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The Impact of Supervisor Support on Preschool Teachers' Resignation Intention in Guangzhou, China: The Mediating Role of Occupational Stress

Jie Wang¹, Qingfang Zhang², Yan Ye³

¹Corresponding Author: Ed.D., Stamford International University, Thailand. Email: 190969122@qq.com

²Ed.D., Stamford International University, Thailand. Email: qingfang.zhang@stamford.edu

³Assistant Professor, Stamford International University, Thailand. Email: yan.ye@stamford.edu

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Abstract

The issue of occupational stress among early childhood teachers has become an international research issue, support from supervisors maybe an important factor influencing teachers' professional stress and resignation intentions. To analyze the impact of supervisor support on the kindergarten teachers' resignation intention and to explore the mediating role of occupational stress in the relationship between leader support and the resignation intention of kindergarten teachers, the author selected 326 kindergarten teachers from 33 kindergartens in Guangzhou as the respondents of the survey and used the Occupational Stress Questionnaire, the Resignation Tendency Questionnaire and the Supervisor Support Questionnaire to conduct the survey. The results showed that the correlation coefficient between teachers' perception of supervisor support and occupational stress was -0.363 , $p=0.000<0.05$, and the correlation coefficient between the perception of supervisor support and resignation intention was -0.476 , $p=0.000<0.05$, both of which were significantly correlated, but the correlation coefficient between occupational stress and resignation intention was 0.074 , $p=0.180>0.05$, which was not significantly correlated. Occupational stress partially mediated the relationship between supervisor support and resignation intention. Although the results of the study showed that there was no significant correlation between occupational stress and the resignation intention, the sense of supervisor support of early childhood teachers was significantly and negatively related to occupational stress and resignation intention, indicating that occupational stress is not a key factor causing employees to quit their jobs, and decision makers consider the influence brought by interpersonal relationships and colleague support in kindergarten management activities to reduce teachers' occupational stress resignation intention by increasing the level of supervisor support.

Keywords: supervisor support; occupational stress; resignation intention; mediating role

Introduction

The resignation intention is the intensity of an individual's tendency to voluntarily leave his or her current job in search of other job opportunities (March & Simon, 1958) and is an important variable in predicting leaving behavior (Mobley, 1977). The phenomenon of early childhood teacher turnover is widespread in kindergartens across countries, and the rate of resignation has remained high (Bassok et al., 2021; Clipa & Boghean, 2015; Nguyen & Springer, 2021). The problem of early childhood teacher turnover has become an international research issue, and research on this topic is increasing (Sönmez & Betül, 2021; Li et al., 2021; Alves et al., 2021), demonstrating the prevalence and seriousness of the problem. The continuing loss of serving early childhood teachers is bound to seriously impact the development of preschool education and the quality of preschool education.

Some studies have demonstrated that high levels of occupational stress can easily lead to teacher turnover (Klassen & Chiu, 2011; Steptoe & Kivimäki, 2013), while others have pointed out that high levels of occupational stress are more likely to make employees think about leaving. Likewise, not all teachers consider leaving because of high levels of occupational stress. Nevertheless, most occupational practitioners are under high levels of occupational stress and continue to work. Furthermore, the relationship between teacher income and teacher turnover was evident in earlier studies (Dolton, & Klaauw, 1999; Currall et al., 2005). However, in recent years, the gap between the income of early childhood teachers has gradually narrowed, and the impact of income on teacher turnover has gradually decreased, while factors such as the management style of leaders and interpersonal relationships at work and work emotions are gradually increasing their impact on staff (Gilpin, 2011; Ling et al., 2021; Hale-Jinks et al., 2006). Supervisors' decisions have a direct impact on teachers, so the level of support from supervisors is a variable of concern that influences teachers' career stress and resignation intentions.

The relationship between occupational stress and teachers' resignation intentions has been an important area of research in educational management. On the one hand, occupational stress has been identified as an important factor in teacher attrition, and numerous studies have shown that teachers who experience high levels of occupational stress tend to show a higher resignation intention. On the other hand, it has also been shown that teachers' resignation intention is not unilaterally influenced by occupational stress but also by the level of support from the organization and leadership, teachers' income, and other demographic variables. Therefore, it is likely that the relationship between occupational stress, leadership support, and teachers' resignation intention is

an interactive one.

