

The Relationship Between Occupation Stereotypes and Turnover Intention of Private Kindergarten Teachers in China-Mainland: A Moderated Mediation Model

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To cite this article:

Feng Yang, Yang Han. The Relationship Between Occupation Stereotypes and Turnover Intention of Private Kindergarten Teachers in China-Mainland: A Moderated Mediation Model. *American Journal of Applied Psychology*. Vol. 12, No. 1, 2023, pp. 8-15.

doi: 10.11648/j.ajap.20231201.12

Received: December 30, 2022; **Accepted:** January 25, 2023; **Published:** February 6, 2023

Abstract: In China-mainland, the high turnover rate of private kindergarten teachers has long bothered relevant scholars and policymakers. In the current research, we recruited 692 teachers from Chinese private kindergartens as participants, and then used a questionnaire survey to investigate the relationship between the occupation stereotypes held by private kindergarten teachers on their turnover intention and the acting mechanisms between them. The results of data analyses demonstrated a significantly positive correlation between the occupation stereotypes held private kindergarten teachers and their turnover intention, reflecting those private kindergarten teachers with negative occupation stereotypes were more likely to left the organization in future. Further data analyses showed that personal control sense played a partially mediating role between occupation stereotypes and turnover intention, indicating that private kindergarten teachers with stronger occupation stereotypes tended to perceive lower personal control sense and lower personal control sense further enabled them to generate the intention of leaving the organization. Moreover, we also found that the above mentioned mediation was further moderated by the intolerance of uncertainty of participants (IU) — compared to private kindergarten teachers with high IU, those private kindergarten teachers with low IU were more likely to generating the intention of leaving the organization resulting from the low personal control sense induced by their negative occupation stereotypes. The present research firstly demonstrates the significant correlation between occupation stereotypes and turnover intention of kindergarten teachers in China Mainland, and also provides a meaningful guideline for Chinese government to alleviate the separation tendency of private kindergarten teachers.

Keywords: Occupation Stereotypes, Private Kindergarten Teachers, Turnover Intention, Personal Control Sense, Preschool Education

1. Introduction

In some Chinese big cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, there are so-called “matchmaking corners” which are generally located in park corners of such cities. These matchmaking corners are developed through voluntary gather of some parents who look forward to hunting for one ideal spouse for their children. In most cases, those candidates who get their salaries from government finance are more likely to acquire special attention from such parents. The logic

underlying this phenomenon is that, one person paid by government is more likely to be evaluated as successful because working “inside the system” (being paid by government) means never worrying about unemployment, a job vividly called “owing an iron rice bowl”. For Chinese people, such fanatical pursuit for a job “inside the system” has spread to all walks of life, including preschool education industry. Compared to the job working as a private kindergarten teacher, the job working as a public kindergarten teacher is commonly considered to be steadier

and more promising. In essence, this oversimplified and not quite accurate belief or attitude tendency about private kindergarten teachers can be defined as one kind of occupation stereotype [1]. In the current research, we firstly attempted to examine possible influences of occupation stereotypes possessed by private kindergarten teachers on their own career development. More concretely, we would examine whether there was a significant correlation between occupation stereotypes held by teachers in private kindergartens and their turnover intention, and the mediating-mechanisms behind the phenomenon.

