

# Leadership Style and Social Behavior of Social Workers in China

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**Abstract:** This study examined the influence of leadership style on the social behavior of social workers across different districts and organizations in China. The empirical measurement involved the participation of social work stations and associations, which included the Social Workers Association and various district social work stations in Hunan. The study sample consisted of 488 individuals who were social work learners and professionals. These participants were picked from various districts and training sites, and they were required to undergo self-evaluation tests. Findings reveal that while social workers generally exhibit average levels of empathy, professionalism, ethical decision-making, collaboration, and resilience, significant variations exist based on age and educational background. Older social workers demonstrate higher levels of these traits compared to younger counterparts. However, barriers such as burnout, limited resources, organizational constraints, and lack of recognition hinder leadership development and positive social behavior. The study seeks to enhance leadership development initiatives and foster positive social behavior in the field of social work in China through a holistic strategy.

**Keywords:** Social worker; empathy; professionalism; ethical decision-making; collaboration; resilience.

## 1. Introduction

China, as one of the most populated and rapidly developing countries in the world, faces many challenges (GZero Media, 2021). These challenges include urbanization, the increasing proportion of elderly people in the population, inequalities between rural and urban areas, mental health issues, and the need for environmental sustainability, among others. The need for proficient and forward-thinking social workers has never been more urgent. China's changing policy environment, growing civil society, and vibrant socio-cultural atmosphere provide an ideal environment for the development of social work leadership (Niu, & Haugen, 2019).

Social work is a crucial discipline that tackles a diverse range of intricate social, economic, and psychological issues experienced by individuals and communities globally. In recent years, there has been an increasing acknowledgment of the connection between social work and leadership abilities, highlighting their importance in influencing the efficacy and impact of social workers in various situations. This study aims to thoroughly investigate the crucial correlation between leadership style and social conduct among social workers in the ever-changing socio-cultural context of China.

China has acknowledged the urgent necessity to strengthen its social welfare system, with the goal of tackling and alleviating societal difficulties. In the past twenty years, the Chinese government has implemented a strategic program to improve the quality of social work (Yiwen, 2020). This initiative focuses on developing talented individuals and improving the institutions involved in social work. This focus has not only led to an increase in the number of social work staff, but also a significant improvement in their professional skills and talents. As a result, social work organizations in China have experienced rapid and significant development. The key aspect of this progress lies in the two-pronged approach to professionalizing social workers: firstly, through

formal social work education, and secondly, through practical involvement in social service practice. This study thoroughly examines the experiences and knowledge gained by two separate groups – 244 social work students at vocational colleges and 244 practitioners working in social work institutions.

The significance of leadership abilities in the field of social work is widely recognized. However, there is a notable lack of research on the specific leadership styles utilized by social workers, especially within the unique socio-cultural environment of China (Kang, 2023). This study aims to fill this void by examining the intricacies of leadership styles and social behaviors demonstrated by social workers in China. By doing this, the goal is to offer useful insights into the professional methods and growth requirements of Chinese social workers in a time marked by swift social change and urbanization.

This research highlights the suitability of leadership styles for Chinese social work institutions, emphasizing their ability to bring about positive changes in the abilities of social workers, enhance their motivation for public service, and strengthen their professional identity. This provides a crucial point of reference for making well-informed decisions, particularly for the training of staff and vocational education in social work institutes. It examines the impact of various leadership styles, including transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and service-oriented leadership, on the promotion of social work social behavior in Chinese social worker institutions.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to assess the correlation between leadership style and social behavior of social workers in China. Specifically, this study sought answer to the following questions:

- (1) What is the respondents profile in terms of:

- 1.1 Age
- 1.2 Sex
- 1.3 educational attainment

(2) What is the assessment of the social worker respondents of their leadership style in terms of

- 2.1 Contingency Bonus
- 2.2 Vision Motivation
- 2.3 Leadership Charisma
- 2.4 Customer-centric Approach
- 2.5 Problem solving Skills
- 2.6 Communication skill

(3) Is there a significant difference in the assessment of the respondents of their leadership skills when they are grouped according to profile?

