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Empowering college student employment through community cultural wealth: a case study of human resource management students in China

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The global economic slowdown, the expansion of higher education, compounded by social factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the significant contraction of key employment industries, along with personal and institutional factors, have collectively created multiple challenges for college students in their employment pursuits, affecting both internal competencies and external opportunities. This article explores how Community Cultural Wealth empowers a group of Human Resources Management major college students in their job-seeking endeavors in China. Using a case study approach, this research employed document analysis and one-to-one interviews with seven student participants and four teacher participant at a university in Beijing. In addition, the researchers collected surveys from 77 senior students major in Human Resources Management at the research site university in the class of 2025 to understand the current situation of student employment. Through the lens of the Community Cultural Wealth framework, the findings revealed that successful employment was achieved by leveraging social capital from human resource managers, mentors, peers, alumni, and friends. Participants established clear career plans and aspirations, navigated diverse on-campus and off-campus resources, received material and emotional support from familial networks, and exercised resistance capital when facing employment discrimination. Additionally, this study offers actionable strategies and recommendations for job-seeking students, professional mentors, university administrators, and policymakers addressing this issue.

KEYWORDS

student employment, human resources management, community cultural wealth, social capital, case study

1 Introduction

Since 1999, China has implemented the higher education expansion policy, leading to a rapid increase in the gross enrollment rate of higher education. By 2019, this rate had reached 51.6%, marking the transition from elite education to massified education. According to data from the Ministry of Education, between 2020 and 2023, the number of college graduates in China increased by over 0.3 million annually. In 2024, the total number of college graduates reached 11.58 million, reflecting a steady rise in graduate numbers and placing significant pressure on the labor market (Liu and Zang, 2024). Concurrently, the global economic growth rate slowed due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This slowdown resulted in contractions and downturns in key employment sectors for university graduates, including education and training, real estate, and Internet platforms. On one hand, there is a growing

population of graduates entering the job market; on the other hand, the sluggish economy has led to reduced job opportunities. Consequently, the current employment situation for university graduates is particularly challenging. Furthermore, personal and institutional factors, such as insufficient employment experience among college students, mismatches between individual career aspirations and societal demands, and irrationalities in the design of college majors and enrollment policies, have exacerbated the difficulties faced by graduates in securing employment (Liu and Zang, 2024).

2 Human resources management major student employment

Human Resource is the first resource for social economic development. Human resource service is a specialized industry that provides related services for the employment and career development of workers and the management and development of human resources for employers. According to the 2023–2028 *Chinese Human Resources service industry market foresight and strategic investment planning analysis report*, the Human Resource service industry will develop in the direction of internationalization of service mode, integration of industrial chain, industrialization of industrial products, as well as industry informatization and marketization.

Up until 2022, there are more than 470 undergraduate universities in China offering Human Resources Management majors. Among them, there are 179 privately operated application-oriented colleges or universities (Yu, 2024). A research study surveyed the employment quality of 175 graduates majoring in Human Resource Management, results of the survey proposed suggestions that Human Resources students should preserve professional knowledge and enhance academic qualifications, actively develop skills in professional skill, interpersonal skill, innovation skill, writing skill and computer skill (Ruan and Yun, 2023).

Yang et al. (2020) surveyed 436 graduates majoring in Human Resources Management at a college. Results of the survey showed that many problems exist in college graduates' employment, such as difficulty in employment, too much pressure to find a job, a big gap between employment expectation and reality, over-attention to short-term interests, lack of understanding of employment promotion and help policies, and the lack of practicality of college courses and employment guidance. The researchers proposed a series of suggestions including subsidizing companies that hire graduates, intensifying policies to promote and support employment, enriching the course content, strengthening practical teaching, and enhancing students' practical ability, as well as strengthening employment guidance and improving employment assessment for graduates. Given that Human Resources Management students face a series of issues and problems in their employment, researchers need to pay attention to their current employment situation and propose strategies for their employment in the future.

3 Capital theory

The classical theory of capital originates from Marx (1933), capital means surplus value and represents an investment with expected

returns. The neo-capital theories consist of human capital, cultural capital, and social capital (Lin, 1999). Human capital theory conceives capital as an investment in education with certain expected returns in earnings (Becker, 1964; Johnson, 1960; Schultz, 1961). Cultural capital theory described by Bourdieu (1986) represents investments of the dominant class in reproducing a set of symbols and meanings, the masses also generate returns from internalizing such investment and acquisition.

Social capital is the access to and use of resources embedded in social networks (Bourdieu, 1983; Coleman, 1988). It is the investment in social networks, mutual recognition, and acknowledgment with expected returns. Two perspectives identified as to whether the return or profit accrued for the individual or the group. From the individual perspective, the focus point is how individuals access and use resources embedded in social networks to gain returns in instrumental rewards such as finding a better job or preserve gains (Lin, 1999). In the group perspective, the emphasis is on how certain groups develop and maintain social capital as a collective asset and how such asset benefits the group members' life chances.

4 Community cultural wealth

The Community Cultural Wealth theory proposed by Yosso (2005) is a critical race theory challenge to the traditional interpretations of cultural capital. The theory shifts from a deficit view of communities of color to a strength-based approach. Instead of seeing communities of color as socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged, this theory invites the knowledge, skills, ability and contacts of students of color from the home and communities into the classroom.

Yosso (2005) believes that on the basis of cultural capital, there are six capitals for the communities of color which include cultural capital, social capital, aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, navigational capital, and resistant capital. Aspirational capital refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future despite real-life obstacles. Linguistic capital refers to the intellectual and social skills obtained through communication in more than one language. Familial capital refers to the cultural knowledge nurtured among family members that carries a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition. It also includes family support to help the students through emotional, educational, and occupational consciousness (Liou et al., 2009). Social capital means networks of people and community resources that provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society's institutions. Navigational capital refers to skills of manoeuvring through social institutions. Resistant capital refers to knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality.

