhaustion	4	3	2,6	,011*
Passion	3	3	1,9	,060
A sense of accomplishment	3	4	2,3	,020*
Life well-being	25	32	4,6	,369**
Happiness at work	26	34	4,9	,996**
Human well being	29	34	3,5	,000**
Overall Happiness Score	80	100	4,8	,502**

$p=0,05$ (1,97); $p=0,01$ (2,61)

A high statistical significance of differences in the studied parameters of psychological health and well-being among Chinese social workers was revealed, who prefer to receive moral support from the work team and from the family environment.

Thus, those social workers who in difficult situations tend to seek moral help and support mainly from their colleagues demonstrate lower indicators of emotional achievement (Student's t-test = 2.6, with a significance level of 0.011*) and higher indicators of a sense of achievement (Student's t-test = 2.3, at a significance level of 0.020*).

In addition, also social workers who prefer to receive moral support from their work team, relevant trade union organizations, have higher indicators of life and human well-being, happiness at work and a general indicator of happiness, in contrast to those social workers who apply for moral support mostly to family members.

All this indicates a high degree of development of financial and moral (psychological) support for social workers in the conditions of the labor collective, public and private organizations, trade unions, etc. institutions in this area in modern China. What is of value and interest for a detailed study.

Financial Support Tools for Social Workers in Contemporary China. The state policy of social security and social work is an essential element of the overall well-being and

psychological health of workers employed in this area. It is she who is responsible for the effective distribution of labor duties and the award of fair material remuneration.

The main instruments of financial support for social workers in China today are wages; social insurance; social help; privileges; medical services; educational programs; assistance in purchasing housing; personal social services and some others. From an administrative point of view, the model of financial provision and support for social workers in China is fixed and stable.

For example, in 2013, through the integration of state, corporate and social resources in China, the Shanghai Center for Social Services for the Public Benefit was established. This center is a professional platform for serving social workers and providing personalized and professional services for them. To date, the center employs 316 trade union social workers in 36 Pudong cities.

Financial support for social workers in China also includes close cooperation between government and private organizations, trade unions and educational institutions. For example, the well-known National Open University School of Social Work in China is implementing several projects, one of which is the development of talent among social workers. This project involves the provision of full or partial funding for professional development pro-

grams for social workers who have demonstrated a particular return in their activities. To this end, employees of the National Open University have developed online, and offline courses aimed at developing talents, improving professional skills and the quality of social services for the population.

The Three-District Plan project, created by the Social Work Professional Personnel Service and the Ministry of Civil Affairs, is widely popular in China today. As part of this plan, as of the end of 2020, 7,700 social workers were selected for the «three districts», more than 4,000 social workers have been trained over the past 8 years.

A major role in funding social organizations and supporting social workers, especially over the past three years, has been played by the National Plan «Hand in Hand». During its implementation, 332 institutions providing social spectrum services were selected throughout China to provide individual and targeted assistance to its staff, mainly monetary and material in nature¹.

On November 3, 2020, the «Proposals of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on the formulation of the fourteenth five-year plan for national economic and social development and long-term goals for the period up to 2035» were put forward. These proposals included a section on «Strengthening and Innovating Social Governance», which clearly stated that to further develop the practice of social assistance, it is important to improve and facilitate the ways of social management and the provision of financial support to social service organizations.

All the above tools for the material support of the professional activities of social workers in China, which are stable, standardized, and sustainable, contribute to the normalization and strengthening of their psychological health and well-being.

Tools for moral (psychological) support of social workers in the conditions of the labor

collective in modern China. The key regulator of the system of moral (psychological) support for social workers in China is the national policy, professional standards developed by the Chinese Federation of Social Work, as well as the model of the social system of the psychological service, created and adopted throughout the country. Concern for the mental health of workers is proclaimed to be the most important and integral component of social work in the Middle Kingdom, as such.

For example, in 2014, the first micro-wish service was launched in China. Its purpose is to collect proposals from social workers in offline and online modes. The service is managed by trade union organizations that go directly to enterprises, institutions, as well as personally to the families of workers employed in the field of social services to the population. After sorting through all the wishes, considering online publications and offline search resources, the staff of the service strives to satisfy the dreams of as many social workers as possible. The micro-wishes service team, which is based on trade unions and commercial organizations, is confident that such projects help to promote a spirit of mutual assistance and love among social workers and community organizations.

The statistics of the activity of the Chinese micro-wish service are very revealing. After only three years of implementation, the number of wishes increased from 100 at the beginning to 836 completed in 2017. Funding also increased from zero in 2014 to 100,000 yuan in 2015 and 500,000 yuan in 2016.

As the project evolved, the categories of aid were also refined. The main emphasis was placed on solving the psychological and moral problems of social workers. For example, a night walk along the Pujiang River was organized for a social worker as part of a micro-wishes project.

¹ Ten social work experts comment on the Chinese model of social services for the population (2017) [Electronic resource] // China Social Network. URL:

http://www.xinhuanet.com/gongyi/2017-03/20/c_129513284.htm (accessed 1.09.2022).

Social workers in China demonstrated a special demand for moral support from the labor collective during a severe epidemic. In 2020, the «Psychosocial Communities Linkage Plan» was launched by the China Social Work Federation. This plan was aimed at providing individual assistance and support to line social workers who find themselves in a difficult psychological situation due to the pandemic. The plan provided them with counseling, emotional support, crisis intervention, case counseling and other services primarily aimed at alleviating the stress response caused by the pandemic and improving overall morale.

