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# BMJ Open

## Physician Mental Workload Scale in China: Development and Psychometric Evaluation

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Complete List of Authors:	<p>Lu, Chuntao; Huazhong University of Science and Technology Tongji Medical College, School of Medicine and Health Management</p> <p>Hu, Yinhan; Huazhong University of Science and Technology Tongji Medical College, School of Medicine and Health Management</p> <p>Fu, Qiang; Saint Louis University, College for Public Health and Social Justice, Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics</p> <p>Governor, Samuel ; Saint Louis University, College for Public Health and Social Justice, Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics</p> <p>Wang, Liuming; Huazhong University of Science and Technology Tongji Medical College, Tongji Hospital</p> <p>Deng, Lu; Huazhong University of Science and Technology Tongji Medical College, School of Medicine and Health Management</p> <p>Xie, Jinzhu; Huazhong University of Science and Technology Tongji Medical College, School of Medicine and Health Management</p>
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Physician Mental Workload Scale in China: Development and Psychometric Evaluation

Corresponding author:

Yinhuan Hu

Address: No.13 Hangkong Rd., Wuhan, Hubei 430030, P.R. China

Email: [hyh288@hotmail.com](mailto:hyh288@hotmail.com)

Telephone number: 13554285879

Co-author:

**Chuntao Lu:** School of Medicine and Health Management, Tongji Medical College, Huazhong University of Science and Technology, No.13 Hangkong Rd., Wuhan, Hubei 430030, P.R. China

**Yinhuan Hu:** School of Medicine and Health Management, Tongji Medical College, Huazhong University of Science and Technology, No.13 Hangkong Rd., Wuhan, Hubei 430030, P.R. China

**Qiang Fu:** Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, College for Public Health and Social Justice, Saint Louis University, Missouri, MO, United States

**Samuel Governor:** Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, College for Public Health and Social Justice, Saint Louis University, Missouri, MO, United States

**Liuming Wang:** Tongji Hospital, Tongji Medical College of Huazhong University of Science and Technology, No.1095 Jiefang Rd., Wuhan, Hubei 430030, P.R. China

1  
2  
3  
4 **Lu Deng** : School of Medicine and Health Management, Tongji Medical College,  
5  
6 Huazhong University of Science and Technology, No.13 Hangkong Rd.,Wuhan, Hubei  
7  
8  
9 430030, P.R. China  
10

11 **Jinzhui Xie**: The Third People's Hospital of Hubei Province, No.26 Zhongshan Rd.,  
12  
13  
14 Wuhan, Hubei 430030, P.R. China.  
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## Physician Mental Workload Scale in China: Development and Psychometric Evaluation

### Abstract

**Objective:** The purpose of our study is to develop and perform reliability and validity assessments of mental workload scale for physicians in China.

**Design:** Three phases, involving 385 physicians from different-level of comprehensive public hospitals in China, were conducted in this research to develop this instrument. In the first phase, an initial item pool was developed through systematic literature review. The second phase consisted of two rounds of Delphi expert consultations and a pilot survey. The third phase tested psychometric properties of the instrument, including reliability and validity.

**Setting:** Public hospitals in China

**Participants:** 385 physicians from different-level of comprehensive public hospitals in China took part in this survey in 2018.

**Primary and secondary outcome measures:** Cronbach's alpha was used to test the reliability of the scale. Content validity index, correlation coefficient analysis, exploratory factor analysis, and confirmatory factor analysis were conducted to test validity of the scale.

**Results:** Six dimensions (mental demand, physical demand, temporal demand, perceived risk, frustration level and performance) and twelve items were identified in the instrument. For reliability, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for the whole scale was 0.81. For validity, the corrected item-content validity index of each item ranged from 0.85-1 and correlation coefficients between dimensions and total scores had a range of 0.37-0.72.