In previous studies on the factors influencing resignation intention, occupational stress and supervisor support have been studied separately as separate variables, or the influence of occupational stress factors such as work intensity, work hours, and work demands on the resignation intention has only been considered (Olaniyan et al., 2020; Faulkner et al., 2016; Tian, 2019), while the influence of managerial factors on the resignation intention has been ignored. At the same time, research has mainly focused on the influence of social and organizational factors on teachers' resignation intentions (Lang et al., 2020; Qu, 2019), while less attention has been paid to the role of leadership factors alone. In the current research, supervisor support is often studied as a part of organizational support, and little literature independently includes supervisor support as a variable. They belong to two parallel dimensions. The researchers have not found any literature that examines the perception of supervisor support and resignation intention, using occupational stress as a mediating variable. The factors influencing resignation intentions have been widely discussed in academia, and recent research has highlighted that the support from supervisor affects employees' perceptions of job stress. However, there has not been sufficient empirical research to validate the process by which teachers generate resignation intentions from the perspective of supervisor support, and most such studies have only validated the existence of an effect of supervisor support on job stress, with few studies discussing how supervisor support affects the process by which employees perceive resignation intentions through occupational stress. This thesis therefore focuses on the relationship between occupational stress, resignation intention and supervisor support, and identifies the mediating role of occupational stress between supervisor support and resignation intention.

Research Objectives

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of supervisor support on resignation intention of preschool teachers in Guangzhou, and to explore the mediating role of occupational stress between supervisor support and resignation intention.

1. To determine the impact of supervisor support on the resignation intentions of early childhood teachers.
2. To determine whether occupational stress mediates the relationship between perceptions of supervisor support and the resignation intention of the profession among early childhood teachers.

Literature Review

Job Requirements - Control Theory

According to Karasek (1979), there are two key factors in a job: job requirements and job control, which together influence job stress. Job requirements refer to the amount of work and the difficulty in completing the work, it also can be called a stressor, while job control indicates the level that employees can control over their behavior at work. Job stress does not depend on one aspect alone, but rather on the interaction between the two. This model contains two basic assumptions: 1) high job requirements and low job control lead to high job stress; 2) when both job requirements and job control are at high levels, work motivation increases, and it is conducive to improving employees' job performance and career satisfaction. This dissertation takes the first theoretical model. The practical value of this model is that it allows managers to enhance employees' control over their work and thus improve their physical and mental health, but it is a study of stress management at the theoretical level, which is still very challenging to implement.

Occupational Stress of Early Childhood Teachers

The research on teachers' occupational stress originated in the 1970s and has become an international research topic. The literature shows that in many countries, the occupational stress of early childhood teachers is middle or high. For example, in a survey by Clipa and Bogheam (2015), based on 150 kindergarten teachers in Romania, 42.0% were 'very stressed,' and 86% had moderate to high-stress levels. Herman et al. (2018) mentioned that teachers in the US experience high levels of occupational stress, with early childhood teachers experiencing significantly higher levels of occupational stress than teachers at other grade levels. Likewise, Chinese kindergarten teachers also with high level of occupational stress, with overall stress levels higher than moderate ones. For example, Zhang (2016) found that kindergarten teachers in Wuhan felt high levels of stress (48%). Guo et al. (2017) found that 49.6% of teachers in a study of rural private kindergarten teachers in Ya'an, Sichuan felt high levels of stress, which is largely consistent with the findings of studies in Wuhu, Anhui, and Beijing (Lai, 2011; Liu et al., 2021). Although there in currently China, there are no empirical studies that directly compare the level of occupational stress between early childhood teachers and other teachers, and it is generally accepted that kindergarten teachers are more stressed than primary and secondary school teachers due to the younger age of the children they work with, as well as the combination of care and education.