(4) What is the assessment of the social worker-respondents of their social behavior characteristics in terms of?

- 3.1 Empathy
- 3.2 Professionalism
- 3.3 Ethical decision making
- 3.4 Collaboration
- 3.5 Resilience

(5) Is there a significant difference in the assessment of the respondents of their social behavior when they are grouped according to profile?

(6) Based on the results of the study, what leadership training program can be proposed for the social workers to improve their leadership style and social behavior.

### 3. Scope and Delimitation of the Study

The findings of this study will immediately benefit social workers in China. Understanding the relationship between leadership style and social conduct can assist individuals in improving their professional practices, developing successful leadership abilities, and improving their social behavior traits. This understanding can help them better serve their customers and communities.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

### 4.1. Research Design

The present study employed a descriptive comparative research approach to examine the complex association between leadership style and social conduct within the context of Chinese social workers. The study sought to achieve the research objectives comprehensively by gathering data from social worker participants from diverse demographic backgrounds through the use of a well-organized questionnaire. The profiles comprised demographic variables such as age, gender, and level of education achieved. The objective of this study was to provide a comprehensive depiction of the demographic characteristics, leadership approaches, social behavior traits, and challenges encountered by social workers through the utilization of descriptive statistics, including measures such as mean, median, standard deviation, and frequency density. In addition, statistical methods such as t-tests and ANOVA were employed to evaluate whether there were any notable disparities in leadership abilities and social behavior across

various demographic categories. Ultimately, this study methodology facilitated a comprehensive examination of the research subjects and the execution of tailored leadership training initiatives and policies for Chinese social workers, thus enhancing their professional conduct.

### 4.2. Research Instrumentation

This study involved the selection of social work practitioners working at social work service stations in Hunan for empirical research. The building of the study was conducted within the context of education. The questionnaire on Leadership Style and Social Behavior of social workers was completed by a cohort of 488 social work learners. The questionnaire consisted of various sections that collected demographic information from participants, assessed their leadership styles (including factors such as contingency bonus, vision motivation, and communication skills), and evaluated their social behavior trait (including empathy, professionalism, and collaboration).

It was anticipated that a total of 488 questionnaires would be gathered.

### 4.3. Sampling Technique

**Table 1.** List of experts of Sample

Sample Unit	Description	Number
Changsha social work College	Social work learners	244persons
Hunan Social Workers Association	Social work practice	50 persons
Yuhua District social workstation	Social work practice	30persons
Kaifu district social work station	Social work practice	30persons
Ning Xiang district social work station	Social work practice	30persons
Wangcheng district social work station	Social work practice	24persons
Tianxin district social work station	Social work practice	30persons
China Ministry of Civil Affairs social work talent training base	Social work practice	50 persons

**Table 2.** Frequency and Percentage of Demographic Profile

Sex	Counts	%Total
Female	379	78 %
Male	109	22 %
Age		
18-24 years old	252	52 %
25-34 years old	142	29 %
35-44 years old	66	14 %
46 and above	28	6 %
Education		
Some college, no degree	16	3 %
Associate degree	380	78 %
High school diploma or equivalent	4	1 %
Graduate School Degree	7	1 %
Bachelor's degree	81	17 %

Table 2 displays descriptive data on the frequencies and percentages of respondents' demographic profiles in terms of

gender, age, and educational achievement. According to the tabulated statistics, 379 (78%) were female, whereas 109 (22%) were male. This may indicate that the majority of the respondents are female.

In terms of age, the statistics showed that 52% were between the ages of 18 and 24, 29% were between the ages of 25 and 34, 14% were between the ages of 35 and 44, and 6% were 46 years or older. This shows that the majority of responses are aged 18 to 24.

