

Research on the Career Development of Female University Counselors under "Work-Family" Conflict

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Abstract: With a series of reforms in the higher education system, the career development of university counselors, as the backbone of students' ideological education, has received considerable attention. While undertaking professional roles, female counselors must also fulfill family role responsibilities, facing unique challenges posed by "work-family" conflict. This paper systematically explores the impact of "work-family" conflict on the career development of female counselors. Furthermore, in response to these impacts, it proposes optimization pathways from three levels: macro-level systemic support, meso-level organizational guarantees, and micro-level personal adjustment. The aim is to promote a balance between career development and family life for female counselors, advance the professionalization and specialization of the female counselor workforce in universities, and better leverage the role of counselors in the "Five-Education Integration" education in universities.

Keywords: Work-Family Conflict; Universities; Female; Counselors; Career Development

1. Introduction

In recent years, with the rapid development of higher education and the continuous advancement of ideological and political education, the construction of the university counselor workforce has become crucial. The state has successively issued a series of documents clearly proposing to effectively strengthen the professionalization and specialization of the university counselor workforce, making it an important part of building the teaching and management staff. As an important component of the university counselor workforce, female counselors, on one hand, undertake responsibilities such as

education and teaching; on the other hand, they must also balance family roles, facing responsibilities like family care. The "work-family" conflict arising from this has become a key factor affecting their career development. This dual pressure not only affects the personal growth and career development of female counselors but also impacts the quality of student work in universities and the advancement of higher education.

The "work-family" conflict faced by the group of female university counselors has certain specificities. Characteristics such as the uncertainty of counselors' working hours and the breadth of their work content make female counselors face more prominent role conflicts [1,2]. While existing research has focused on the stress and role conflict of female counselors, it lacks a systematic analysis of their career development. It has failed to consider the synergistic effects of subjective and objective environments fully [3]. Based on this, this paper will systematically analyze the impact of "work-family" conflict on the career development of female counselors, and then explore optimization pathways for constructing a multi-level support system.

2. The Impact of "Work-Family" Conflict on the Career Development of Female Counselors

(1) Multiple roles and time dilemma

Female counselors face dual pressure from work roles and family roles. This role multiplicity directly leads to tight time resources, becoming an important factor affecting their career development. University counselors' work has obvious characteristics of diversity and extensibility [4,5]. On the one hand, counselors undertake multiple responsibilities, such as providing ideological guidance and employment counseling; on the other hand, student work often requires handling emergencies, causing counselors to use their rest time to manage

student affairs. This work characteristic makes it difficult for female counselors to plan and control their work time effectively. In addition, female counselors also undertake family roles such as mother, wife, and daughter, all of which demand their time. Children often have a strong emotional dependence on and daily attachment to their mothers, requiring female counselors to invest much time in companionship and care. In terms of housework and elder care, female counselors also bear significant responsibilities. The overlapping time demands of multiple roles further exacerbate the tension in their time allocation. As a non-renewable resource, the dilemma of time allocation directly affects the career development of female counselors: time constraints limit their participation in professional learning and academic research, causing professional development to lag; time conflicts may make it difficult for them to fully participate in professional networking and important meetings, thereby reducing promotion opportunities.

(2) Emotional exhaustion and career burnout
"Work-family" conflict leads to emotional exhaustion and career burnout among female counselors, becoming a significant factor constraining their career development. Counselor work itself is a form of emotional labor, requiring constant adjustment and management of one's own emotions to meet work demands. Female counselors must display care, patience, and positive emotions at work, while also serving as emotional support to their families. This dual emotional labor leads to excessive consumption of emotional resources. This emotional depletion not only leads to decreased work enthusiasm and creativity, affecting work quality, but also causes reduced individualization (depersonalization), thereby lessening emotional investment in students and impacting educational outcomes. When the demands of work roles and family roles are incompatible, female counselors experience significant psychological pressure and a sense of role conflict. On one hand, they feel guilty about neglecting their family while working; on the other hand, they feel anxious about poor work performance while handling family matters. This continuous psychological pressure not only affects work efficiency but also gradually erodes professional identity and job satisfaction, ultimately leading to career burnout. Career burnout diminishes an individual's sense of

professional accomplishment, erodes the professional identity and developmental motivation of female counselors, and impedes their career advancement.

(3) Developmental bottlenecks and promotion difficulties

Female counselors face obvious developmental bottlenecks and promotion difficulties in their career progression, mainly concentrated in aspects like unclear career paths and the impact of childbirth, which are largely related to "work-family" conflict. Counselor career development usually has two paths: one is the administrative management track, and the other is the professional and technical track. For female counselors, due to the constraints of family responsibilities, it is challenging to devote sufficient time to administrative management work, which puts them at a disadvantage in the administrative promotion channel. On the professional and technical track, research capabilities and academic achievements are key evaluation indicators; however, the "work-family" conflict leads to a lack of stable research time for female counselors, which in turn affects their academic output. Childbirth is a special stage in the career of female counselors, which often leads to career interruptions or a slowdown in development speed. During maternity leave, female counselors are away from their posts, which affects their work continuity and professional development. Especially in academic research and professional development, the interruption caused by the childbearing period makes it difficult for female counselors to maintain continuous and stable academic output, which affects their title evaluation and professional advancement. Additionally, some current evaluation standards and promotion mechanisms in university human resource management fail to consider the unique circumstances of women fully. Multiple factors jointly limit the promotion prospects for female counselors.

3. Optimization Pathways for the Career Development of Female Counselors under "Work-Family" Conflict

Alleviating the impact of "work-family" conflict on the career development of female counselors requires constructing systematic optimization pathways from three levels: macro-level systemic support, meso-level organizational guarantees, and micro-level personal adjustment.