Supervisor Support

Some studies have confirmed that kindergarten teachers' stress mainly stems from the lack of freedom in their work due to overly authoritarian leaders or insufficient support from their leaders at work (Jeon et al., 2014; Wagner & French, 2010) followed

by the lack of necessary communication with their leaders (Sakiz, 2007; Hall-Kenyon et al., 2014) and inequitable leadership (Skaalvik & Skaalvik 2007; Čecho et al., 2019). Grayson and Alvarez (2008) supported Skaalvik's (2007) findings that the lack of support from administrators, excessive centralization of power of the administrators, or brutal management caused teachers to feel greater stress. Conversely, leaders or administrators who use available resources wisely to help teachers balance job demands with job control can effectively reduce teacher stress and burnout (Sokal et al., 2021). Leadership style at work and support from leaders are significant predictors of teacher stress (Yang et al., 2018; Su et al., 2011), and employees who interact well with their leaders have lower levels of occupational stress than those who have little interaction with their leaders (Zhao, 2014; Garvis et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021). The results of this study have also been confirmed by doctors and nurses (Fang et al, 2013; Tuckett & Winters, 2014).

Resignation Intention of Early Childhood Teachers

In previous research, early childhood teachers' resignation intentions can be broadly categorized into organizational and personal factors. The researchers focused on organizational factors finding that the resignation intention was higher for early childhood teachers with larger class sizes, as larger classes meant that teachers needed more support and help. In addition, the supervisor and organizational support significantly predicted the resignation intention for teachers with larger class sizes compared to smaller classes (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2014). Some researchers have also found that the nature of kindergartens also leads to differences in teachers' resignation intentions, with teachers in private kindergartens tending to have more stressful jobs and higher resignation intentions after controlling for variables such as age and salary (Loeb et al., 2017). Other researchers have focused on the impact of leadership support on early childhood teachers' resignation intentions. However, some literature suggests that teachers' occupational stress is not correlated with levels of supervisor support (Ong & Khan, 2022); the finding further elaborates that teachers' occupational stress are influenced in large part by their colleagues and that the more support and assistance from colleagues, the lower the level of occupational stress.

Research Hypotheses

1. Supervisor support has a significantly impact on the resignation intention of preschool teachers in Guangzhou.
2. Occupational stress is significantly related to supervisor support and resignation intention.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the main theories, this study was designed to determine the impact of

supervisor support on the resignation intentions of early childhood teachers and whether occupational stress mediates the relationship between perceptions of supervisor support and the resignation intentions of the profession among early childhood teachers: the main variables and their relationships are shown in the conceptual framework in Figure 1 below.

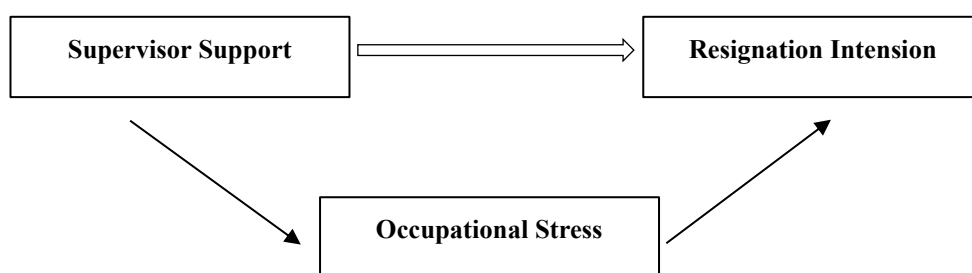


Figure 1 *Conceptual Framework*
(Source from the researchers of this study)

Methodology

Participants

The sample group was selected from 1004 kindergartens registered by the Guangzhou Municipal Bureau of Education (GZBE), and one public kindergarten, one private kindergarten, and one inclusive kindergarten were selected from each of the 11 districts in Guangzhou by stratified random sampling. During the survey, four teachers dropped out of the survey, while the remaining 326 completed the survey, with a return rate of 98.8%. A total of 40 male and 286 female teachers participated in the survey. The mean age of the teachers tested was 29.89 years (M=29.89, SD=6.151), with a range of 21-47 years. In terms of income, 3.1% of the teachers earned more than \$1000, 15.9% earned between \$700-800, 43.9% earned between \$600-700 and 37.1% earned less than \$600 per month.

