

# ***Exploring the Factors Influencing the Life Satisfaction of White-collar Workers in China***

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**Abstract:** The current social economy is in a downturn because of the epidemic, and quality of life has been lowered for residents. The white-collar group is a significant group in the labor market, so it is necessary to take the white-collar group as a research object. To explore the underlying causes of life satisfaction among Chinese white-collar groups, this study uses the qualitative research method of in-depth interviews. It aims to identify the deep reasons behind life satisfaction of white-collar groups. In addition, it can also serve as background data for the policy practice dimension of improving residents' life quality and social welfare. In addition, it can complement the deficiencies of the current qualitative research on life satisfaction. Based on the interview content and analysis, this paper divides the influencing factors into five themes namely: Salary and financial security, education and self-knowledge, environmental safety and trust, stability of interpersonal networks and pressure relief, family models and self-consistency.

**Keywords:** life satisfaction, white-collar workers, China

## **1. Introduction**

Residents have been significantly affected by the novel Coronavirus outbreak, which has led to declining employment stability, which has become a hot topic in society [1]. "Company layoffs" and "business closures" are frequently reported in the network news [2]. As a result, the importance of discussing residents' life satisfaction has been highlighted. Because white-collar workers have a number of characteristics and participate in a large range of employment opportunities [3], white-collar workers should be given more attention to some degree.

Through the search of relevant subject words, it was found that previous studies on life satisfaction mostly use quantitative data collection methods and only a few use qualitative research. In addition, previous studies on life satisfaction mainly focused on the elderly and students, while there were insufficient papers and essays on white-collar workers. Or, most studies tend to explore and generalize the general performance of the same group. This ignores the fact that life satisfaction varies among individuals within the same income and economic range.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the factors that influence life satisfaction in Chinese white-collar groups. Based on previous relevant literature, this study adopts the qualitative research method of in-depth interviews in an attempt to explore more essential meanings and factors. Academically, it can make up for the lack of depth and uniqueness of quantitative research. In terms

of practical significance, it can provide applicable and updated research data for the current post-epidemic era and provide a realistic research background for the formulation of policies and the design of measures to some extent.

Finally, the structure of this paper is mainly composed of four parts: introduction, method, results, and discussion, which will be described gradually in the remaining sections.

## 2. Method

In-depth interviews are also known as unstructured interviews or free interviews. This research method does not rely on pre-designed questionnaires and fixed procedures but only has one topic or scope of interview, and the interviewer and interviewee have a relatively free conversation around this topic or scope [4]. Its main function is to obtain rich and vivid qualitative data through in-depth and detailed interviews and to summarize and generalize certain conclusions through subjective and perceptual analysis by researchers. The biggest advantage of an unstructured interview is its flexibility, which is conducive to giving full play to the initiative and creativity of both sides. The most obvious characteristic of a structured interview is depth and detail [5].

According to the research theme, this study adopts the data collection method of an in-depth interview. In addition to the depth and breadth of the inquiry content, an in-depth interview can also help this research to dig and explore the essential elements under the surface factors through the expression, tone, body language, and other auxiliary information of interviewees [6], so as to make up for the shortcomings of quantitative research, such as the lack of depth of data and the uniqueness of the research object, which are easy to ignore. The general framework of the interview is designed according to the research theme, and the interview is mainly conducted with open-ended questions. The interview process is highly flexible, and the interview questions are adjusted flexibly according to the content of the dialogue and the status of the interviewees.

The target group of this paper is the white-collar group, which refers to employees under the age of 40 who have received a higher education, are engaged in mental work, have a monthly salary of more than 3,000 RMB, have a relatively stable economic income, and have a higher social status [7]. Based on this conception, five white-collar workers from Sichuan Province were interviewed in this study. However, due to the impact of COVID-19, some interviewees prefer a phone interview. Based on the principles of privacy and confidentiality and the informed consent of the interviewees, the background information of the interviewees is shown in the following Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of background of the interviewees.

Interviewee	Field of Occupation	Native Place	Age	Educational Level
J	Internet	Sichuan	23	Undergraduate
X	Advertising Media	Fujian	23	Undergraduate
L	Consultation	Xinjiang	26	Master
W	Clerk	Sichuan	24	Undergraduate
S	Computer operation and maintenance	Henan	23	Undergraduate

## 3. Result

After collecting the interview contents of the interviewees and sorting them out, the results of this article are divided into five themes, namely: salary and security; stability of interpersonal network and pressure relief; family models and self-consistency; environmental safety and trust; education and self-knowledge.