Finally, in terms of educational attainment, 3% completed

some college, 78% completed an associate degree, 1% completed high school and went on to graduate school, and 17% completed a bachelor's degree. This suggests that the majority of respondents hold an associate degree.

## 5. Results and Analysis

### 5.1. Assessment of the Social Worker Respondents of their Leadership Style

(1) There was no significant difference between the sex

**Table 3.** Difference in the Assessment of Leadership Skills Based on Age

Contingency Bonus	F	df1	df2	p	Interpretation	Decision
Vision Motivation:	14.39	3	484	< .001	Significant	Reject H0
Leadership Charisma	11.97	3	484	< .001	Significant	Reject H0
Customer-centric Approach	6.33	3	484	< .001	Significant	Reject H0
Problem Solving Skills	80.93	3	484	< .001	Significant	Reject H0
Communication Skill	94.77	3	484	< .001	Significant	Reject H0
	74.81	3	484	< .001	Significant	Reject H0

Furthermore, this research highlights the imperative for organizations to ensure equitable access to leadership development and progression for all social workers, irrespective of their gender. Organizations can enhance inclusivity and diversity of thinking and perspectives by advocating for gender equality in leadership roles. This, in turn, can result in better outcomes for customers and communities (Kim & Park, 2021). The absence of substantial disparities in leadership abilities between genders implies that training and development initiatives targeting the improvement of leadership skills can be universally

advantageous for all social workers, regardless of their gender.

Organizations have the opportunity to allocate resources towards leadership training programs that encompass a diverse set of abilities, including but not limited to communication, problem-solving, and vision motivation. These initiatives aim to facilitate the professional development and progression of social workers (Wang & Chen, 2019).

(2) There is a significant effect with age

**Table 6.** Tukey Post-Hoc Test

	Age	Mean	Difference	p
Contingency Bonus	18-24 (M = 2.63)	25-34 (M = 2.81)	-0.18	0.009
	18-24 (M = 2.63)	35-44 (M = 3.09)	-0.46	<.001
	18-24 (M = 2.63)	46 and up (M = 2.94)	-0.31	0.021
Vision Motivation	25-34 (M = 2.81)	35-44 (M = 3.09)	-0.28	0.003
	18-24 (M = 2.61)	25-34 (M = 2.83)	-0.22	<.001
	18-24 (M = 2.61)	35-44 (M = 3.00)	-0.39	<.001
Leadership Charisma	18-24 (M = 2.61)	46 and up (M = 2.96)	-0.36	0.008
	18-24 (M = 2.53)	35-44 (M = 2.83)	-0.30	0.001
	18-24 (M = 2.53)	46 and up (M = 2.83)	-0.30	0.048
Customer-centric Approach	18-24 (M = 2.45)	25-34 (M = 3.15)	-0.70	<.001
	18-24 (M = 2.45)	35-44 (M = 3.24)	-0.79	<.001
	18-24 (M = 2.45)	46 and up (M = 3.21)	-0.77	<.001
Problem-Solving	18-24 (M = 2.39)	25-34 (M = 3.12)	-0.73	<.001
	18-24 (M = 2.39)	35-44 (M = 3.18)	-0.79	<.001
	18-24 (M = 2.39)	46 and up (M = 3.20)	-0.81	<.001
Communication Skills	18-24 (M = 2.44)	25-34 (M = 3.13)	-0.69	<.001
	18-24 (M = 2.44)	35-44 (M = 3.14)	-0.70	<.001
	18-24 (M = 2.44)	46 and up (M = 3.23)	-0.79	<.001

In brief, the notable differences in the evaluation of leadership abilities among social workers, as influenced by age, highlight the significance of implementing age-inclusive leadership strategies and developmental programs within the realm of social work. Organizations can enhance workforce inclusivity and effectiveness by acknowledging and attending

to the varied needs and strengths of social workers across different age cohorts. This approach ultimately leads to favorable outcomes for clients and communities.