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4 The results of confirmatory factor analysis showed that the goodness of fit of the scale  
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6 was reasonable. Thus, the scale had good reliability and validity.  
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9 **Conclusion:** The instrument showed acceptable psychometric properties and can be a  
10  
11 useful instrument for diagnosing mental workload of physicians.  
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14 **Keywords:** Physician; Mental Health; Workload; Survey and Questionnaires; Hospitals,  
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16 Public  
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## 22 **Article Summary**

### 23 **Strengths and limitations of this study**

24  
25 This is the first study to develop a measurement about physician mental workload  
26  
27 from subjective perspective in China.  
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30 The findings of this study have good validity and reliability.  
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33 There is potential reporting bias in the self-reported measurements of the workload  
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35 among physicians.  
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38 There was no assessment of re-test reliability because of web-based survey method.  
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41 There existed a selection bias due to all respondents voluntarily rather than randomly  
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43 took part in the survey.  
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## Introduction

Internationally, there has been a focus on the workload that physicians have often to face and on the physical and mental health[1]. Physician health is highly associated with workload[2]. Excessive workload impacts physician's health[3,4]and increases the risk of work-related musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs)[5,6]. Exposure to workload has been shown to be related to adverse effects in medical errors[7] and adverse incidents[8]. Physician workload could be a negatively contributing factor to patients' perceived quality of care[9], and affects patient satisfaction[10] and safety[11,12]. It is possible that these stressors have reached a point where they pose a serious policy issue for the entire healthcare system[13]. Thus, unreasonable and overwhelming workload has adverse effects to physicians, patients and healthcare organizations[14].

Workload is thought to be multidimensional and multifaceted[15]. One aspect of workload includes the subjective psychological experiences of the human operator[16]. Mental workload has emerged as one of the most important occupational risk factors as well. Heavily mental workload can lead to serious health problems for workers (anxiety, burnout, cardiovascular diseases, digestive problems, etc.)[17], so as well to physicians, excessive mental workload can lead to inferior quality of care[18]. Currently, The European Pact for Mental Health and Welfare[19] has conducted mental workload assessments to promote physical and mental wellbeing.

Mental workload can be influenced by numerous factors that make a definitive

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4 measurement difficult[20]. Different methods have been proposed to assess mental  
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6 workload. Previous research has established a brief instrument with six items to  
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8 measure physician mental workload[21]. The most widely used instrument to  
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10 measure mental workload is NASA-Task Load Index (NASA-TLX) scale[22] which has  
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12 proven to be a sensitive, valid, and reliable instrument[23] and can be used in human  
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14 factors research[24]. The existing body of research on NASA-TLX suggests that it could  
15  
16 be used to measure nurse workload[25-27]. In the same vein, the Subjective Workload  
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18 Assessment Technique (SWAT) is a subjective rating technique with three dimensions  
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20 of time load, mental effort load, and psychological stress load, which is used to assess  
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22 mental workload as well[28]. It has been successfully applied in the mental workload  
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24 assessment of several aircraft multitask conditions, such as assessing the mental  
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26 workload of different systems of air defense[23]. Together these studies provide  
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28 important insights into workload measurement in health care management. However,  
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30 there is no specific instrument, to our knowledge, has been explored in physician  
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32 mental workload in China.  
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43 Physicians, some of the major providers of health services, taking more and more  
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45 responsibilities for patient care in Chinese health care management, have heavier  
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47 workload, worse physical health, more mental strain and more intense relationships  
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49 with patients[29]. Data from several studies suggest that most physicians' work more  
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51 than 10 hours in a day[30] to manage outpatients and inpatients, on average, a  
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53 physician in a tertiary hospital is responsible for 8.10 outpatients and 2.70 beds per  
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55 day[29]. However, they even have been abused, injured, and in extreme cases,  
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4 murdered by patients or their relatives in hospitals across China[31], which resulted  
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6 in extremely mental workload. Establishing the workload measurement system for  
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8 medical personnel has been fitted into Chinese Patient Safety Goals by Chinese  
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10 Hospital Association[32].  
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14 However, existing research about workload measurement instruments are  
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16 concentrated on work time and objective workload in China, whereas the mental  
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18 workload which is an indispensable problem has less relevant instrument in China. The  
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20 purpose of this paper is to develop a scientific mental workload instrument, which can  
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22 be used to measure or assess the actual mental workload of physicians in China.  
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## 31 **Methods**

### 32 **Study design**

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35 The instrument was developed in three phases. In the first phase, an initial item  
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37 pool was developed by integrating previous studies through systematic literature  
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39 review. The second phase consisted of two rounds of Delphi expert consultations and  
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41 a pilot survey in 2017. The third phase was testing the psychometric properties of the  
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43 instrument, including its reliability and validity, through a survey conducted in 2018 in  
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45 comprehensive public hospitals in China.  
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### 53 **Framework and items of generation and selection**