Delouche et al. (2024) studied a group of recent immigrant Latina/o families in U.S. schools and found many strengths of these families including their ability to manoeuvre social institutions, engage in various social networks, and maintain hopes for the future. Nuria et al. (2021) synthesized 20 years of empirical research on women of color in computing and technology graduate education. Using the theoretical framework of Community Cultural Wealth, the results of the study showed that women of color's motivation to persist and succeed in computing education came from teachers, families, individual and social strategies. Pumacahua and Rogers (2023)

interviewed 12 Latinx and Black students who obtained degrees in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) disciplines. The findings of this study reflected that students viewed support from faculty, mentors, advisors, program directors, and off-campus individuals as the major factors contributing to their academic success. The Latinx and Black students utilized all dimensions of Community Cultural Wealth to varying degrees during their doctoral experiences. Kelley et al. (2023) analyzed a group of international students in the United States and suggested that the practice of mentoring might be enhanced by applying Community Cultural Wealth as a way for faculty members to acknowledge, affirm, and appreciate the aspirational, familial, and linguistic capital that international students bring to mentor-mentee relationships.

In China, drawing on the Community Cultural Wealth theory, Yang (2023) investigated the sociocultural adaptation mechanisms for international doctoral students enrolled in the China Studies Program. This study delved into how these students, along with their families and staff members at the host university in China, leverage community cultural resources to facilitate sociocultural adaptation. These forms of cultural wealth enabled international students to attain academic success by accumulating aspirational capital, linguistic capital, social capital, familial capital, navigational capital, and resistant capital. In a separate study conducted within the Chinese American community in the U.S., Lu (2013) examined how community-based music schools employ cultural strategies to assist Chinese American immigrants in gaining admission to prestigious colleges through the utilization of high cultural capital in classical music. Chinese immigrant families utilize information networks within these schools to develop a form of social capital that enables not only students from middle-class families but also working-class families to achieve academic success.

5 Purpose of the study

Employment is the basis of people's livelihood, and youth employment represented by college students directly relates to social stability and social class mobility. Therefore, by interviewing professional mentors and sending surveys to senior students majoring in Human Resources Management at a college in Beijing, this study aims to understand the current employment situation of college students in China. This study also intends to explore in what ways the Community Cultural Wealth empower a group of Human Resources Management major college students in seeking their employment in China, and to put forward strategies and suggestions for job seeker students, professional mentors, university administrators, and policy-makers of this issue.

6 Research questions

- 1 What is the current employment situation of college students at the research site university?
- 2 In what ways do the Community Cultural Wealth empower a group of Human Resources Management major college students in seeking their employment in China?
- 3 What are some strategies and suggestions of student employment for job seeker students, professional mentors, university administrators, and policy-makers for this issue?

7 Methodology

This study employed a sociological case study in that it attends to the constructs of society and socialization in studying an education phenomenon (Merriam, 1988). A single instrumental case study is applied in that the researcher selects only one bounded case to focus on an issue or concern and then to illustrate the issue (Creswell, 2013). In this study, the researchers selected four participant teachers and seven students at a research site university as the case for this study. In addition, this study applied quantitative methods to send surveys to students major in Human Resources Management at the research site university to have a better understanding of their employment.

7.1 Background of the study

The research site is a comprehensive privately operated university in Beijing. The city has around 22 million population and 92 higher education institutions and colleges. The research site university was established in 1984, and currently has 20,000 students and more than 2000 staff members and teachers. The unit of analysis for this study is senior and graduated Human Resources Management major students and four professional mentors who are responsible for a group of Human Resources Management students employment at the research site university.

7.2 Research participants

To protect the participating students' privacy, pseudonyms were used in this study. The students were recruited through purposeful sampling. The researchers contacted a teacher responsible for student employment at the research site university and explained the purpose of this study and the participants' selection criteria. The student participants must meet the following criteria: a. the student participants must be senior students or 1 year after graduation students major in Human Resource Management at the research site university; b. the student participants must have actively sought employment or in the process of job seeking at the time of the study. The teacher participants must be teachers who are responsible for student employment for students major in Human Resource Management at the research site university. They must have at least 3 years' experience for mentoring student employment at the research site university. The researchers sent informed consent to the teachers and the students to explain the purpose of the study, the participants' rights, research methods, ways to protect the participants' privacy, and the benefits of this study (Maxwell, 2013). The teacher then contacted students who had met the criteria, seven students and four teachers agreed to participate in this study, and signed the informed consent. The basic information of the student participants including their gender, grade, employment status, and employment methods are shown in Table 1. The ways that students find jobs are stressed in the table.

Among the four participant teachers, one is male teacher and three are females. All of them have worked for Human Resources Management student employment for at least 3 years at the research site university (see Table 2). Apart from working as a professional mentor, they also work as full-time teachers to teach professional courses and guide the graduation thesis for Human Resources

TABLE 1 Basic information about the interviewed student participants.

Student	Gender	Grade	Employment status	Employment method
1	Male	Senior	Passed the headcount examination (also employed but chose to work for the public institution)	Classmate recommendation, the campus career fair, WeChat official account, teacher recommendation, career service center
2	Female	Senior	Currently doing internship, in the process of looking for a stable job	Find an internship by herself, the campus career fair, teacher guidance, recruiting websites, career service center, university-enterprise cooperation
3	Female	Senior	Employed	Teacher recommendation, career service center, off-campus career fair, recruiting websites and platforms
4	Female	One year after graduation	Employed	Find the job by herself, teacher recommendation, campus career fair
5	Female	Senior	Employed	Classmate recommendation, campus career fair, lesson for career guidance, recruitment app, teacher recommendation, WeChat official account
6	Male	Senior	Employed	Recruiting website, teacher recommendation, WeChat official account
7	Female	Senior	Employed	Teacher recommendation, campus career fair, employment assistance forum, recruitment software

Management majors. On the one hand, they are familiar with students in this major; on the other hand, their work load are heavy since they have responsibilities for both students' academic study and employment.

While conducting interviews with student participants and participant teachers, the researchers sent surveys to students from class of 2025 to understand their current employment situation. The survey participants must be Human Resources Management students who currently in their senior year at the research site university, 77 students participated in the survey and reported their data. Among the 77 students, 58 students are male and 19 students are female.