(3) significant effect on the level of Educational Attainment

**Table 7.** Difference in the Assessment of Leadership Skills Based on Educational Attainment

	F	df1	df2	p	Interpretation	Decision
Contingency Bonus	3.75	4	483	0.005	Significant	Reject H <sup>0</sup>
Vision Motivation:	3.58	4	483	0.057	Not Significant	Accept H <sup>0</sup>
Leadership Charisma	3.02	4	483	0.058	Not Significant	Accept H <sup>0</sup>
Customer-centric Approach	14.34	4	483	< .001	Significant	Reject H <sup>0</sup>
Problem Solving Skills	12.28	4	483	< .001	Significant	Reject H <sup>0</sup>
Communication Skill	11.84	4	483	< .001	Significant	Reject H <sup>0</sup>

The findings indicate the potential advantages of fostering educational progress among social workers as a strategy to augment their leadership skills. By allocating resources towards continuous professional development and pursuing higher education possibilities, social workers can enhance their capacity to gain advanced skills and information, hence augmenting their efficacy as leaders within the sector.

Furthermore, it is imperative for organizations and politicians to carefully contemplate the ramifications of these findings on approaches to recruitment, employment, and promotion within the field of social work. Acknowledging the significance of educational achievement in influencing

leadership aptitude can provide valuable insights for decision-making procedures concerning personnel and professional progression, guaranteeing the placement of individuals with the necessary competencies and credentials in positions of leadership. The results of this study emphasize the significance of recognizing and utilizing the varied educational experiences of social workers in order to enhance their effectiveness as leaders and eventually boost outcomes for both clients and communities.

(4) An overall description of the Leadership Style of Chinese social workers

**Table 8.** Tukey Post-Hoc Test

		Educational Attainment			p
Contingency Bonus	Some college, no degree (M = 2.66)	Graduate School degree (M = 3.37)	-0.71	0.041	
	Associate degree (M = 2.73)	Graduate School degree (M = 3.37)	-0.64	0.023	
Customer-centric Approach	Some college, no degree (M = 3.19)	Associate degree (M = 2.69)	-0.49	<.001	
	Associate degree (M = 2.69)	Graduate School degree (M = 3.49)	-0.79	<.001	
Problem-Solving	Associate degree (M = 2.69)	Bachelors degree (M = 3.13)	-0.77	<.001	
	Some college, no degree (M = 3.08)	Associate degree (M = 2.65)	0.43	0.041	
Communication Skills	Associate degree (M = 2.69)	Graduate School degree (M = 3.49)	-0.68	0.026	
	Associate degree (M = 2.69)	Bachelors degree (M = 3.13)	-0.44	<.001	

The findings of this study suggest that there is a substantial relationship between educational achievement and specific leadership skills among social workers. Social workers who have attained greater levels of education, such as a graduate school degree, have enhanced proficiency in contingency planning and communication abilities in comparison to their counterparts with inferior educational backgrounds. This implies that pursuing higher education can potentially provide social workers with improved problem-solving skills and more efficient communication techniques, both of which are crucial elements for effective leadership within the social work profession. Furthermore, the results emphasize the

significance of allocating resources towards pursuing advanced education and continuous professional growth in order to foster leadership skills among social workers. This, in turn, can result in enhanced provision of services and improved outcomes for both clients and communities.

## 5.2. Assessment of the Social Worker-Respondents of their Social Behavior Characteristics

(1) There was no significant difference between the sex

**Table 9.** Difference in the Assessment of Social Behavior Based on Sex

	t	df	p	Interpretation	Decision
Empathy	1.37	486	0.172	Not Significant	Accept H <sup>0</sup>
Professionalism	0.11	486	0.912	Not Significant	Accept H <sup>0</sup>
Ethical Decision Making:	0.95	486	0.343	Not Significant	Accept H <sup>0</sup>
Collaboration	1.02	486	0.308	Not Significant	Accept H <sup>0</sup>
Resilience	0.7	486	0.483	Not Significant	Accept H <sup>0</sup>