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58 Based on the framework of NASA-TLX and SWAT, we combined the status quo of  
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4 Chinese physicians' workload to determine the item pool. Six dimensions and fifteen  
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6 items were sent to 20 experts for consultation. After a two-round consultation, it was  
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8 suggested that we deleted four items, added a new item, and revised the description  
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10 of all the items. Finally, the pre-scale consisted of six dimensions (physical demand,  
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12 mental demand, temporal demand, effort, frustration level, and performance) and  
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14 twelve items with an evaluation from 0 to 100.  
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19 In the pre-survey analysis, a sample of 80 physicians was surveyed with a web-  
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21 based pre-scale during November and December 2017. Items were refined based on  
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23 the following indexes or methods: critical ratio (CR), coefficient of variation (CV),  
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25 correlation analysis[33], Cronbach's  $\alpha$ [34], exploratory factor analysis (EFA)[35].  
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30 If an item was eliminated by any of the above methods, then the item was  
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32 deleted or revised. Final scale consisted of six dimensions (mental demand, physical  
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34 demand, temporal demand, perceived risk, frustration level, and performance) and  
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36 twelve items (Table 1).  
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#### 40 41 **Data collection for testing validity and reliability of the scale** 42

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45 To test the validity and reliability of the developed scale, the samples size was 5-  
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47 10 times the size of the items, were considered suitable[36]. Data was collected from  
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49 the tertiary hospitals (valid sample size: 130), secondary hospitals (valid sample size:  
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51 124) and first-level hospitals (valid sample size: 131) from February 2018 to March  
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53 2018.  
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58 The scale included three parts. The first part of the scale was the principal twelve  
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4 items. The second part was used to collect the weights of each dimension. Every two  
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6 dimensions formed a pair, and the respondents selected which of the two dimensions  
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8 in a pair they considered to have contributed more to their workload. There were  
9  
10 fifteen pairs the respondents needed to select from, and the weights of each  
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12 dimension was equal to the number of times that dimension was selected divided by  
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17 fifteen. The third part was the individual information about the physicians.

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19 Items were scored from 0 to 100. Responses to the items are displayed in Table

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22 1. The average scores of all items for a corresponding dimension were multiplied by  
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24 the dimension weight to produce the dimension scores. The total scores were the sum  
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27 of all dimension scores.  
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30 Table 1 Dimensions and items of physician mental workload scale

Dimensions and items	Endpoints (0-100)
<b>Mental demand</b>	
A1 How much cognitive activity (e.g. sensation, perception, remembering, thinking, calculating, attention etc.) was required during your medical work?	Little (lighter workload) /much (heavier workload)
A2 How much emotion and feeling was required (e.g. empathy, sympathy, enthusiasm, negative emotion restraining etc.) during your medical work?	Little (lighter workload) /much (heavier workload)
A3 How hard did you have to work to overcome difficulties in accomplishing your medical work?	Low (lighter workload) /high (heavier workload)
<b>Physical demand</b>	
B1 How much physical activity was required (e.g. standing, sedentary, controlling, repetitive action etc.) in your medical work?	Little (lighter workload) /much (heavier workload)
B2 How intensive or precise was the physical activity during your medical work? (Was the work restful or laborious? Was your muscle relaxed or tense?)	Low (lighter workload) /high (heavier workload)
<b>Temporal demand</b>	
C1 How much time pressure did you feel due to the ratio of required time to available time in your medical work (Was the pace slow and leisurely or rapid and frantic)?	Little (lighter workload) /much (heavier workload)
C2 How frequent did you have to complete multiple tasks at	Low (lighter workload) /high (heavier workload)

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3 the same time (work overlap) in your medical work?