Instrument

Early Childhood Teachers Occupational Stress Questionnaire

The scale used in this thesis is the Occupational Stress Questionnaire for

Kindergarten Teachers developed by Alatan & Liu (2014), which is divided into four dimensions: job difficulty and challenges, job responsibilities and rewards, management system and career development, and job intensity. The whole questionnaire was scored on a five-point Likert scale, with no stress assigned a score of 1; mild stress assigned a score of 2; moderate stress assigned a score of 3; high stress assigned a score of 4, and extreme stress assigned a score of 5. Higher scores indicate greater perceived stress on that dimension; lower scores indicate less perceived stress on that dimension. The questionnaires are highly reliable and have been used and validated in previous studies (Alatan & Liu. 2014). For the Early Childhood Teacher Occupational Stress Questionnaire, the reliability of Cronbach's alpha value was 0.90, according to Alatan and Liu's study (2014).

Resignation Intention questionnaire

In this thesis, the scale developed by Weisberg and Sagie (1999) was used for comparison. The alpha coefficient for this scale was 0.88, and the Cronbach alpha coefficient for this scale in this study was 0.861. The scale is more reliable, has fewer questions, and is easier to use without reverse scoring.

Supervisor Support Questionnaire

The present study used the leadership support questionnaire developed by Fuller et al. (1996), which has only one dimension and has an alpha value of 0.954 measured in previous studies, with factor loadings above 0.6 for all nine items of the scale and $\chi^2 = 80.593$, $df = 27$, $\chi^2/df = 2.985 < 3$, $GFI = 0.897 > 0.8$, $TLI = 0.947 > 0.9$, $CFI = 0.960 > 0.9$, and $RMSEA = 0.078 < 0.08$ (Zhao, 2014), the Cronbach alpha coefficient of the leadership support scale in this study was 0.861; $GFI = 0.942 > 0.9$, $CFI = 0.954 > 0.9$, $NFI = 0.938 > 0.9$, $TLI = 0.939 > 0.9$, $IFI = 0.954 > 0.9$, $RMSEA = 0.090 < 0.10$, $RMR = 0.007 < 0.05$, which shows that the structure of the leadership support scale has good stability through the fit index of the model. This indicates that the model fits well and that the overall internal consistency of the scale is high.

Table 1

Interpretation for the Scale and Level of Preschool Teacher's Occupational Stress Perceptions

Perceptions	Score	Scale	Interpretation
No Stress	1	1.00-1.50	Very Low
Mild Stress	2	1.51-2.50	Low
Moderate Stress	3	2.51-3.50	Moderate
High Stress	4	3.51-4.50	High

Extreme Stress	5	4.51-5.00	Very high
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Procedure

The researchers first contacted the kindergarten principals and acquired their consent and support; the principals appointed the teacher in charge to help us distribute envelopes to a random sample of eight teachers in each kindergarten classroom. Each envelope contained an invitation letter, an informed consent form, and the Kindergarten Teacher Occupational Stress Questionnaire, Resignation Intension Questionnaire, and Supervisor Support Scale. The invitation letter outlined the purpose, principles, and instructions for completing the questionnaire, and each teacher was invited to complete the questionnaire independently, as described in the invitation letter. The teachers in charge returned the signed informed consent form and completed questionnaires to researchers after two weeks.

Results and Discussion

Research Objective One: To determine the impact of supervisor support on the resignation intentions of early childhood teachers.

Descriptive statistics and correlational analyses were conducted on the occupational stress and supervisor support, and resignation intentions of early childhood teachers, with the following results:

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations of Occupational Stress, Supervisor Support and Resignation Intension of Early Childhood Teachers.

<i>Items</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Occupational Stress	326	3.27	0.394
Resignation Intension	326	3.14	0.485
Supervisor Support	326	2.99	0.343

As shown in Table 2, the mean occupational stress level of the kindergarten teachers tested was 3.27, the resignation intention was 3.14, and the level of supervisor support was 2.99. Combined with Table 1, it can be seen that the occupational stress, resignation intentions, and supervisor support of kindergarten teachers in Guangzhou are all at a medium level.

Table 3

Correlation Analysis of Occupational Stress, Supervisor Support, and Resignation Intension of Early Childhood Teachers.