### 3.1. Salary and Financial Security

All interviewees expressed, to varying degrees, the importance of pay to them. Respondents earning more than RMB 7,000 were satisfied with their current state of life and reported lower levels of anxiety. Interviewees with a salary of less than RMB 7,000 showed a higher sense of stress and confusion about the future. For instance, L, a high earner, expressed a high sense of satisfaction and stability when talking about her feelings about the current situation and said that there is nothing she wants to change about her life. The main reason is that L's monthly income is much higher than the urban average:

*My life is very regular; there are no unexpected events, and my salary is in line with my expectation, which gives me a sense of stability. I am satisfied with my life now, and I don't want to complain or improve anything.*

On the contrary, Wang, one of the interviewees, whose monthly salary was about RMB 5,000, expressed a clear sense of insecurity when talking about her current life situation, thinking that her current salary could not support the expected lifestyle, but she was full of a feeling of powerlessness for a long time:

*After I paid the rent and bought necessities every month, I didn't have much money left in my account. Basically, after a month, I can't save money, but I don't think I have luxury consumption. This makes me have no long-term plans for the future. The reality is that I can only focus on my current life without redundant planning. I am in a state of taking one step at a time. In the past, I thought it was not bad, but as time went on, I felt less and less secure and began to doubt my ability to work.*

### 3.2. Education and Self-knowledge

In regards to the factors that influence their views on life, the interviewees generally agreed that education is the most significant factor. Values are gradually formed and then stabilized through the process of receiving knowledge. This leads to them eventually forming their own unique way of thinking and value system based on their own experiences. In addition, although the interviewees also affirmed the impact of family education on themselves, they believed that the impact was not a decisive factor. For example, S thinks that the character of his parents has had a certain impact on the cultivation of his own character, but in terms of deeper values and standards of life, he still owes more to the experience of education:

*I think that my views on my current life, such as what the ideal life state should be, or the more macro values, should be attributed to the process of education. Especially after receiving undergraduate education, I gradually developed my own views on life planning, and the outlooks have basically established themselves and become stable. Of course, for example, my personality is more rational, which is inevitably influenced by my parents to a certain extent, but I believe that the more essential things are still attributed to the acquired education.*

### 3.3. Environmental Safety and Trust

In the interview, environmental security was mainly divided into the office environment and the living environment. The majority of respondents said the office environment was the most important part. Whether the office environment is good and whether the working atmosphere is harmonious, both of which greatly affected the interviewee's satisfaction with their current work and perspectives with colleagues, and then affect their views on their current situation of life. When talking about the positive impact of her current job on her life, W expressed her satisfaction with the working atmosphere, which was one of the reasons why she was still willing to work in the company even though her monthly salary was not within the expectation:

*The most satisfying part of my current work is that I have a very harmonious relationship with my colleagues, and the working atmosphere in the department is very harmonious. We help each other and treat people sincerely. My colleagues and I are actually friends. Having a comfortable job has a great impact on my life. After all, work occupies most of my life. Although I am not satisfied with my current salary, I am still willing to stay here.*

However, some interviewees indicated that they paid more attention to the safety and security of the living environment and believed that the living environment affected the quality of life. For instance, J expressed the importance of the living environment to herself in the interview:

*I feel that the living environment is too important for me. I even think that working hard is to make myself live safely and comfortably. A good quality of life affects my mood and work efficiency, so that I can maintain a healthy living state and a good mentality.*

Whether working or living, environmental safety plays an important role for interviewees. A safe environment would increase interviewers' attitudes and views towards their colleagues. They believed that in a harmonious office, they would get along more well with their colleagues. In addition, their views of each other would be more positive, so that their sense of trust would increase.

### **3.4. Stability of Interpersonal Network and Pressure Relief**

According to the interview content, most interviewees have their own relatively stable interpersonal network. Although the range of social networks of each interviewee is different, which is mainly reflected in the composition and number of people in the social network circle. However, they all have at least one friend they trust, and expressed the positive impact of their association with them. An interviewee, X, expressed her reliance on and emphasis on interpersonal communication. X also thought that high frequency of meeting with friends is one of the effective ways to release work pressure:

*I hang out with my friends about three to four times a week. Generally, after work, I go shopping and watch movies with them. I enjoy spending time with my friends very much. Every time I end a date with my friends, I feel much better. I will also tell them some of my secrets and privacy, which will bring our friendship closer, and I believe in my friends. It's often said that "trust is the foundation of relationships."*

However, an interviewee, L, was unable to meet her friends because she was too far from home. And because of the workload, she preferred to stay at home on her days off. However, L did not feel lonely and expressed her enjoyment of being alone:

*My home is too far away from here, and I have no college experience in this city, so I can hardly meet my friends. In addition, I have different days off from them, which makes it is hard to video chat. Gradually, the frequency of communication with my friends becomes less and less. However, I have a very harmonious relationship with my colleagues. We will have lunch and chat together at noon, so I don't feel that my social life has been affected too much. As a result of the high pressure of work, I usually spend my rest days at home sleeping, cleaning, or watching online movies. I feel my life is also full. Making money is more important for me now, so I don't spend too much time on social networking.*