4 **Perceived risk**

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6 D1 How much risk did you perceive (e.g. professional infection, Little (lighter workload) /much (heavier workload)  
7 medical dispute , uncertainty of medical treatment etc.) in  
8 your medical work?  
9

10 **Frustration level**

11 E1 How depressed or frustrated did you feel in your medical Low (lighter workload) /high (heavier workload)  
12 work?  
13

14 E2 How anxious or irritated did you feel in your medical work? Low (lighter workload) /high (heavier workload)  
15

16 **Performance**

17 F1 How successful do you think you were in accomplishing the Low (heavier workload) /high (lighter workload)  
18 goals in your medical work?  
19

20 F2 How satisfied were you with the outcome in your medical Unsatisfactory(heavier workload) /satisfactory(light  
21 work?  
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25 **Statistical analysis**

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29 Descriptive statistics were used to show the characteristics of the samples. For  
30  
31 the reliability of the scale, Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the internal  
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33 consistency of each instrument component. Values of 0.70 or greater for Cronbach's  
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35 alpha were considered acceptable[34].  
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40 Content validity index (CVI) of each item was calculated to assess the accuracy of  
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42 the scale using the scores of 1-4. Experts were invited to assess the items with a scale  
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44 of 1 representing the item not relevant to corresponding dimension and 4  
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46 representing the item closely relevant to corresponding dimension. Corrected item-  
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48 content validity index (I-CVI) and average scale-content validity index (S-CVI/Ave)  
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50 were calculated. Corrected I-CVI of 0.78 or greater and S-CVI/Ave of 0.90 or greater  
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52 were considered acceptable[37].  
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58 The test of construct validity was tested by correlation coefficient method,  
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4 Exploratory Factor Analysis and Confirmatory Factor Analysis. Items whose values for  
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6 item-total correlation and dimension-total correlation below 0.40 were revised or  
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8 removed from the scale. A Bartlett's test of sphericity scores lower than 0.05 and a  
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10 Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy higher than 0.70 and closer  
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12 to 1 were considered appropriate for factor analysis[38]. Exploratory Factor Analysis  
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14 and Confirmatory Factor Analysis was used to further explore and confirm the  
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16 structure of the scale.  
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22 For the Confirmatory Factor Analysis, the criterion of model fit indices were listed  
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24 as follows:  $\chi^2/df < 3$ ; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)  $< 0.05$ ; root  
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26 of mean square residual (RMR) $< 0.05$ ; goodness of fit (GFI)  $> 0.90$ , comparative fit index  
27  
28 (CFI) $> 0.90$ , Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) $> 0.90$ [39]. Statistical analyses were performed  
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30 with SPSS V. 21 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA) and AMOS V.17 (IBM Corp., Armonk,  
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32 NY, USA).  
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### 39 **Participants and public involvement**

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42 We used a reliable and widely web-based survey ([www.wjx.cn](http://www.wjx.cn)) in the form of  
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44 quick-response code to survey physicians through sending the code to physician  
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46 communication groups of each hospital. Participants were voluntarily to take part in  
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48 this survey, before participating in the study, informed consent was provided to them.  
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## Results

### Sample characteristics

396 questionnaires were received and 11 questionnaires were excluded due to incomplete demographic information. The response rate was 97.2% (385/396). There were no issues of floor or ceiling effects as questions to every item were responded as required in the form of quick-response code. Characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Respondents' characteristic of samples

Variable	Valid sample	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	200	51.95
Female	185	48.05
<b>Age</b>		
<45	258	67.01
45-55	121	31.43
>55	6	1.56
<b>Marriage status</b>		
Single	47	12.21
Married	329	85.45
Divorced/widowed	9	2.34
<b>Educational level</b>		
PhD degree	36	9.35
Master degree	48	12.47
Undergraduate	184	47.79
Junior college and below	117	30.39
<b>Professional title</b>		
Senior	83	21.56
Middle	146	37.92
Junior	156	40.52
<b>Work years in his/her institutions (year)</b>		
1-5	122	31.69
6-10	91	23.64
11-15	58	15.06

Variable	Valid sample	Percentage (%)
>16	114	29.61
<b>Hospital level</b>		
Tertiary hospitals	130	33.77
Secondary hospitals	124	32.21
First-level hospitals	131	34.02
<b>Work hours per week</b>		
<=40	73	18.96
41-60	152	39.48
>60	160	41.56
<b>Number of daily service outpatients</b>		
<20	135	35.06
20-50	171	44.42
>50	79	20.52
<b>Self-rated health status</b>		
Poor	65	16.89
Fair	242	62.86
Good	78	20.25

### Reliability of physician mental workload scale

Each of the six components demonstrated at least satisfactory internal consistency higher than 0.70, with Cronbach's  $\alpha$  in the range of 0.70-0.90. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for the whole scale was up to 0.81, greater than 0.80, indicating that the scale has a good reliability.