<i>Items</i>		<i>Occupational Stress</i>	<i>Resignation Intension</i>	<i>Supervisor Support</i>
Occupational Stress	Pearson Correlation	-		
	Sig. (two tails)			
Resignation Intension	Pearson Correlation	0.074	-	
	Sig. (two tails)	0.180		
Supervisor Support	Pearson Correlation	-.363**	-.476**	-
	Sig. (two tails)	0.000	0.000	

** p is significant at 0.01 level

As shown in Table 3, the correlation coefficient between the perception of supervisor support and occupational stress was -0.363, and the correlation coefficient with resignation intention was -0.476, $p=0.000<0.05$, indicating that there was a negative correlation between perception of supervisor support and occupational stress and resignation intention, and hypothesis 1 was accepted. However, the correlation coefficient between occupational stress and resignation intention was 0.074, $p=0.18>0.05$, the correlation coefficient between occupational stress and resignation intention was 0.074, $p=0.18>0.05$. From the data, there was no direct correlation between occupational stress and resignation intentions.

Research Objective Two: To determine whether occupational stress mediates the relationship between perceptions of supervisor support and the resignation intension of the profession among early childhood teachers.

The second research objective was to determine whether occupational stress mediates supervisor support and resignation intentions. The researcher conducted a regression analysis between leadership support and the resignation intentions of early childhood teachers.

Table 4

Regression Analysis between Coping Strategies and Occupational Stress

	β	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig</i>
Supervisor Support	-0.476	-9.742	0.000

a Dependent variable: Resignation Intension

As can be seen from Table 4, before the inclusion of mediating variables, the effect of perceived supervisor support on ECE teachers' resignation intentions was significant ($\beta=-0.476$, $t=-9.742$ $p=0.000<0.001$), and the higher the level of perceived supervisor support of ECE teachers, the lower the resignation intension. Regressions of perceived supervisor support on occupational stress were next done.

Table 5

Regression Analysis between Supervisor Support and Occupational Stress

	β	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig</i>
Supervisor Support	-0.363	-7.017	0.000

a Dependent variable: Occupational Stress

Table 5 perceived supervisor support has a significant effect on early childhood teachers' occupational stress ($\beta=-0.363$, $t=-7.017$ $p=0.000< 0.001$), and the lower the level of perceived supervisor support of early childhood teachers, the higher the occupational stress. Next, the regression of perceived supervisor support on the resignation intention was done by adding the mediating variable occupational stress.

Table 6

Regression Analysis between Supervisor Support and Resignation Intension

	β	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig</i>
Supervisor Support	-0.517	-9.919	0.000
Occupational Stress	-0.113	-2.176	0.030

a Dependent variable: Resignation Intension

As can be seen from Table 6, the effect of perceived supervisor support on the

resignation intentions of early childhood teachers remained significant after the inclusion of mediating variables ($\beta = -0.517$, $t = -9.19$ $p = 0.000 < 0.001$), and occupational stress partially mediated the supervisor support and resignation intention. Thus, occupational stress is an indirect relationship between supervisor support and resignation intentions.

Discussion

A large body of research has found that the level of support perceived by early childhood teachers from their leaders affects their career stability. This study focused on perceptions of supervisor support and occupational stress, focusing on the effect of perceptions of supervisor support on early childhood teachers' resignation intentions and examining the mediating role of occupational stress.

Supervisor Support and Resignation Intension of Early Childhood Teachers

This study found that supervisor support has a significantly impact on the resignation intention of preschool teachers in Guangzhou, which is consistent with our expected hypothesis that perceptions of supervisor support negatively affect teachers' resignation intentions, and the higher the level of supervisor support perceived by teachers, the lower the level of resignation intension. The results of this succession study are the same as those of Smith and Lawrence (2019). In a study by Ling et al. (2021), it was found that there was a significant correlation between private kindergarten teachers' intention to stay and interpersonal relationships, and interpersonal relationships explained 17% of the turnover. He mentioned in the literature that “whether the relationship between teachers and leaders is the relationship between teachers and their supervisors is related to the recognition and respect of teachers' work in kindergartens and their career development prospects. Therefore, the relationship with the leader plays an important role in influencing the willingness of private kindergarten teachers to stay in their jobs (Ling et al., 2021)”. This study also found that career stress partially mediated the relationship between perceptions of supervisor support and teachers' resignation intentions at their jobs. In other words, perceived supervisor support influenced teachers' resignation intentions by mediating occupational stress. The lack of supervisor support and the fact that employees are left to do all the work independently can easily lead to overwork (Gillet et al., 2019), and the occupational stress associated with overwork can lead to various chronic illnesses (Shahzad et al., 2022), which can eventually lead to employees leaving the position due to physical and mental exhaustion.