Additionally, the findings indicate that it is imperative for social work organizations and training institutions to prioritize the cultivation of a nurturing and all-encompassing atmosphere that promotes cooperation and reciprocal regard among professionals across all genders. Social work institutions have the potential to promote team cohesion and performance, leading to improved outcomes for both social workers and the communities they serve through the promotion of an atmosphere characterized by equality and

respect (Wang & Liu, 2021). The results emphasize the significance of employing gender-neutral methodologies while assessing and advocating for social behaviors within the field of social work. By acknowledging and mitigating potential biases or imbalances, social work organizations can foster a more equal and supportive workplace for all workers.

(3) There is a significant effect with age

**Table 10.** Difference in the Assessment of Social Behavior Based on Age

	F	df1	df2	p	Interpretation	Decision
Empathy	48.19	3	484	< .001	Significant	Reject H <sup>0</sup>
Professionalism	109.39	3	484	< .001	Significant	Reject H <sup>0</sup>
Ethical Decision Making	73.64	3	484	< .001	Significant	Reject H <sup>0</sup>
Collaboration	96.64	3	484	< .001	Significant	Reject H <sup>0</sup>
Resilience	76.3	3	484	< .001	Significant	Reject H <sup>0</sup>

Furthermore, a study conducted by Wang and Li (2018) revealed that there is a positive correlation between age and collaboration skills. Specifically, older social workers had higher levels of expertise in interdisciplinary collaboration than their younger counterparts. This emphasizes the potential advantages of utilizing the varied experiences and viewpoints of social workers from different age cohorts to promote efficient collaboration and provision of services.

Finally, the findings indicated a positive correlation between age and resilience levels, whereby older social workers shown higher levels of resilience when confronted with difficulties. According to Huang and Zhou (2020), it can be inferred that the development of coping mechanisms

and adaptive strategies that promote resilience among social workers may be influenced by factors such as age and cumulative experience. The results emphasize the significance of considering age-related variations in social conduct among social workers and incorporating age-sensitive approaches to enhance professional growth, education, and assistance within social work institutions. Organizations can cultivate a supportive and inclusive work environment that nurtures social workers' professional development and well-being throughout their careers by acknowledging and attending to the distinct requirements and capabilities linked to various age cohorts.

(3) significant effect on the level of Educational Attainment

**Table 11.** Difference in the Assessment of Social Behavior Based on Educational Attainment

	F	df1	df2	p	Interpretation	Decision
Empathy	6.24	4	483	< .001	Significant	Reject H <sup>0</sup>
Professionalism	16.91	4	483	< .001	Significant	Reject H <sup>0</sup>
Ethical Decision Making	10.04	4	483	< .001	Significant	Reject H <sup>0</sup>
Collaboration	13.09	4	483	< .001	Significant	Reject H <sup>0</sup>
Resilience	9.27	4	483	< .001	Significant	Reject H <sup>0</sup>

The findings of the Tukey post-hoc analysis reveal that social workers who possess bachelor's degrees consistently exhibit elevated levels of empathy, professionalism, ethical decision-making, teamwork, and resilience in comparison to their counterparts with associate degrees. The aforementioned findings highlight the significance of educational achievement in influencing the skills and actions of social workers. The prioritization of expanding access to bachelor's degree programs and offering targeted support to professionals with associate degrees to strengthen their skills and capabilities should be emphasized by organizations and educational institutions. The enhancement of service quality, client outcomes, and overall workforce performance within

the social work profession can be achieved through the allocation of resources towards higher education options and the promotion of multidisciplinary collaboration. Furthermore, it is crucial to establish resilience-enhancing treatments and support systems to effectively tackle the distinct obstacles encountered by social workers across all educational levels. This will ultimately enhance the well-being of employees and contribute to the overall success of the company.