1.1. The Two-Children Policy and the Development of Private Kindergartens in China

Since the 1980s, to prevent Chinese government has begun to implemented the so-called one-child policy to avoid the excessively rapid growth of the total population in China-Mainland. Nevertheless, Chinese society has entered into the aging society in recent years, and correspondingly, the original one-child policy was changed into the two-children policy or three-children policy (in some regions of China-Mainland.) since 2016. That means, if they want, all married couples can have two or three children in total. As expected, the change of the one-child policy led to a rapid rise of the kindergarten-age children number, which raised a challenge for the endurance of the kindergarten-age children in China-Mainland. As a coping strategy, Chinese government has put forward some policies and also taken actions aiming to advance the rapid development of private kindergartens. Awkwardly, although the number of private kindergartens has been much higher in recent years than the number of private kindergartens several years ago, those teachers in private kindergartens also display a relatively high turnover rate. According to prior literature concerning preschool education, there are multiple factors contributing to this high turnover rate, such as macro policy, salary, personal career planning, social support and so on [2, 3]. However, our concern is that, except such external circumstance factors, whether attitudes of teachers working in private kindergartens toward their own job also contribute to their final resignations. Concretely, some private kindergarten teachers hold relatively negative attitudes and beliefs toward their occupation and take for granted that being a teacher in private kindergartens is unstable and unpromising than in public kindergartens. In the current research, we want to know whether and to what extent these preexisting negative attitudes held by teachers in private kindergartens toward their job — a phenomenon called occupation stereotypes — contribute to their final resignations.

1.2. Occupation Stereotypes of Private Kindergarten Teachers and Their Turnover Intention

Generally, stereotypes are defined as mental representations that people tend to associate a specific social category (e.g., professor) with some typical traits (e.g., intelligent) [4, 5]. So far, social psychologists have revealed multiple kinds of

stereotypes, including race stereotypes, gender stereotypes, age stereotypes, occupation stereotypes and so on. As for the occupation stereotypes mentioned in current research, they often refer to some stereotypic beliefs that the members in an occupation tend to possess some typical traits; and sometimes, occupation stereotypes also refer to an attitude tendency shared by the members in a society toward a specific occupation or those members employed in the occupation [1]. For instance, as we have mentioned above, some private kindergarten teachers before their formal entry into a private kindergarten take for granted that being a private kindergarten teacher means a higher work intensity and a less steady career development in comparison with being a state-run kindergarten teacher. These negative beliefs held by private kindergarten teachers in China-Mainland have been defined as a kind of occupation stereotypes [6].

Dijksterhuis and van Knippenberg (1996) has proposed that stereotypes are like a double-edged sword: They facilitate our cognitive efficiency on the one hand, and on the other hand, they also bias our cognition and behavior in an almost inevitable way. Supporting this viewpoint, empirical research suggests that those individuals holding stereotypes are inclined to display stereotype-consistent cognition and behaviors, which in turn will confirm their original stereotypes [7, 8]. For example, because men are generally considered to be more talent and competent than women, the work performance of women correspondingly tended to be underestimated than that of men, despite there was actually no difference in their objective performance [8, 9]. In addition to biasing evaluations toward others, stereotypes may also cause ourselves to display stereotype-consistent behaviors in a relatively unobtrusive manner. In a prior study concerning the priming effect, researchers found that compared to participants without elderly stereotypes priming, participants with elderly stereotypes priming tended to walked more slowly when they left the room [7]. For such stereotype-consistent effects, some researchers propose that people are cognitive misers due to their limited cognitive resources, and as a result, people tend to allocate more attention to stereotype-consistent than stereotype-inconsistent information surrounding them, which in turn will further confirm their original stereotypes [10]. On the basis of such previous research, although there is so far no direct evidence about the correlation between occupation stereotypes and turnover intention, we had reason to believe that negative occupation stereotypes possessed by private kindergarten teachers would exert an influence on their turnover intention and produce the so-called “stereotype-consistent effect”. In concrete terms, we hypothesized that negative occupation stereotypes held by private kindergarten teachers would significantly predict their turnover intention. The more they had negative beliefs toward their job, the more likely they quit the job in future (*Hypothesis 1*).

1.3. The Mediating Role of Personal Control Sense

Besides the direct effect, we hypothesized that occupation stereotypes would be correlated with separation tendency via

the mediating role of personal control sense. There is a large body of evidence demonstrating that possessing personal control sense toward the surroundings around us is necessary for our healthy development and social adaptation [11, 12]. This may be especially true for Chinese people. For many Chinese people, a dream job should be “steady and no worries about losing the job”, because such a job can assure a sense of stability to a great extent. We would further discuss this issue in the discussion section.