Supervisor Support and Occupational Stress of Early Childhood Teachers

This study found that the level of supervisor support was negatively impact teachers' occupational stress, with the lower the level of supervisor support by early

childhood teachers, the higher the occupational stress. The results of this study were similar to those of other studies of the same type (Delaney & Krepps, 2021; Kim & Lim, 2021; Волинець et al., 2021). However, the findings of this study differ from those of Ong & Bin (2022). They concluded that there was no significant correlation between perceived supervisor support and occupational stress among early childhood teachers and that this finding, which led to inconsistency between the two studies, may be due to sampling differences. The sample used in this study differs significantly from that used in Ong and Bin. Ong and Bin's (2022) studies used a sample of teachers from primary and secondary schools. Because early childhood teachers are more homogeneous in what they do, the resources and assistance they can give their colleagues are more limited. Therefore, according to attribution theory, the direct cause of reduced occupational stress was attributed to leaders giving their ECE teachers the necessary resources and helping in their work. In contrast, according to attribution theory, the direct cause of reduced occupational stress was attributed to colleagues when primary and secondary school teachers taught different subjects and it was more common for teachers of different subjects to help each other in the same grade or classroom.

Resignation Intention and Occupational Stress of Early Childhood Teachers

This thesis also found that there was no significant association between occupational stress and resignation intentions; previous research showed that a high level of stress means a higher likelihood of leaving the profession (Волинець, 2021). Part of the reasons for turnover due to occupational stress is that occupational stress can cause a variety of illnesses, and poor health and sickness absence of anyone in the teaching force may increase the workload and stress of other staff members (Huang et al., 2020), a vicious circle as the increasing stack of workloads can lead to teachers being overwhelmed and leaving the profession. Onadiran and Arogundade, (2021) explained the findings of this study by finding that, controlling for gender and income, there was no significant difference in the resignation intentions between males and females at the same level of job stress. However, career fulfillment, career respect, and career satisfaction had a significant impact on the resignation intentions, suggesting that career stress is not the only factor that causes employees to leave, but also that lack of support, perceived lack of respect, and lack of organizational fairness also have an impact on the resignation intention.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study examines the correlation of supervisor support and teachers' resignation intentions and the mediating role of occupational stress in the context of the current early childhood education environment in China. Overall, therefore, this study is of some theoretical value in enriching the literature on the factors that influence the resignation intentions of early childhood teachers. This study explores the factors associated with the resignation intention of in-service kindergarten teachers from the supervisor support to provide an empirical evidence basis for kindergarten administrators to reduce the turnover rate of in-service kindergarten teachers and to improve the overall career stability of teachers. This study demonstrates no significant correlation between occupational stress and teachers' resignation intentions. Since most teachers are female, more consideration should be given to interpersonal relationships and colleague support in influencing teachers' turnover.

Supervisors should increase the level of support for teachers. Supervisors ensure effective communication with teachers. Directors and administrators should maintain good communication with their staff at work and give them as much information and content as they need to do their jobs, such as introducing the new teachers to the overall goals of the kindergarten, the future development plans of the campus, and the issues that the staff must focus on, and assisting them with their work. Teachers will have a better understanding of the mission and vision of the kindergarten so that they can complete their work effectively, clearly, and positively. At the same time, the director should pay attention to teachers' feedback, especially to the emotional problems that teachers respond to. If teachers respond to conflicts with other teachers or parents, the director and leaders should communicate with teachers and parents in a timely manner through face-to-face meetings, phone calls, or emails to try to resolve conflicts or eliminate misunderstandings.

In addition, supervisors should treat each teacher fairly and equitably. Good leaders should not be biased against their staff. Principals and administrators should trust and respect and care for each teacher and respect the dignity and value of each teacher. Believe in each teacher's moral and ethical training believe in the teacher's classroom competency and should be the first to fully understand the situation when they encounter parental complaints, rather than blaming the teacher.

This study also has some limitations, which need to be further improved in future studies. Firstly, the study was conducted among kindergarten teachers in Guangzhou, a city with high-income levels, so the results may not be generalizable to kindergarten teachers in small and medium-sized cities and rural areas. Further research needs to explore whether other factors act as mediating variables.

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