7.3 Confidentiality

In order to protect the confidentiality of the participant teachers and students, several measures were implemented in this study. Both the interviews and the surveys did not identify the students and participants by name. The transcripts and surveys were saved in the researchers' personal computer (protected by a six-digit code) and in a code protected USB flash drive for the backup of the data. Both the recordings and the transcripts were saved in password-protected files. Only the researchers could get access to the data and the data were only used for the purpose of this study. Immediately following the discussions, the researchers transferred the data to the laptop. After transcribing the audio recordings, the recordings were immediately deleted from the researchers' phones, computer, and USB flash drive. In the recording, the participants were not identified by name.

7.4 Research methods

This case study employed there search methods of document analysis and interviews. Document analysis includes information from the research site university's official website, the WeChat official account of the research site university employment and entrepreneurship guidance center, and work reports from the participant teachers.

TABLE 2 Basic information about the participant teachers.

Participant teacher	Gender	Experience in student employment
Participant teacher 1	Male	4 years
Participant teacher 2	Female	6 years
Participant teacher 3	Female	5 years
Participant teacher 4	Female	8 years

The researchers conducted seven student interviews and four teacher interviews to understand the current situation of college student employment. The student participants were interviewed in Chinese through WeChat voice calls, while the teacher participants were interviewed face-to-face in their offices. Each one-to-one interview lasted for about 30 min, with a total of 3 h of student interviews and 2 h of teacher interviews were conducted in this study. The semi-constructed interview questions were designed to understand the basic information of the students and how the individual, family, school, peers, and society help the students in their employment. Sample interview questions were 'What methods have you tried in your search for a job or internship?' and 'What else do you think the school can do to help you in your job search and employment?'. The student interview protocol and teacher interview protocol are attached to this study.

7.5 Data analysis

The documents and interview transcripts were used to analyze the data. The researchers read the information from the research site university's official website, the WeChat official account of the research site university employment and entrepreneurship guidance center, and the interview transcripts for several times to be thoroughly familiar with the data (Agar, 1980). Through detailed reading of the documents and the transcripts, margin notes were taken to record ideas or key concepts during this process. The researchers used markers of different colors to highlight quotes related to different themes. The next step of

coding involved aggregating the documents and the transcripts into small categories of information which was like “winnowing” the data according to Wolcott (1994). Categorical aggregation was used in that categories were reduced to a limited number to classify or collapse the categories into several themes in the findings (Creswell, 2013). The third step involved representing the data through in-depth descriptions and a large number of quotes from the documents and the transcripts of the interviews. At this point, the quotes from the transcripts were translated from Chinese into English. At last, member checking was used in this study to avoid misrepresentation or misunderstanding of the data. The participant teachers agreed with all identified themes and added several recommendations to job seeker students.

8 Findings

This section addresses the major findings of this study from three aspects: the current situation of student employment at the research site university, capitals in influencing students’ employment in Community Cultural Wealth, as well as recommendations to job seeker students.

8.1 Current situation of student employment

Among the seven interviewed students, two students are males and five students are females. All students are majoring in Human Resources Management in the School of Economics and Management at the research site university. Six students are seniors and one student has graduated for 1 year (see Table 1). Student 1 has passed the headcount examination at a public institution, before that he also found a job through a classmate’s recommendation in case he did not pass the exam. Student 2 currently works as an intern and is still in the process of looking for a stable job. The other five interviewed students have either signed the triple agreements which means the agreements signed among graduates, employers, and universities, or signed the employment contract with the company.

8.1.1 Employment status

Students’ intentions after graduation can be classified into four types. The first type of students want to take the headcount examination or the public servant examination. The second type of students want to continue their study for a master’s degree in China or abroad, the participant teacher needs to collect their school admission letter. The third type of students would sign the triple agreements among graduates, employers, and universities, or sign an employment contract with the company. The last type of students start a business by themselves or choose a liberal profession.

Up until April 2025, among the 77 students major in Human Resources Management who participated in the survey, 48 students reported have found employment and signed the triple contracts, 13 students were still actively seeking employment, 13 students would like to continue their study for a master’s degree either at home or abroad, and 3 students reported would like to start a business by themselves (see Figure 1).

8.1.2 Means of seeking employment

In this study, the top three ways the interviewed students tried to find jobs are teacher recommendations, recruiting websites (apps, platforms, or software), as well as on-campus and off-campus career fairs. In the end, the ways most interviewed students used to find jobs are recruiting websites and teacher recommendations. The teachers who recommend jobs refer to a professional mentor who is course lecturer responsible for student school work, graduation field work, graduation thesis, and employment, as well as a class teacher who is responsible for student affairs related to daily life. The commonly used recruiting websites (apps, platforms, or software) include the BOSS direct employment website and Zhaopin.com. The on-campus and online career fairs were held by the Department of Human Resources Management, the School of Economics and Management, and the research site university. The other common methods include employment information pushed by the WeChat official account of the research site university employment and entrepreneurship guidance center as well as job positions recommended by a classmate or senior schoolmate.

For the 77 class of 2025 students participated in the survey, 62 students got recruitment information from recruitment platforms, 20 students obtained information from social medias such as WeChat and the Red Note, 12 students received professional mentors or family member’s recommendation, 9 students found job through on-campus career fair or university employment website, and 4 students searched the official website of enterprises to find their jobs (see Figure 2).

8.1.3 Employment channels

The statistics from the participant teacher’s work report reflects the employment channels of Human Resources Management major from 2020 to 2024 (see Table 3). During the year 2024, the campus career fair or teacher recommendation is the major channel of employment with 30%. It can be seen that this channel is also the major channel of employment in 2023 with 21%, other major channels include family, alumni, and classmate. In 2022, family dominated the major channel with 33.8%, the campus career fair (school recommendation), classmates, and alumni are the other major channels of Human Resources Management student employment. In 2021, the campus career fair (school recommendation) dominated the channel of employment with 36.08%, followed by the career fair in the society, and other major channels included family, alumni, and classmates. In 2020, the career fair in society was the major channel of employment, other major channels include the campus career fairs (school recommendation), family, alumni, and classmates.