(1) Macro-level systemic support: improving the institutional environment

As the top-level design for resolving the "work-family" conflict faced by female counselors, macro-level governance is crucial in guiding meso-level organizational guarantees and micro-level personal adjustments. Specifically, collaborative efforts can be made in areas such as career development guarantees and family-friendly support systems to build a solid foundation for female counselors to resolve "work-family" conflict and achieve career development.

The state and educational authorities should further enhance the measures system for the career development of university counselors, with a focus on the unique circumstances of the female counselor group. On one hand, further clarify the specific implementation paths of the "dual-track" career development for counselors, making the career paths clear, and providing diversified development options for female counselors. On the other hand, in the evaluation systems for professional titles and promotions, they fully consider the special circumstances of women's childbearing periods, such as appropriately extending the years required for title evaluation for female counselors and allowing for moderately relaxed requirements for research achievements during the childbirth period. On this basis, it is necessary to ensure that all support initiatives are fully implemented to benefit the female counselor group truly.

Building a family-friendly social support system is an important guarantee for alleviating "work-family" conflict. Improve the childcare service system by encouraging universities to establish childcare centers for faculty and staff's children, and address the childcare difficulties faced by female counselors. Strengthen full-process parenting support provisions by providing flexible maternity and parental leave arrangements, as well as establishing childcare allowance systems. Promote family education support services, provide professional parenting guidance, and alleviate the parenting pressure and anxiety experienced by female counselors. Through these measures, create a more friendly social environment for female counselors, helping them better balance work and family relationships.

(2) Meso-level organizational guarantees: optimizing university support mechanisms

As the direct setting for the career development

of female counselors, universities are the platform and support they rely on. Direct support from universities for female counselors can greatly reduce the impact of "work-family" conflict. Organizational-level support can be provided through aspects such as cultural guidance and the establishment of a comprehensive support system.

Construct a family-friendly organizational culture that supports female counselors in balancing work and family relationships at the value and institutional levels. Advocate for a work concept that respects family responsibilities. The institution should strive to prevent counselors, especially female counselors, from working overtime or excessively long hours. Establish flexible work systems as much as possible, such as flexible arrangements like remote work (work-from-home), to meet the needs of female counselors' family roles. Attempt to build assistance mechanisms for female counselors, such as establishing mutual aid groups and providing psychological support services. Through these measures, create a work environment that respects personal family responsibilities, reduces female counselors' sense of role conflict, and allows them to have sufficient time and energy to fulfill their family roles.

Improve the career development support system for female counselors. Optimize the construction of the counselor workforce by rationally allocating the number of counselors, avoiding work overload caused by insufficient staffing, and preventing excessive psychological pressure on counselors. Establish differentiated evaluation standards for professional titles, fully considering the special circumstances of women's childbearing periods, appropriately lowering relevant indicator requirements, and providing tangible support for the career development of female counselors [6]. Establish a family-friendly performance evaluation system, taking work quality rather than work duration as the main evaluation indicator, and combining qualitative and quantitative assessments.

(3) Micro-level personal adjustment: enhancing self-management capabilities

Micro-level personal adjustment is the final acceptance point for the implementation of macro measures and the effectiveness of meso-level organizational guarantees. It is also the core lever for female counselors to control their own career and family rhythms. The degree

to which their agency is exerted directly affects the effectiveness of resolving "work-family" conflict. Female counselors need to proactively develop a self-management system through boundary-setting, psychological empowerment, and other strategies to resolve role dilemmas through personal agency.

Self-enhance boundary management capabilities between work and family to reduce inter-role conflict. For female counselors, it is first necessary to establish clear time boundaries, explicitly distinguishing between work time and family time, and avoiding excessive integration: Focus on work during work hours and avoid distractions; similarly, focus on fulfilling family role responsibilities during family time, without being affected by work. Secondly, it is necessary to set reasonable psychological boundaries, learn to "role-switch," focus on the current role in different settings, and not be internally disturbed by other roles [7,8]. Through effective boundary management, female counselors can reduce role conflict, improve time utilization efficiency, and enhance performance effectiveness in both their professional and personal lives.

Strengthening comprehensive personal abilities and enhancing self-efficacy are important psychological resources for female counselors to cope with "work-family" conflict. On the one hand, establish the concept of continuous and lifelong learning, self-reinforce the acquisition of various types of knowledge, actively participate in internal and external training, keep pace with the times and with students ("advancing with students"), and stay current with the pace of development. Continuously improve work abilities and efficiency, reduce work anxiety and stress, and calmly cope with various problems and difficulties at work [9]. On the other hand, develop family management skills, master scientific parenting and family communication techniques, and reduce family role pressure [10].

4. Conclusion and Discussion

From the perspective of "work-family" conflict, this paper systematically analyzed the dilemmas in the career development of female counselors and, on this basis, proposed optimization pathways. The study found that female counselors face prominent issues such as role, emotional, and developmental problems. Solving these problems is of great significance to individual female counselors, university student

education, and the development of the counselor workforce. Alleviating the "work-family" conflict faced by female counselors requires establishing a multi-level support system at the macro, meso, and micro levels. It necessitates the construction of a "government-university-individual" pluralistic collaborative support system and promoting institutional innovation in the development of the counselor workforce to foster the career growth of female counselors.

Of course, this study also has limitations. First, it focuses on theoretical analysis and lacks empirical support from field research; the real-world applicability of the conclusions needs to be verified by data. Second, the proposed countermeasures are still in the theoretical conception stage, and their practical effectiveness requires further observation. Future research can be strengthened through empirical investigation, longitudinal tracking, and other methods to provide more solid support for the professionalization of the female university counselor workforce and the advancement of gender equality.

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