For this, appropriate online and offline support channels were created, within which popular science propaganda about mental health was also conducted, public lectures were held on interpersonal relationships in the workplace, emotional regulation, awareness of social workers about mental health was increased, and trainings were organized to master methods and techniques of independent psychological assistance and adaptation (management of emotions, stress, depression, anxiety).

For example, on November 24, 2020, the Conference to Encourage National Exemplary and Advanced Social Workers was held at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. As part of the event, 1,689 people were awarded the title of «National Exemplary Workers», and 804 people received the title of «National Frontier Workers». Among them, eight people were awarded the corresponding national award¹.

With the support of mental health medical institutions, qualified social service institutions, a public health hotline and other professional help channels, a mental health care platform has been established and launched in China to provide related services to social workers. Assistance is provided mainly through hotlines, networks, applications, official accounts, etc. Particular attention was paid

to expanding the social influence of professional groups on those social workers who, for one reason or another, are identified as high-risk.

A large role in providing moral (psychological) support to social workers in China also belongs to trade unions and non-governmental organizations. Such institutions make full use of all their resources and capabilities to guide and promote the mental and vital well-being of workers employed in the field of social services to the population.

Conclusions. *Recommendations for improving the model of financial and moral support for social workers, considering the Chinese experience.*

The main conclusion of the study is that for social organizations to become global, they need the support of all sectors of society and the creation of an international network. To ensure communication between social workers, organizations providing social services for the population, educational institutions and trade unions, the following areas should be practiced.

1) *Strengthening the organizational culture, creating a harmonious humanistic environment and a comfortable atmosphere among work teams.*

It is very important to ensure the proper level of care for all social workers, give due attention to everyone, be people-oriented and actively promote within the team an atmosphere that will promote the physical and mental development of all personnel involved in the provision of social services to the population. Educational institutions and trade unions can help social workers relieve stress, regulate mood, and strengthen communication through regular activities that they enjoy. For example, it could be climbing, listening to lectures, reading the classics, watching movies, and organizing talent shows.

2) *Making full use of modern means of communication to train social workers in self-*

¹ Inventory of the top ten social work events in 2020 [Electronic resource] // China Social News. URL:

<https://www.mca.gov.cn/article/xw/mtbd/202101/20210100031857.shtml> (accessed 1.09.2022).

help skills when detecting mental health problems.

It is important for educational institutions and trade union organizations to make full use of modern means of communication, such as the Internet, to use its interactive capabilities in real time, to guide social workers to achieve a good state of mental health. For example, in Chinese practice, this can be WeChat, QQ group, Weibo, in Russian society it would be advisable to use resources such as Viber, Telegram and other network platforms for the purposeful dissemination of various types of information useful for the physical and mental well-being of social workers and ensuring reaching out, providing mental health advice, and establishing different ways of interacting that create a sense of love and warmth within the workforce.

3) Taking several measures to help social workers form the right attitude towards life and the possible difficulties that arise in their path.

The experience of functioning of organizations providing social services for the population shows that psychological stress is not created in a vacuum. Yet it reflects the objective things that happen in the human brain and psyche. In this regard, educational institutions and trade union institutions can help social workers in identifying the main source of psychological stress. For example, these may be some personal characteristics (high anxiety, way of thinking, etc.) or professional characteristics, social environment. When the source of psychological stress is identified, then the person knows in which direction he should make efforts. From this point of view, educational and trade union institutions can provide stimulation of a sense of honor, mission, and responsibility of social workers, encourage them to love life, accept it and enjoy it, regardless of external circumstances.

Thus, the solution of mental health problems of social workers requires coordinated support from the labor collective and relevant organizations, trade unions. Strengthening the psychological health of employees of social

and psychological services and a comprehensive study of the issue of creating an effective system for their functioning will not only provide a realistic basis and develop their own psychological resources for the general promotion of work on epidemic prevention and socioeconomic development, but also scientifically implement the leading principle of «heart people is the greatest policy». In modern conditions, many talents with a rich theoretical foundation and practical skills are needed, which will be capable of self-regulation of emotional behavioral manifestations.

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Zihan Li, Senior Lecturer, PhD in Psychology, Southwest Minzu University, Luzhou Psychosocial Service and Crisis Intervention Center, Key Research Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences in Southwest Minzu University, State Ethnic Affairs Commission, China.

Ли Зихан, старший преподаватель, доктор психологических наук, Юго-Западный университет Миньцзу, Лучжоуский центр психосоциальной службы и кризисного вмешательства, Ключевой научно-исследовательский институт гуманитарных и социальных наук Юго-Западного университета Миньцзу, Государственная комиссия по этническим делам, Китай.

Xiang Liang, Undergraduate Student, Southwest Minzu University, China.

Лян Сян, студентка бакалавриата Юго-Западного университета Миньцзу, Китай.

Junhao Liao, Undergraduate Students, Southwest Minzu University, China.

Ляо Цзюньхао, студент бакалавриата Юго-Западного университета Миньцзу, Китай.

Mao Jiao Li, Undergraduate Student, Southwest Minzu University, China.

Ли Мао Цзяо, студентка бакалавриата Юго-Западного университета Миньцзу, Китай.

Feng Bao Ji, Undergraduate Student, Southwest Minzu University, China.

Цзи Фэн Бао, студентка бакалавриата Юго-Западного университета Миньцзу, Китай.

Wang Xiao, Senior Lecturer, PhD in Psychology, Southwest Medical University, Luzhou Psychosocial Service and Crisis Intervention Center, China.

Сяо Ван, старший преподаватель, кандидат психологических наук, Юго-Западный медицинский университет, Китай.