8.1.4 Employment industries

Statistics from the participant teachers showed that leasing and business services, information transmission, software and information technology services as well as scientific research and technology services are the top three employment industries for Human Resources Management major students in the research site university (see Table 4). It can be analyzed that technology services and business service are the two major industries which Human Resources Management students find employment. The percentage of student employment in the industry of education decreased from 9% in 2020 to 3.64% in 2024, this is accordance with statistics from National Statistical Bulletin on Development of Education from the Ministry of Education in China.

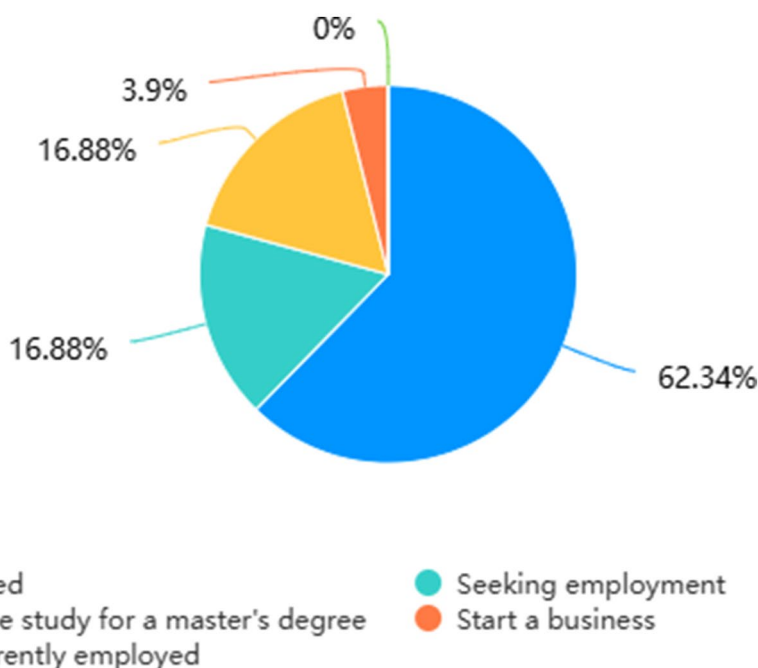


FIGURE 1
Percentage of student employment status for class of 2025.

8.2 Utilizing social capital from managers, mentors, friends, classmates, and alumni

In the research site university, the professional mentors and class teachers intentionally utilize networks of human resources managers of university-enterprise cooperation, the human resources management alumni, and personal friends of human resources manager that provided instrumental support to student employment. The professional mentors organized a WeChat group for students waiting for employment and provide recruitment information from the head of the Human Resources Management department, personal networks, alumni, and university-enterprise cooperation. The Department of Human Resources Management, the School of Economics and Management, and the research site university also held both online and offline campus career fairs for junior and senior students.

Since working as a professional mentor, the participant teacher 1 won the title of 'Advanced Individual in Employment' for two consecutive years. The professional mentors' duty ranged from student employment and career planning to occupational guidance. During the second semester of junior year, students receive the professional mentor's guidance on resume writing. After finishing junior, students would conduct the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) to understand their temperament and character. During the interview, participant student 1 intentionally utilized the results of the MBTI to analyze his character as an E-person, which means extrovert character. Based on the results of the MBTI, the professional mentors provide position description and students select positions they are interested in.

Before students enter their senior year for internship, the professional mentors would find the internship institutions for the students and prepare for department-level, school-level, and

university-level career fairs to let students and the enterprises for mutual selection. Then during the first semester of senior year, the professional mentors would conduct graduation appraisal, grade students' work report, thus finishing students' 16 weeks of graduation fieldwork which takes up to 6 credits. Finally, in the second semester of senior year, students would take fieldwork for 4 weeks. Students could choose to continue with the previous internship or change to another position, however, the aim of this fieldwork is to confirm student's position of employment. During students' senior year, along with conducting internships, they also need to finish their bachelor's thesis to get their diploma and certificate of graduation. The participant teacher 1 shared that some students' ideas about their dream jobs might change during the internship process, so the professional mentor needs to classify the students based on their job-seeking intention.

The research site university has an employment and entrepreneurship guidance center which provides professional elective courses for students to choose. The center invites on-campus and off-campus professionals who have rich backgrounds and practical experiences in their fields to lecture the course. The WeChat official account of the research site University Employment and Entrepreneurship Guidance Center serves as an information hub for 31 WeChat official accounts and websites in the society to expand students' employment resources. Students majoring in Human Resources Management receive social capital from professional mentors, class teachers, heads of the department, personal networks, alumni, university-enterprise cooperation, employment and entrepreneurship guidance centers, as well as online and offline campus career fairs for student employment.

When asked 'How have your friends or classmates helped you with your internship or employment?', student 1 shared that:

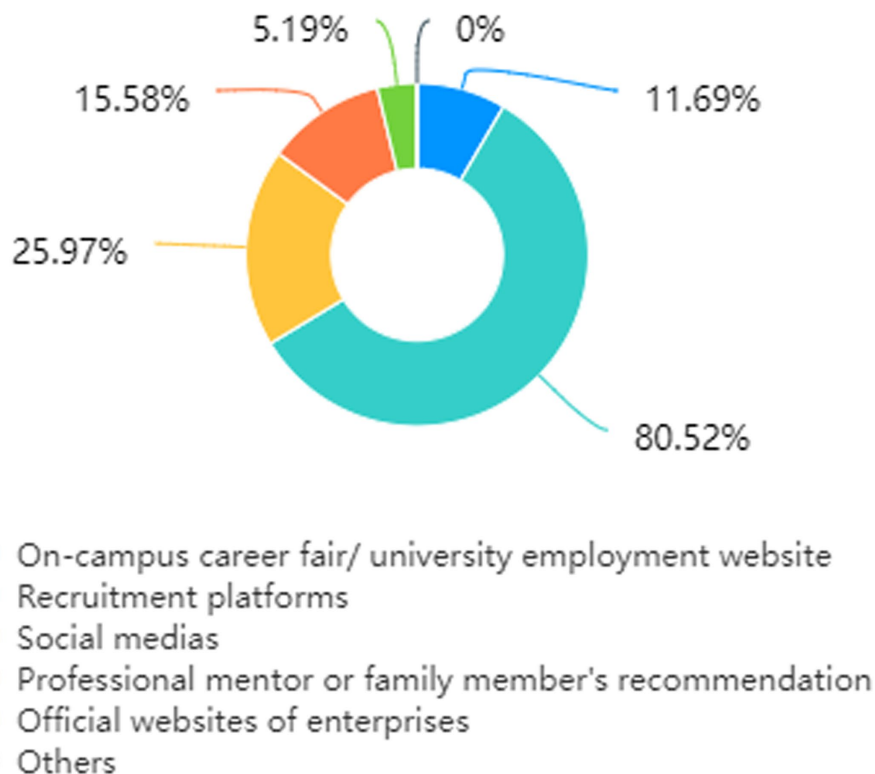


FIGURE 2
Percentage of students' means of seeking employment.

When I was looking for an internship, a classmate of the next class assisted me in finding this internship, and then signed a contract with the company from his family. Our dormitory is also quite united as a whole, for example, one of our classmates did not find a job until last December. Then another classmate of mine and I recommended a few recruitment links to him, and now he successfully found a company.

Through this case, it can be seen that student 1 intentionally utilized social capital from his classmates in finding an internship. The students in the dormitory united as a community to provide social capital to each other in successful employment. Participant teacher 3 also shared the importance of peer support in seeking employment. Since students' classmates and peers are actively seeking job positions, those positive energy and information would inspire other students during the job seeking process.

Students from the survey also reported influence of peers and classmates for their employment. Among the students participated in the survey, 60 students received psychological support and comfort of employment from their peers, 22 students obtained suggestions for employment from their peers, 11 students shared recruitment information with their peers, and 9 students prepared for the interviews together with their peers (see Figure 3).

Student 3 also shared how her friends off campus synchronized hiring information with each other. For example, student 3 would tell some development opportunities to friends off campus and they would tell her activities in their organizations to gain career development. In addition, when one of her classmate got

internship at company A and another classmate got internship at company B, she would exchange information with her classmates about salary and job responsibilities to get an overall judgment to the position.

8.3 Cultural capital from professional mentors and the university

During the student interview, the researchers asked "In the process of guidance, what activities and measures are organized at the college and school level to help students in their employment?," student 7 reported that mentors at the research site university are very professional and friendly to the students. They would actively solve problems and answer questions for the students, especially related to student employment, the university also makes great efforts in designing on-campus career fairs and holding some informal discussion meetings to help with student employment.

Student 1 appreciated the research site university in designing general curriculum and professional courses since the first year in the university. Since students might not be clear about each major, the university offers different divisions for students during sophomore year. Professional mentors serve as the helpers to answer questions related to career development, curriculum design, and many other questions about each major and division.

Meanwhile, he shared that if students want to study after class, each classroom building sets up study rooms and the library opens 7 days a week. The research site university offers both facilities and

TABLE 3 Human resources management major student employment channels from 2020 to 2024.

Channels	2020		2021		2022		2023		2024	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Campus career fair (school recommendation)	17	13.71%	35	36.08%	15	21.13%	17	11%	33	30%
Career fair in the society	23	18.55%	23	23.71%	4	5.63%	33	21%	26	23.64%
Internet of Beijing college graduates	2	1.61%	3	3.09%	0	0%	5	3%	1	0.91%
Other recruitment websites	18	14.52%	7	7.22%	8	11.27%	16	10%	6	5.45%
Intermediary organ	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	1%	0	0
Other channels	49	39.52%	27	27.84%	38	53.52%	67	42%	22	20%
Family					24	33.8%				
Alumni					6	8.45%				
Classmate					8	11.27%				
Other*	15	12.10%	2	2%	6	8.45%	21	13%	22	20%
Total	124	100%	97	100%	71	100%	160	100%	110	100%

*Other refers to students who take the headcount examination or the public servant examination, students who continue their study for a master's degree in China or abroad, as well as students who start a business by themselves or choose a liberal profession.

TABLE 4 Statistics of employment industries from 2020–2024.

Industries	2020		2021		2022		2023		2024	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Leasing and business service	25	20%	18	19%	10	14%	24	15%	20	18.18%
Manufacturing industry	2	2%	0	0%	1	1%	6	4%	6	5.45%
Hotel and catering sector	1	1%	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%	4	3.64%
Information transmission, software and information technology services	13	10%	19	20%	6	8%	14	9%	4	3.64%
Culture, sports, and entertainment	7	6%	3	3%	4	6%	6	4%	10	9.09%
Health and social work	3	2%	8	8%	1	1%	3	2%	2	1.82%
Water, environment, and utilities management	1	1%	3	3%	2	3%	0	0%	0	0.00%
Wholesales and retail trade	8	6%	4	4%	5	7%	7	4%	25	22.73%
Scientific research and technology service	6	5%	3	3%	14	20%	29	18%	3	2.72%
Agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, and fishery	2	2%	0	0%	1	1%	5	3%	1	0.91%
Financial industry	6	5%	2	2%	3	4%	4	3%	5	4.55%
Resident service, repairs, and other services	3	2%	5	5%	1	1%	2	1%	6	5.45%
Electrical, thermal, gas and water production, and supply industries	2	2%	1	1%	1	1%	3	2%	0	0.00%
Real estate	4	3%	1	1%	1	1%	7	4%	0	0.00%
Public administration, social security, and social organization	8	6%	3	3%	1	1%	15	9%	8	7.27%
Construction	3	2%	1	1%	5	7%	8	5%	1	0.91%
Transportation, warehousing, and postal services	3	2%	3	3%	0	0%	6	4%	1	0.91%
Education	11	9%	7	7%	3	4%	4	3%	4	3.64%
Other	16	13%	15	15%	12	17%	17	11%	10	9.09%
Total	124	100.00%	97	100.00%	71	100.00%	160	100.00%	110	100.00%