Prior research suggests that personal control sense carries important implications for individuals’ survival, so that individuals will try their best to again acquire control sense toward the surroundings around them, including allocating more cognitive resources to monitor the external environments [13], drawing illusory causal inferences from a series of uncorrelated events [14], or increasing their control sense by irrational consumption [15]. In the research, we posited that when a private kindergarten teacher believed that working in private kindergartens is an unstable and unpromising job than working in state-run kindergartens (working “inside the system”), he/she may correspondingly have lower personal control sense over the surrounding environments. In this case, it seems to be reasonable for those teachers to leave the present organization and then reestablish their control sense in another workplace via getting a new job. In other words, negative occupation stereotypes would induce the lower control sense of private kindergarten teachers, and this may further prompt them to change jobs. Namely, the correlation between occupation stereotypes and turnover intention would be mediated by personal control sense (*Hypothesis 2*).

1.4. The Moderating Role of Intolerance of Uncertainty

It should be noted that there may be individual differences as to what extent the perceived uncertain environment will cause private kindergarten teachers’ separation. Intolerance of uncertainty (IU), which is considered to reflect a tendency that an individual assesses the possibility of a negative event occurring as unacceptable and threatening regardless of the true probability of the event emergence [16], should moderate teachers’ response to the perceived uncertainty induced by occupation stereotypes. Past research has suggested that individuals with high IU are more likely to suffer from the stress of uncertain events in the future [17, 18]. For example, with 110 undergraduates as participants, Chen and Hong (2010) examined the moderating role of IU in the relationship between daily hassles and residual change in anxiety symptoms during a one-month period. The results showed that there was a significantly positive correlation between daily hassles and anxiety symptoms among participants displaying high intolerance for uncertainty but not those displaying low intolerance for uncertainty. That means, even when facing uncertainties to the same degree, high IU individuals actually are more likely to show some negative symptoms. Given that, our research hypothesized that the mediating effect of personal control sense between occupation stereotypes and turnover intention would be further moderated by IU.

According to our speculation, although occupation stereotypes theoretically may lead to a decline of the perceived control sense for all private kindergarten teachers holding such stereotypes, those teachers with high IU (compared to those low IU teachers) should be more likely to generate turnover intention due to the lack of control sense. The expected moderated mediation model was shown schematically in Figure 1.

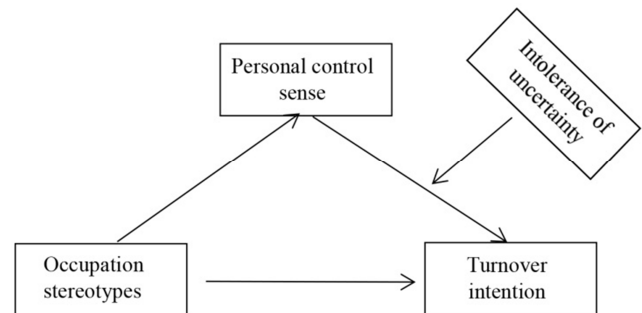


Figure 1. The expected moderated mediation model was presented schematically.

1.5. The Current Research

In the present research, we are first to investigate whether there is a correlation between occupation stereotypes held by private kindergarten teachers and their turnover intention, and the mechanisms behind this phenomenon. To achieve this goal, we invited more than 600 private kindergarten teachers as participants to take part in our survey. Through this survey, we sought to successively clarify (a) the relationship between occupation stereotypes and separation tendency of private kindergarten teachers, (b) the mediating role of control sense between them, and (c) the moderating effect of IU on the mediation.