### Validity of physician mental workload scale

The corrected I-CVI of each item ranged from 0.85-1 (Table 3), which is higher than 0.78. The CVI/Ave was 0.96, which is higher than 0.90. All of these showed a good content validity of the scale.

The correlation matrix between items and total scores was inspected to confirm the convergent validity, which was indicated by reasonable coefficients of 0.40 and

above, except for F1 and F2 (Table 3). Calculated correlation coefficients between dimensions and total scores had a range of 0.37-0.72, which was an additional index that showed that dimensions and total scores have a good convergent validity. Also, the correlation coefficients among the dimensions were lower than the correlation coefficients between the dimension-total scores, which indicated that the scale has a good discriminant validity (Table 4).

Table 3 Content validity and correlation coefficient of item-total scores of the scale

Items	Corrected I-CVI	Item-total correlations
Cognitive activity	1	0.57
Emotion and feeling	0.85	0.57
Overcoming difficulties	0.85	0.59
Physical activity	1	0.57
Intensity of physical activity	1	0.65
Time pressure	1	0.69
Multiple task	0.85	0.69
Risk	1	0.64
Depressed or frustrated	1	0.75
Anxious or irritated	1	0.75
Successful	1	0.33*
Satisfied	1	0.31*

\*item-total scores were below than 0.4

Table 4 Correlation coefficient matrix between dimensions and total scores of the scale

Dimensions	Mental demand	Physical demand	Temporal demand	Perceived risk	Frustration Level	Performance	Total scores
Mental demand	1						
Physical demand	0.43	1					
Temporal demand	0.52	0.47	1				
Perceived risk	0.46	0.38	0.44	1			



Frustration level	0.40	0.36	0.54	0.51	1		
Performance	0.09	0.05	0.01	0.05	0.13	1	
Total scores	0.61	0.52	0.68	0.68	0.72	0.37	1

### Exploratory factor analysis of physician mental workload scale

The KMO sample adequacy measurement was 0.81, which was higher than the recommended value of 0.70, and the Bartlett's test of sphericity with Chi square value 1950.70 and  $p < 0.000$ . Thus, the data were suitable for factor analysis. Considering experts' suggestion, we select 6 principal components and the six-dimensional model explained 81.88% of total variance (Table 5).

The factor "mental demand" was developed from 3 items that asked for feeling or memory requirement, emotional requirement, and the effort input to overcome difficulties, with the factor loading in the range of 0.74-0.81. The factor "physical demand" consisted of 2 items that related to strength requirement and the intensity of work time with a factor loading in the range of 0.84-0.90. The factor "temporal demand" constituted 2 items that asked about the ratio of required time to available time and frequency of completing multiple tasks, with the factor loading in the range of 0.77-0.82.

The factor "perceived risk" included only 1 item that explained the perception of risk in conducting tasks (such as medical dispute and risk of being infectious) with a factor loading of 0.84. The factor "frustration level" consisted of 2 items that asked

about anxiety and level of depression or frustration, and the factor loading was in the range of 0.86-0.88. There were 2 items in the “performance demand” factor, which related to the sense of achievement and job satisfaction regarding work outcome, with the factor loading in the range of 0.85-0.90.

Table 5 Factor loadings for the rotated component matrix: varimax rotated components

Items	Components					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
A2	0.81					
A1	0.76					
A3	0.74					
E1		0.88				
E2		0.86				
B1			0.90			
B2			0.84			
C1				0.82		
C2				0.77		
F1					0.90	
F2					0.85	
D1						0.84

### Confirmatory factor analysis of physician workload scale

The six-factor model obtained after Exploratory Factor Analysis was tested by Confirmatory Factor Analysis using maximum likelihood estimation method. The goodness-of-fit model was listed as follows:  $\chi^2/df=1.84$ , RMR= 0.04, and GFI=0.97, CFI=0.98, TLI=0.97, RMSEA=0.05. Referring to the criterion listed above, the model was a good fit for the data.

## Discussion

The purpose of this study is to develop and explore the validity and reliability of mental workload scale for physicians. According to the results of the tests, the scale is reliable and valid, hence, it is considered as an effective instrument for assessing physician mental workload in Chinese comprehensive public hospitals. Results show a six-dimensional model which includes aspects related to mental demand, physical demand, temporal demand, perceived risk, frustration level and performance. Perceived risk and temporal demand are especially distinctive for Chinese physician mental workload.