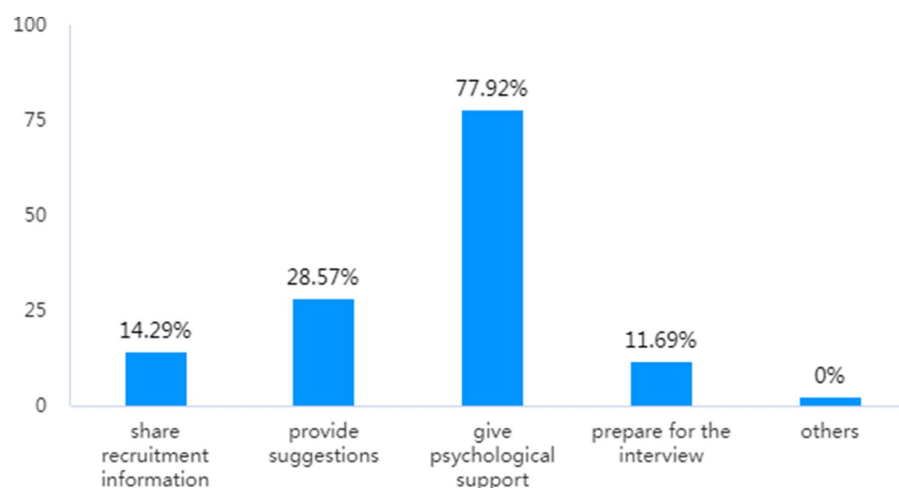


FIGURE 3
Percentage of types of support from their peers.

capabilities to the students. Student 3 also shared her opinion on how the research site university empowers her in many different aspects:

First, the university is a place for study. Therefore, most importantly, our university provides a special platform for us to deeply explore this social science field. For example, my field is Human Resource Management major, therefore the university would systematically teach us about six modules of human resource management, such as how to dig deeper in the module of recruitment, remuneration, a series of training, and many other aspects. Secondly, university teaches us how to deal with many things from academic thinking and critical thinking to independent thinking. Thirdly, university teaches us the ability of interpersonal communication, since university is a platform to support us in getting in touch with the social context.

In the field of employment, student 3 mentioned how the university holds some career planning courses at fixed intervals, for example, during sophomore students would get chances to take a career development test from question bank to understand their suitable career and field. Meanwhile, the university also provides platforms if students choose to continue their study for a master's degree abroad or at home. She also mentioned how the university library provided literature resources for students to log into academic databases such as the China National Knowledge Infrastructure database.

Similarly, student 4 shared that since the Human Resources major has its training building, students can learn and practice leaderless group discussion, mock interviews, and some other practices such as employment interviews from professional mentors and mentors in this major. In addition, student 4 also talked about how the university would invite guest speakers and lecturers from companies to share cases with the students. From students' sharing, it can be seen that the research site university and mentors provide all kinds of resources to help students with knowledge, platforms, and resources for grasping professional knowledge in the field of human resource management.

8.4 Navigational capital in utilizing various resources

Student 1 shared that he tried many ways to be employed, such as campus career fair, the BOSS direct employment website, the WeChat official account of the research site university employment and entrepreneurship guidance center, the WeChat official account of Beijing university students employment and entrepreneurship guidance center, and many other WeChat official account of some enterprises to actively acquire recruitment information. During the process of job search, he frankly shared how he navigated himself into understanding what are the five social insurance and one housing fund:

In terms of employment guidance, for example, when should we sign this agreement, or what should we pay attention to this practical content, because a lot of things still need to know until the students go to work, it is felt that some students may step on the pit. I think universities can talk more with students about this.

Student 1 talked about how he navigated himself with understanding the basic concept of five social insurance and one housing fund. He suggested that adding this to the university career guidance curriculum might be helpful for future graduates.

Student 4 shared how she navigates her university life:

In fact, I did not have any goals at the beginning, so when I entered the university, I first participated in various activities to enrich myself, and then learned about all aspects of different things. Then, I also joined professional associations, including those related to human resources, after I completed my major and had my own goals. Then I will actively help the mentors prepare for it and participate in it myself. In this way, I may be able to get some more cutting-edge development content in the industry, which will also help me achieve my follow-up work or goal faster.

Student 4 intentionally tried different things during the university, although she was aimless at first, her active participation helped her

in navigating through different associations and finally find her work interest.

Although most students navigate themselves during the job search, they also meet some difficulties during the process, student 5 shared that because of the Covid-19 pandemic and the courses during senior year, he could find enough time for an internship, which led to a lack of experience when he wants to find a job in the career fair. Most companies want an intern to work for at least 3 days a week for at least 3 months, however, this was impossible given the courses he has to take during senior year. He suggested that the course design should consider the practical needs of students and internship requirements.

During the interview, participant teacher 2 shared how she helped with navigating the students through finding their career goals:

Some students still have insufficient understanding of the current situation of employment and the social status of the labor market. They are overly optimistic and always hope to find some so-called ideal occupations and such ideal conditions.

Participant teacher 2 thinks that the main thing is to guide students to face reality and eliminate their psychological concerns and sense of resistance. Only in this way can we help students get employment effectively.

8.5 Clear career planning and aspiration for employment success

For student 3, aspirational capital played an important role in her employment and career planning. She is the most determined girl among the seven participants and has won many awards at school such as the 8th Human Resource University Union You Competition individual grand prize and team second prize at national finals, third prize of the 9th China Internet Plus Student Innovation and Entrepreneurship Competition in Beijing area, National College Student Career Planning Competition first prize in employment track at the university level, as well as university level outstanding internship. During the interview, she shared her thoughts about the future:

In school, I have been moving in the direction of recruitment, and in the process of real practice, I have been deeply plow in the recruitment direction. I have been working in the consultant position, and I have set an internship goal for myself, that is, I want to become a headhunting consultant in the future, and then make steady progress. Finally, I want to become a senior executive headhunting consultant with an annual salary of one million.