2. Method and Results

2.1. Participants and Procedure

Participants were 692 private kindergarten teachers who mainly came from private kindergartens in Shandong Province of China. After understanding the purpose of the research, those teachers volunteered to take part in this research in an online way. Prior to filling in the questionnaire, participants were presented a detailed introduction about the purpose of the survey. After that, they continued to answer each item on the questionnaire by using the computer or telephone (following their preference). During data analyses, 4 participants were regarded as unqualified participants and excluded from any data analyses because they gave the same answer for all items. As a result, our final sample consisted of 688 participants (687 females; $M_{\text{age}} = 28$ years, $SD = 7.5$ years, range = 18–52 years). Their average working years was 1.59 years (ranging from 1 to 5 years).

2.2. Measures

Occupation stereotypes about private kindergarten teachers.

The Occupation Stereotypes Scale of Private Kindergarten Teachers developed by Yang et al. (2021) was used to assess private kindergarten teachers' occupation stereotypes. The scale contained four items and these items mainly reflect to what extent private kindergarten teachers believe working in private kindergartens is an unstable and unpromising job in comparison to working in public kindergarten teachers. The score of occupation stereotypes was calculated by averaging participants' scores on each item of the scale. The internal consistency coefficient of the scale was 0.80.

Personal control sense. We measured participants' control sense over the external circumstances via the control sense scale by Lachman and Weaver's (1998) [19]. The scale consisted of 12 items and participants were asked to give their answer for each item on the 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). In the original version of the scale, it consisted of two subscales: — the personal mastery subscale and the perceived constraints subscale. Following previous research [13], with those items in the perceived constraints subscale reversely scored, we generated a composite score to represent participants' general control sense in the current research. As a result, a higher score implied that the individuals perceived stronger control sense. The internal consistency coefficient was 0.84 in the current research.

The intolerance of uncertainty. We adopted the simplified version of the intolerance of uncertainty scale (IU) to assess participants' reactions to uncertainty, ambiguous situations, and the future [16]. The simplified scale contains 12 items and each item is scored on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Researchers add up the score on each item to form a total scale score, with high scores indicating high intolerance for uncertainty. The reliability coefficient of the scale was 0.84.

Turnover intention. In the current research, we measured participants' turnover intention via the scale developed by Farh and colleagues (1998) which was developed to exclusive detect the turnover intention of private kindergarten teachers in China-Mainland [20]. The scale consisted of four items and participants were asked to give their agreement for each item on the 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). After the score of the

item 3 was reversely scored, we assessed participants' turnover intention by averaging participants' scores on each item of the scale. The internal consistency coefficient of the scale was 0.87 in the current research.

2.3. Results

2.3.1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and Pearson correlations of all variables. As shown in the Table 1, occupation stereotypes had a significant correlation with personal control sense and turnover intention, $ps < 0.01$. The sense of control had a significant correlation with turnover intention, $p < 0.01$. In addition, uncertainty intolerance was significantly correlated with the other three variables, $ps < 0.01$.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations between variables.

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4
Occupation stereotypes	3.00	1.12	1			
Personal control sense	4.49	1.04	-0.43**	1		
Turnover intention	1.66	0.92	0.38**	-0.58**	1	
IU	34.51	9.73	0.40**	-0.40**	0.32**	1

Note. M = mean value, SD = standard deviations, and IU = intolerance of uncertainty. ** $p < 0.01$.

2.3.2. Tests of Hypothesis 1 and 2

Hypothesis 1 stated that occupational stereotypes positively predicted turnover intention of teachers, and hypothesis 2 further predicted personal control sense played a mediating role between them. In the current research, we used Hayes' (2013) PROCESS program (Model 4) to test the above two hypotheses [21]. To avoid multicollinearity, all variables were standardized prior to entering the regression equation.

The results of data processing were presented in Table 2. As shown in Model 1 of Table 2, occupation stereotypes had a significantly positive correlation with teachers' turnover intention ($p < 0.001$), supporting the hypothesis 1. In addition, occupation stereotypes were negatively correlated with personal control sense, $p < 0.001$, and personal control sense was further negatively correlated with turnover intention, $p < 0.001$.