Perceived risk, which is a different dimension and not included in framework of NASA-TLX and SWAT, is highly associated with physician mental workload in China. Medical practice is a special but a high-risk behavior because physicians do not only save and heal people, but also they put themselves at a risk of being infectious. Also in China, there tends to be an estranged relationship between physicians and patients which puts physicians at a dangerous risk of being assaulted in their line of work[40]. For instance, in recent years, many doctors have been assaulted, seriously injured and even murdered by patients or visitors in China. According to the statistics, 96% of medical staff have been abused or injured in 2012[41]. Moreover, the reports of these incidents by mass media have further exacerbated the conflict between doctors and patients. The physician-patient relationship is becoming more and more fragile and has reached an unprecedented poor level in China[42]. Without exaggeration, some physicians even wear helmet in the hospitals in Guangdong Province, which reflects

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4 that physicians feel unsafe and have suffered from heavy psychological workloads  
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6 during their work.  
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9 In China, the gap between healthcare demand and supply (thus doctor-patient  
10 ratio) in China has caused physicians in the secondary and tertiary hospital settings to  
11 become overworked[43]. Few physicians in tertiary hospitals can complete their  
12 work in regular 8 hours. Research has reported that physicians may feel stressed when  
13 poor scheduling leaves them pressed for time[44]. Chinese physicians play various  
14 roles during their work and they always need to work overtime, even though they  
15 conduct more than one task at the same time[43]. According to the White Paper on  
16 the Practice of Medicine by Chinese Physicians by the Chinese Medical Association in  
17 2014, 32.7% of doctors had an average workweek over 60 hours[45]. High task  
18 demands require plenty of time, and evoke high mental effort and heavy workload for  
19 physicians[46]. Mental workload encompasses the subjective experience of a given  
20 task load[47], the higher the task load, the higher the mental workload[48].  
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40 Consistent with previous research on NASA-TLX[49], performance dimension  
41 shows a limited practical relevance since it is influenced by variations in physical load.  
42 In our study, the item-total scores of the two items in the dimension of performance  
43 were near to 0.4, and perhaps, would have been relevant in a reverse scoring. Other  
44 research reported that subjective assessments of mental workload may not provide  
45 accurate estimation of the performance dimension[17]. Considering this information,  
46 we retain the two items but revised their description.  
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58 Although we have attempted an accurate examination of the measurement  
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4 properties of the physician mental workload scale, there were still some limitations  
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6 that merit discussions. One of the limitations was potential reporting bias in the self-  
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8 reported measurements of the workload among physicians. Secondly, we could not  
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10 conduct a re-test reliability because we used a web-based survey method. Thirdly, all  
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12 respondents voluntarily decided to take part in the survey. This means physicians who  
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14 were overburdened at the time of the survey may not have time to take part in the  
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16 survey, resulting in a selection bias.  
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22 Notwithstanding these limitations, creating new scale items from a subjective  
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24 perspective is of paramount importance in investigating Chinese physician's workload.  
25  
26 Physician mental workload scale has acceptable preliminary psychometric properties  
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28 with six dimensions and twelve items. The use of physician mental workload scale can  
29  
30 help us to find the main stressors in physician mental workload and to implement  
31  
32 targeted optimization strategies to mitigate these stressors in an effort to ameliorate  
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34 the physical and mental health of physicians. This, consequently, will help us to  
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36 improve the quality and efficiency of healthcare delivery in hospital settings.  
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### 43 **Abbreviations**

44  
45 CVI: Content Validity Index;  
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48 RMR: Root of Mean Square Residual; GFI= Good of Fitness Index; CFI= Comparative Fit  
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50 Index; TLI=Tucker-Lewis index; CR= Critical Ratio; CV=Coefficient of Variation;  
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53 NASA-TLX=NASA- Task Load Index; SWAT= Subjective Workload Assessment  
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55 Technique;  
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57  
58 EMRs= Electronic Medical Records  
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17  
18 YH obtained funding; CL, JX and LD took part in investigation; LW and LD were involved  
19  
20 in data cleaning; CL wrote original draft; SG and QF contributed to the interpretation  
21  
22 of the results and critical revision of the manuscript; All authors have read and  
23  
24 approved the final manuscript.  
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29 **Competing interests:** We have read and understood BMJ policy on declaration of  
30  
31 interests and declare that we have no competing interests.  
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35 **Patient consent:** Not required.  
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38 **Data sharing:** The datasets used and/or analyzed during the current study are  
39  
40 available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.  
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# Reporting checklist for cross sectional study.