Student 3 has set up clear goals for her future career as a headhunting consultant. In her opinion, the position of headhunting consultant depends on your capability, the higher your capability is, the more money you can earn. Therefore, to achieve her goals, she made many efforts during her college time. Before winning the national prize, student 3 had been conducting an internship as a junior student in 2023. During the internship, she found that she liked this industry and wanted to dig deeper into this area. After that, she won more awards in Beijing and at the national level. She wrote those awards on her resume and publicized them to the company that she can take up the position.

In addition to internship experience and participation in competitions, student 3's bachelor thesis is also in the direction of the recruitment industry and recruiting methods. Under her thesis advisor's help, she synthesized information from a series of headhunting consultants in Beijing and conducted research on their capability construction, and finally won the award of outstanding thesis at the university. She intentionally combined course study, competition, graduation thesis, and internship experiences in the same occupation direction, and finally got successful employment in her dream job of being a recruiting consultant.

8.6 Both material and emotional support from familial capital

Student 3 particularly emphasized her family's support not only during her college years, but also since she grew up over the years, both emotionally and materially. She provided an example by recalling when she was in middle school and high school, her family would spend about 20,000 RMB per month on after-school tutorial classes to help her get better grades or learn more knowledge. When she finished the tutorial classes at 11:30 pm, she could always see her father waiting for her at the entrance, no matter winter or summer. Although her family is not rich in money, her parents would meet her demands by providing whatever she wants. They also spend money on cultivating her hobbies such as dancing, playing musical instruments, and painting. Student 3 shared 'I am so touched by how my parents are willing to spend everything to give me a better chance in the future.'

Although she did not get excellent marks on the college entrance examination, her parents are still willing to spend money on her tuition to support her study. She said that:

My parents still believe that I have the potential to perform well in the future. They always feel proud of the awards that I got. Never did they complain about how much money they had spent on me and that I only got admitted to this university. They never said things like this. What they said was only it does not matter, you can do better in the future.

She shared that sometimes when she felt stressed, her parents would comfort her with not to add too much pressure on yourself. When she got great awards, her parents would remind her not to be too proud, there are still better awards waiting for you. She always felt grateful for how her family stood behind her during these years. When it comes to internship and employment, since she lives far away from the company, her parents support her by renting a house close to the company to reduce her commuting time. Her parents encouraged her with words and felt satisfied that she found a job once graduated from college.

Student 3 gave an example of how her parents provided her with familial capital from emotional, educational, and occupational support. It is the continuous encouragement, expectation, and trust from her parents that made her finally achieve her career dream.

Meanwhile, students from the survey also reported family support for their employment ranging from financial support, interpersonal

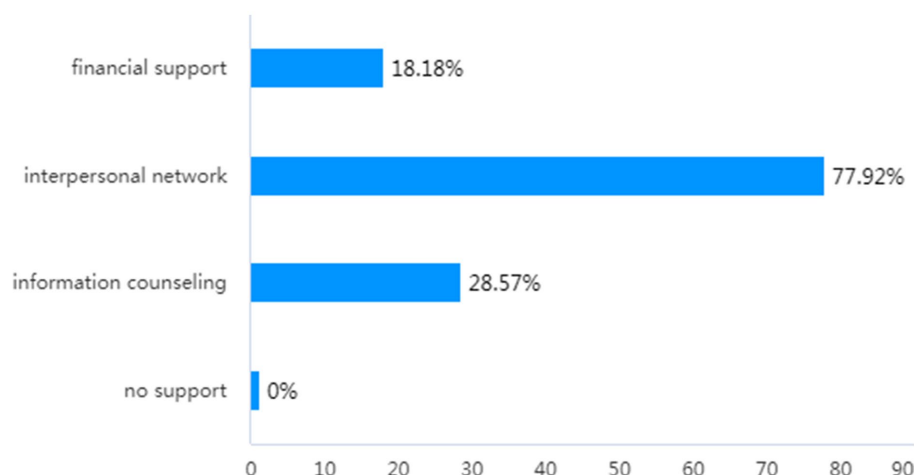


FIGURE 4
Percentage of students' types of family support.

network, and information counseling (see Figure 4). Among the 77 students participated in the survey, 60 students obtained interpersonal network from their family during the employment process, 22 students received information counseling from their family members, and 14 students got financial support from their families. It can be seen that students got both capital and social capital from their family members.

Moreover, participant teacher 4 also shared how the professional mentors collaborate with student parents through parent meeting and WeChat group to provide the students with psychological and material support for their employment. The family and university collaboration not only help students during their academic study and personal development, but also safeguard students' successful employment.

8.7 Resistance capital when encounter employment discrimination

When asked "Have you encountered unfairness in the job searching process? What did you do to overcome and defuse it?" student 1 shared that he felt there is not any good method to solve the problem of educational background discrimination. When he met this kind of discrimination, he simply changed another company to send his resume. He thinks that it depends on different companies, some companies use a bachelor educational background as the screening condition to screen out some candidates, for example, the company would specifically state that it only hires students who graduate from project 985, project 211 universities, or have a graduate degree. While other company such as [Huatu.com](https://www.huatu.com/) emphasizes more on candidate's capability, the company would let potential candidates conduct trial lectures to see their ability of expression, and then decide whether they could stay or not. Student 1 shared that:

My solution to this kind of phenomenon is to get the chance to do an internship at first, and leave alone its restrictions. Although the recruitment notice said it wants graduate students, my solution is to get into the company first to show your ability. After seeing your

ability, most of the time the company would give you a chance to be hired.

Similar to student 1, student 2 also mentioned that the interviewer would look at the university the candidates graduated from and potentially deny the student or believe that students who graduate from this university would perform less than students from other high-ranking universities. When encountering this phenomenon, student 2 shared that she would prove her ability through practice that she has not inferior to students from project 985 or project 211 universities. She also shared unfair treatment for her classmates during the internship process:

It is a company that has cooperation with the university. Our classmates went there for an internship, but the company did not sign a contract, and then dismissed those classmates after about half a month.

Student 2 explained that when this happened, the internship wasted students' precious time cost. She suggested that the university could enhance its communication with the company to ensure that students would not lose the internship opportunity because of some other reasons.