Table 2. Regression results for testing the mediating role of personal control sense between occupation stereotypes and turnover intention.

Independent variables	Model 1: Turnover intention			Model 2: Personal control sense			Model 3: Turnover intention		
	β	SE	t	β	SE	t	β	SE	t
Occupation stereotypes	0.38	0.04	10.86***	-0.42	0.03	-12.28***	0.17	0.03	4.96***
Personal control sense							-0.51	0.03	-15.02***
R^2	0.15			0.18			0.36		
F	118.03***			150.79***			191.16***		

Note. SE = standard error. *** $p < 0.001$.

More important, the correlation between occupation stereotypes and turnover intention became weaker when personal control sense was added, but still significant ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < 0.001$). The above results provide evidence for the hypothesis 2. Namely, personal control sense played a

mediating role between occupation stereotypes and turnover intention. Bootstrapping results with 5,000 resampling showed that a bias-corrected 95% confidence interval did not contain 0, CI [0.17, 0.27], further confirming the mediating role of control sense.

2.3.3. Test of Hypothesis 3

Table 3. Regression results for testing the moderated mediation model.

Independent variables	Model 4: Personal control sense			Model 5: Turnover intention		
	β	SE	t	β	SE	t
Occupation stereotypes	-0.42	0.03	-12.28***	0.16	0.03	4.50***
Personal control sense				-0.48	0.04	-13.71***
IU				0.06	0.03	1.77
Personal control sense \times IU				-0.09	0.03	-3.21**
R^2	0.18			0.37		
F	150.79***			100.40***		

Note. ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that the mediating role of the sense of control would be moderated by IU. Again, we performed Hayes' (2013) PROCESS program (Model 14) to test the hypothesis 3. Data processing results showed that (Table 3), (a) occupation stereotypes significantly predicted turnover intention ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$); (b) occupation stereotypes also significantly predicted personal control sense ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$); (c) and more important, the effect of the interaction between control sense and IU also was significant in predicting turnover intention ($\beta = -0.09$, $p < 0.01$). Bootstrapping results showed that the magnitude of the indirect effect of occupation stereotypes via control sense was different across high and low levels of IU. Specifically, as shown in Table 4, the conditional indirect effect of occupation stereotypes was stronger at the high level of IU than that at the low level of IU, despite the indirect effects were both significant at those two levels (the indirect effect = 0.24, 0.16, respectively).

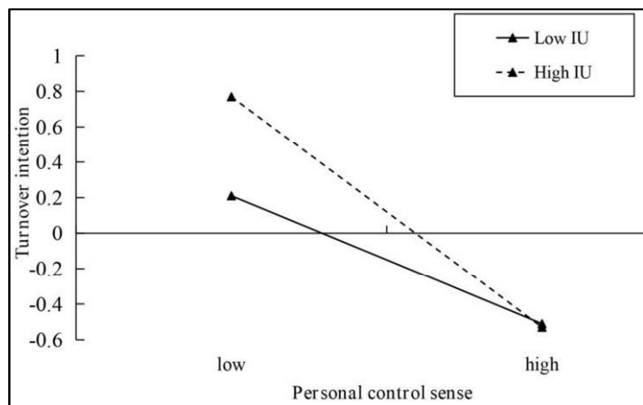


Figure 2. The moderation of IU between personal control sense and turnover intention was presented schematically.

Table 4. Moderated Mediated Results for personal control sense across high and low levels of IU.

IU	Conditional indirect effect	SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
M-1SD	0.16	0.02	0.12	0.22
M	0.20	0.02	0.16	0.25
M+1SD	0.24	0.03	0.19	0.30

Note. IU = intolerance of uncertainty, M = mean value, SD = standard deviation, SE = standard error.