(4) An overall description of the Social Behavior of Chinese social workers



**Table 12.** Tukey Post-Hoc Test

	Educational Attainment		Mean Difference	p
Empathy	Associate degree (M = 2.70)	Bachelors Degree (M = 3.00)	-0.3	0.002
Professionalism	Associate degree (M = 2.71)	Bachelors Degree (M = 3.19)	-0.51	<.001
Ethical Decision Making	Associate degree (M = 2.71)	Bachelors Degree (M = 3.11)	-0.4	<.001
Collaboration	Associate degree (M = 2.71)	Bachelors Degree (M = 3.17)	-0.46	<.001
Resilience	Associate degree (M = 2.68)	Bachelors Degree (M = 3.17)	-0.39	<.001

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## 6. Conclusion

1. The majority of female participants, especially in the younger age bracket with associate degrees, indicates a requirement for focused assistance and growth initiatives designed to tackle the distinct requirements and difficulties encountered by this population in the field of social work.

2. The findings suggest that leadership training and development programs within the social work profession need to grow, specifically in communication, problem-solving, and vision motivation.

3. Significant differences in leadership abilities among individuals of varying ages and educational levels highlight the significance of tailored leadership development programs that consider the distinct attributes and experiences of social workers at different points in their professional trajectories and educational histories.

4. The findings indicate that continuous training and assistance are required to improve social workers' empathy, professionalism, ethical decision-making, teamwork, and resilience. This is crucial to ensuring that they are able to effectively handle the changing demands of their profession.

5. The significant differences in social behavior traits according to age underscore the significance of employing

age-sensitive strategies in training and support initiatives to cater to social workers' diverse requirements and capacities across distinct age cohorts.

6. Burnout, limited resources, organizational constraints, and lack of recognition are notable obstacles that underscore the pressing necessity for systemic reforms and proactive initiatives to tackle these difficulties. These measures are crucial in enabling social workers to proficiently cultivate leadership abilities and foster favorable social conduct while upholding their own well-being and job contentment.

## 7. Recommendations

1. Design customized support programs with the objective of meeting the distinct requirements and obstacles encountered by female social workers, namely those belonging to the younger demographic and holding associate degrees. These programs ought to offer mentorship, possibilities for skill improvement, and resources to empower individuals in their career advancement.

2. Augment leadership training and development initiatives within the social work field to effectively target the highlighted areas for enhancement, including communication, problem-solving, and vision motivation. To foster the development of effective leadership abilities among social workers, it is recommended to include practical exercises, workshops, and mentoring opportunities.

3. Create personalized leadership development programs that take into account the distinct attributes and backgrounds of social workers, taking into account their age and level of education. Deliver focused instruction and assistance to cater to social workers' diverse requirements and competencies at different points in their professional trajectories and educational qualifications.

4. Implement continual professional development initiatives since they are crucial in fostering the development of social behavior traits, including empathy, professionalism, ethical decision-making, teamwork, and resilience. Provide workshops, seminars, and online courses that specifically target the enhancement of these fundamental skills and competencies.

5. Create training programs that are tailored to specific age groups, taking into account and addressing the variations in social behavior traits associated with different age groups. Utilize age-appropriate tactics and treatments to facilitate the development of desirable social behaviors among social workers across diverse age groups.

6. Promote the implementation of comprehensive changes within social work organizations to effectively tackle the highlighted obstacles, including burnout, resource limitations, organizational restraints, and lack of acknowledgment. Enforce norms and protocols that foster a nurturing work atmosphere, efficiently distribute resources, and acknowledge the valuable contributions made by social workers.

7. Cultivate an environment that promotes acknowledgment and gratitude within the field of social work, with the aim of enhancing morale and job satisfaction among social work professionals. Enact measures to recognize and commemorate the accomplishments and services of social workers at all hierarchical levels.

8. Foster collaborative efforts among many stakeholders, such as social work organizations, educational institutions, policymakers, and professional groups, to collectively address the stated difficulties and implement successful solutions; it is imperative to resources, exchange optimal methods, and cooperate on endeavors focused on bolstering the professional growth and welfare of social workers.

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