Student 3 shared her opinions about unfairness or inequity during job application such as unjust treatment because of appearance discrimination for one's height or weight, educational background discrimination for whether the student is graduated from key universities or first-tier universities, gender discrimination for some positions only want male instead of female, salary discrimination for little salary no matter how hard-working the employee is only since he or she is a new recruit, and some other potential discrimination. She shared that since she cannot change her alma mater in a short period, the only thing she can do is to get more awards, or better performance in the company to prove that she has a high ability to be competent for the job. However, she also stated it is necessary to strengthen the awareness of legal protection and understand the rights protected by legal law. When it is necessary she would use law as a tool to protect her legal rights.

9 Recommendations to job seeker students

First, choose the job you are passionate about. Participant student 4 works in the business sector in the largest human resources service enterprise in China. Her job duties include employee onboarding, offboarding, contract renewals, salary management, and daily employee relations management. When asked ‘What advice would you like to give to graduates to help them find better employment?’, she suggested that the job seeker students should choose the job they like first. Student 4 has been engaging in recruitment work for a year, in her opinion, the current job seeker students always have high expectations but lack pragmatism. Numerous students have sought her guidance on employment matters, her primary recommendation has consistently been to select a job that aligns with their interests. For some students, they would seek high-ranking state-owned enterprises or national enterprises. However, after some time, they realize these positions may not suit them and choose to leave office. Therefore, they should be clear about the position’s requirements and descriptions instead of submitting resumes aimlessly.

Secondly, planning your career ahead of time. Participate teacher 2 suggested that from the perspective of graduates, they should start thinking about employment in advance. They should not wait until they are about to graduate to consider the issue of employment. At least from the junior year, they should have a clear employment plan and even start some related operations. For instance, participating in professional competitions, accumulating practical experience in society, and engaging in internship in some companies related to one’s major, all those can enable students to get in touch with society earlier. At the same time, students can also enhance their motivation to think independently and devote themselves to work on their own. Since students spend too much time at school, they may have a gap with the society. Therefore, when choosing employment in the future, it will indeed cause some psychological disparity, which is also not conducive to employment.

Thirdly, approach your resume and interview preparation with seriousness and dedication. As an interviewer for over a year, participant student 4 noted that she has encountered candidates who failed to prepare adequately for interviews and provided minimal information on their resumes. Given that the research site university offers lectures and professional mentors to assist students in refining their resumes, participant student 4 expressed confidence in her interviewing abilities compared to students from other majors or institutions. Nevertheless, based on her observations, students’ proficiency in interview skills and resume writing varies significantly, as some may not attend these lectures or invest insufficient effort into preparing for interviews. Furthermore, drawing from her experience as an interviewer, student 4 emphasized that candidates must clearly articulate their professional skills and advantages on their resumes and be prepared to elaborate during interviews, rather than merely reciting information listed on their resumes.

Fourthly, extend the duration of the internship. If job-seeking students opt for internships lasting only one or two months, they may not accumulate sufficient experience. Companies typically do not invest time in teaching interns advanced knowledge or skills within such a short timeframe. As noted by Student 4, job-seeking students should first specify their desired position and develop a clear career plan. Since internships often provide pathways to full-time

employment or further development in the field, longer internships can offer more learning opportunities. Many positions explicitly state a preference for hiring fresh graduates, meaning students who have recently completed their college education. Consequently, if students allocate excessive time to multiple short-term internships, this time and effort may be considered a sunk cost. Moreover, recruiters might question the rationale behind frequent position changes. Human resource managers evaluate the stability of job seekers in their future careers, and candidates with inconsistent internship histories may be excluded from consideration as top candidates.

10 Implications of this study

This study provided some implications to policy-makers of student employment and universities from a global perspective. Policy-makers should actively promote collaboration between universities and enterprises to build connections and enhance students’ social capital. Enterprises could provide internship opportunities, participate in campus career fairs, and send practitioners with rich experience to universities to assist students in improving their employability. Meanwhile, the government should provide financial subsidies to graduates who remain unemployed after graduation to help them with transition and solve their practical problems. The Ministry of Education should also provide legal aid to job-seeking students to protect their rights during job seeking and empowering them to use legal frameworks as a protective mechanism in entering society.

Universities should customize their courses and guidance to align with students’ diverse developmental goals such as continuing for a master’s, getting employment locally, or studying abroad. The courses should enhance students’ practical skills to meet different enterprises’ employment demands, anticipate market demands for the major and avoid homogenous cultivation. The courses should aim to solve students’ practical problems and provide basic information such as explaining the five social insurance and one housing fund. Meanwhile, for senior students, the university should allocate sufficient out-of-class time for students to do internships. This will ensure that students gain relevant experience when entering into the job market. Where feasible, the career guidance center and professional mentor should provide practical and timely help to students including career planning, sending recruitment information from enterprises, holding mock interviews, guiding resume writing, organizing campus career fair, and connecting students to alumni in different enterprises. After introducing students with the internship, professional mentors should follow up with the process and protect students’ rights during the internship. Universities can also collaborate with students’ families to provide both psychological and material support to the job seeking students.

11 Conclusion

The general slowdown in the global economic situation and the expansion of higher education have resulted in rising unemployment rates among college graduates across the globe. To examine the current employment landscape for college students, this study applied document analysis and one-to-one interviews to analyze college

student employment by taking a group of Human Resource Management majors at a university in Beijing as an example. Meanwhile, the researchers collected surveys from 77 students of class of 2025 at the research site university to understand the current employment situation. Research findings suggest that college students leveraged social capital from human resource managers, mentors, friends, classmates, and alumni. The college students set up clear career planning and aspiration for employment success, they strategically utilized navigational capital and aspirational capital in job searching, obtained familial capital from family members, and applied resistance capital when facing inequity. This study provided recommendations to job seeker students and implications to university administrators and policy-makers of this issue.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

Ethical approval was not required for the studies involving humans because the research institution where the study was conducted does not have an ethical committee. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study. Written informed consent was obtained from the individual(s) for the publication of any potentially identifiable images or data included in this article.

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