The above results suggested that the mediating effect of personal control sense between occupation stereotypes and turnover intention was moderated by IU, thus supporting the hypothesis 3. To further elucidate the moderating role of IU between personal control sense and turnover intention, we regressed turnover intention on personal control sense across high and low levels of IU. As shown in Figure 2, personal control sense could significantly predict turnover intention on both high and low levels, but compared to low IU teachers ($\beta = -0.37$, $p < 0.001$), high IU teachers were more likely to generate turnover intention due to lower control sense ($\beta = -0.65$, $p < 0.001$).

3. Discussion

With 692 teachers from private kindergartens in China-Mainland as subjects, we used a questionnaire survey to examine whether there was a significant correlation between occupation stereotypes and turnover intention, and the mechanisms behind this correlation. According to our results, if those teachers working in private kindergartens held negative occupation stereotypes about their work, they may perceive relatively lower control sense. As a consequence, these teachers may further choose to leave their organization in order to reinstate their control sense over surrounding circumstances. This was especially true for those high IU teachers who were considered to have quite low tolerance for situations out of their own control. The current research carries some theoretical and practical implications.

3.1. Theoretical Implications

The current research firstly demonstrated the effect of negative occupation stereotypes on private kindergarten teachers' separation tendency. Consistent with our prediction, the results of data analyses suggested that those private kindergarten teachers with stronger negative occupation stereotypes were inclined to leave the organization in future. This "stereotype-consistent effect" may be because those teachers possessing negative occupation stereotypes would readily perceive the negative side of job in daily life, and this attention bias in turn further reinforced the original stereotypes. More importantly, even for those private kindergarten teachers without occupation stereotypes, they could also worry about the future development of the career when the dominant

perspective believes that working as a private kindergarten teacher is an unstable job, and they thus need to pay extra effort to avoid confirming the above worry. As a result, such teachers may sustain a relatively low level of professional commitment, and this can also lead to poor job performance or resignation [22]. In this case, the effect of occupation stereotypes on turnover intention actually can be regarded as a special kind of “stereotype threaten”, which originally refers to some specific experiences in a situation where he/she needs to make judgments relevant to the correspondingly social stereotypes about the members of a group [23].

Our results suggested that in addition to the direct effects, occupation stereotypes also have an indirect effect on separation tendency via personal control sense. Possessing occupation stereotypes induced private kindergarten teachers' lower control sense, and the lack of control sense further increased the chance of resignation, especially for those high IU individuals. On a broad level, when people face the situation of lacking control sense, they either change the environment to suit the self or change the self to suit the environment so that they can reacquire the balance between the self and external environment [24]. Obviously, our research suggests that most teachers tend to choose the latter. One possible reason may be that, for teachers perceiving the lack of control sense, it is a simple and efficient way to change their job than adjusting themselves to suit the environment. After all, these kindergarten teachers start the job at a younger age, so they can consider changing the job without too much worries. It should be pointed out that personal control sense partially mediated the effects of occupation stereotypes on separation tendency in our research. That means, in addition to the acting path of control sense, occupation stereotypes also exert influences on turnover intention via other paths. For example, those private kindergarten teachers holding occupation stereotypes intuitively should have less identification with their job, and career identification has been found to have a significant predictive effect on separation tendency [2]. Namely, occupation stereotypes may also produce an indirect effect via the mediating role of career identification. In future, we should carry out more work to reveal the acting patterns underlying the effects of occupation stereotypes on turnover intention.