### **3.5. Family Models and Self-consistency**

The way interviewees get along with their parents is mostly more traditional in China. The interviewees would talk to their parents regularly, but the conversation content was mostly limited to daily trifles, and they would consciously avoid privacy and worries. Among the interviewees in the study, "ineffective communication" with parents was common as the reason for dropouts. For example, when L expressed her daily communication with parents, she expressed that she had

"communication problems" with her father, and the main reason probably was that she was obviously different from her father in character and values:

*On weekdays, I also Skype with my parents to talk about my recent life, but most of the time I still chat with my mother. Because my father has a short temper, and I am also an impatient person, it is easy to have an unpleasant conversation or quarrel with my father.*

The only interviewee, X, who clearly expressed that she had a good relationship with her parents and communicated with them frequently showed a high sense of self-consistency in the interview. The interviewee believed that her healthy mentality benefited from her parents' support and "no requirement" for her career and achievements:

*I have a good relationship with my parents, just like friends. I can talk to them about anything. I recently quit my job and have been on the phone with them almost every day. At first, they were worried about my sudden resignation, but they soon decided to support my idea. My parents have never been so demanding of me, which makes me feel happy and relaxed when I get along with them.*

Although each interviewer has different patterns of getting along with their parents and different degrees of self-consistency, they will consciously avoid conflicts and stabilize their emotional core in different ways, such as avoiding topics that are likely to cause quarrels with their parents, or reducing the number of communications with their parents. From another dimension, this is also one of the ways for interviewees to protect themselves and keep self-consistency.

#### 4. Discussion

In this paper, interviewees show a positive attitude towards their current life situation. Although there are differences in the satisfaction of some aspects of life, they both use more optimistic words when describing their own life situation. In addition, this paper finds that education has a significant impact on interviewees, mainly reflected in such deep aspects as values and consciousness cognition. The results of this study are similar to existing relevant research, that is, according to the effect of life satisfaction on mental health, relevant scholars discovered that the greater the level of life satisfaction, the greater the level of positive emotional experiences, the higher the level of mental health [9]. The research objects of this paper are white-collar workers with an undergraduate education. Years of general education and undergraduate professional education occupy most of the interviewees' life time before work. When compared to the social situation, campus life is more organized and clean, and interpersonal relationships are simpler, which provides a good environment for the establishment of a value system in the interviewees. Thus, the stability of the personal core has laid the foundation of a deep consciousness system for mental health, positive emotions and life satisfaction. The three interact to form a healthier virtuous circle. Different from the results of previous studies, the positive impact and important role of education on respondents' life satisfaction described in this paper is lacking in previous studies. Previous group studies on life satisfaction mainly focused on quantitative research methods. This means that the parts that are easy to be quantified, such as economic factors, are easier to be found and summarized. However, the parts about education level and value system are easy to be ignored. The in-depth interview method can be used in this paper to learn more about the research object through a detailed interview process.

However, this paper has some limitations affected by objective factors. As a result of the requirements and characteristics of in-depth interviews, the interviewees in this study are mainly Sichuan populations with the exception of one with three non-local residences. As a result, the research results may not be as applicable as they could be, and the insufficient number of cities does not accurately reflect China as a whole. In light of this fact, a solution to this limitation could be to reach out to more relevant populations as much as possible in different cities to try and expand the size and scope of the white-collar group.



## 5. Conclusion

Based on the in-depth interview research in this paper, it is found that the factors affecting the life satisfaction of Chinese white-collar workers are multi-dimensional, including salary, education, environmental safety, stability of interpersonal network, and family models. Each influence factor also corresponds to and influences the reflection of different parts of the "self" of the research object, corresponding to financial security, self-knowledge, trust, pressure relief, and self-consistency respectively. Among the above influencing factors, salary and education play a particularly prominent role and have a normal relationship with the life satisfaction of the subjects. That is, the higher the salary, the higher the education level, the higher the life satisfaction of the subjects. This is followed by environmental safety and interpersonal interaction, which also have an impact on life satisfaction, although to varying degrees between individuals. Finally, there is the family pattern, which has a relatively weak effect on subjects. The more interviewees attach importance to the changes brought by educational experience, the more they believe that the influence of family mode on them is existing but limited.

Based on the results of this study, future relevant studies can further focus on and explore the essential reasons for the influence of education level on the life satisfaction of white-collar workers. Additionally, future studies can focus on the causes of and changes in the life satisfaction of different social groups in the post-epidemic era, and on the basis of this, suggest and implement measures that will help to improve residents' quality of life and social welfare.

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