One thing deserving our further discussion is Chinese people's fanatical pursuit for a job “inside the system”. Although people can acquire a sense of control over surroundings from multiple sources in theory, many Chinese people prefer to attach great importance to a sense of stability resulting from a permanent residence and a steady job [15]. For example, in the 2019 teacher recruitment examination of Jinan — the capital of Shandong Province, the acceptance rate of the examination is 1: 32, demonstrating job hunters' preference for being a teacher “inside the system”. We guess, there may be historical and realistic two reasons for such people's fanatical pursuit for a stable life. Historically, it may can date back to the traditional Confucian culture, which puts forward that “settling down and starting one's career” is so important in people's life that it can be regarded as the

symbol of a successful person. According to the doctrines of Confucianism, an ideal career should be working for the government. In realistic, there actually are some gaps about salaries and staff benefits between jobs outside inside the system and jobs outside the system. Anyway, this issue deserves our further exploration.

3.2. Practical Implications

In practice, the current research offers a meaningful guideline for how Chinese government can alleviate or prevent the turnover tendency commonly existing among private kindergarten teachers in China-Mainland. According to our results, although there are various of factors (mainly including external environmental and internal cognitive factors) possibly inducing private kindergarten teachers' turnover intention, we may need pay more attention to the occupation stereotypes held by those private kindergarten teachers. Because these negative occupation stereotypes are likely to have an influence on their work satisfaction and career development in an unobtrusive way. Considering that past research has suggested that presenting typical counter-stereotype examples is an effective way to inhibit stereotypes activation, we can attempt to present some counter-stereotype examples for undergraduates majoring in pre-school education to reduce the possible influences of stereotypes on their social cognition and decision [25]. As a popular saying goes, habit cures habit. In addition, according to our findings, private kindergarten teachers in China-Mainland chose to leave the school may be because they perceive lower personal control sense resulting from negative occupation stereotypes held by themselves and they left the organization just attempted to again acquire personal control sense. In this situation, efforts can be taken to increase private kindergarten teachers' social support perception in job. Indeed, one previous study with 548 rural kindergarten teachers as participants, has provided preliminary evidence for the alleviating effect of social supports on teachers' turnover intention [22].

3.3. Limitations and Future Work

There are several limitations existing in the current research. First, to make sense why an increasing number of private kindergarten teachers leave the current job in China-Mainland, we put our focus on the negative contents of occupation stereotypes about private kindergarten teachers. However, according to the propositions of the stereotype content model, the contents of the stereotypes for a group commonly are mixed of positive and negative characteristics [26]. So, on the basis of the research, it may be necessary for us to simultaneously investigate the positive and negative aspects about the contents of occupation stereotypes concerning private kindergarten teachers in China-Mainland. Secondly, the present research was conducted in Shandong province of China, which is the cradle of the Confucian culture. Due to the long-term influences from Confucian culture, individuals in Shandong province may have negative

attitudes toward being a private kindergarten teacher to a greater extent than those in other parts of China. Given that, it may be necessary for us to further evaluate the generalization of our conclusions across the whole country in future. Finally, as we have documented above, personal control sense only partially mediated the effect of occupation stereotypes on turnover intention. That means, the acting patterns between occupation stereotypes and turnover intention should be more implicated than we have assumed, and more work needs to be done to completely solve this issue. Despite such limitations, the current research firstly demonstrates that negative occupation stereotypes held by private kindergarten teachers may be a potential factor resulting in generating turnover intention. In this sense, the present research also offers an inspiration for us to alleviate the separation tendency of private kindergarten teachers improving the evaluations toward their job may be a feasible way to this end.

4. Conclusion

In the current research, we used a questionnaire survey method to investigate, for teachers of private kindergartens in China-Mainland, whether there was a significant correlation between occupation stereotypes and turnover intention, and what underlay the relationship between them. The results showed that a significantly positive correlation existed between occupation stereotypes and turnover intention, and personal control sense played the partial-mediating role between them. The above mediation effect was especially obvious for those high IU teachers who were considered to have quite low tolerance for situations out of their own control (in comparison to low IU teachers). The present research firstly demonstrates the significant correlation between occupation stereotypes and turnover intention of kindergarten teachers in China-Mainland, and also provides a meaningful guideline for Chinese government to alleviate the separation tendency of private kindergarten teachers.

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