Based on the STROBE cross sectional guidelines.

## Instructions to authors

Complete this checklist by entering the page numbers from your manuscript where readers will find each of the items listed below.

Your article may not currently address all the items on the checklist. Please modify your text to include the missing information. If you are certain that an item does not apply, please write "n/a" and provide a short explanation.

Upload your completed checklist as an extra file when you submit to a journal.

In your methods section, say that you used the STROBE cross sectional reporting guidelines, and cite them as:

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		Reporting Item	Page Number
Title	#1a	Indicate the study's design with a commonly used term in the title or the abstract	1
Abstract	#1b	Provide in the abstract an informative and balanced summary of what was done and what was found	2
Background / rationale	#2	Explain the scientific background and rationale for the investigation being reported	3-4
Objectives	#3	State specific objectives, including any prespecified hypotheses	5
Study design	#4	Present key elements of study design early in the paper	5
Setting	#5	Describe the setting, locations, and relevant dates, including periods of recruitment, exposure, follow-up, and data collection	5
Eligibility criteria	#6a	Give the eligibility criteria, and the sources and methods of selection of participants.	9

1		#7	Clearly define all outcomes, exposures, predictors, potential	8-9
2			confounders, and effect modifiers. Give diagnostic criteria, if	
3			applicable	
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6	Data sources /	#8	For each variable of interest give sources of data and details of	n/a
7	measurement		methods of assessment (measurement). Describe	
8			comparability of assessment methods if there is more than one	
9			group. Give information separately for for exposed and	
10			unexposed groups if applicable.	
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14	Bias	#9	Describe any efforts to address potential sources of bias	17
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17	Study size	#10	Explain how the study size was arrived at	9
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19	Quantitative	#11	Explain how quantitative variables were handled in the	n/a
20	variables		analyses. If applicable, describe which groupings were chosen,	
21			and why	
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24	Statistical	#12a	Describe all statistical methods, including those used to control	8-9
25	methods		for confounding	
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28		#12b	Describe any methods used to examine subgroups and	n/a
29			interactions	
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32		#12c	Explain how missing data were addressed	9
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35		#12d	If applicable, describe analytical methods taking account of	8-9
36			sampling strategy	
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39		#12e	Describe any sensitivity analyses	n/a
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41	Participants	#13a	Report numbers of individuals at each stage of study—eg	5-6
42			numbers potentially eligible, examined for eligibility, confirmed	
43			eligible, included in the study, completing follow-up, and	
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45			unexposed groups if applicable.	
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49		#13b	Give reasons for non-participation at each stage	n/a
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52		#13c	Consider use of a flow diagram	n/a
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54	Descriptive data	#14a	Give characteristics of study participants (eg demographic,	9
55			clinical, social) and information on exposures and potential	
56			confounders. Give information separately for exposed and	
57			unexposed groups if applicable.	
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1		#14b	Indicate number of participants with missing data for each	9
2			variable of interest	
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5	Outcome data	#15	Report numbers of outcome events or summary measures.	11-14
6			Give information separately for exposed and unexposed	
7			groups if applicable.	
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10	Main results	#16a	Give unadjusted estimates and, if applicable, confounder-	n/a
11			adjusted estimates and their precision (eg, 95% confidence	
12			interval). Make clear which confounders were adjusted for and	
13			why they were included	
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17		#16b	Report category boundaries when continuous variables were	n/a
18			categorized	
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21		#16c	If relevant, consider translating estimates of relative risk into	n/a
22			absolute risk for a meaningful time period	
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24	Other analyses	#17	Report other analyses done—e.g., analyses of subgroups and	n/a
25			interactions, and sensitivity analyses	
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28	Key results	#18	Summarise key results with reference to study objectives	14-16
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31	Limitations	#19	Discuss limitations of the study, taking into account sources of	16-17
32			potential bias or imprecision. Discuss both direction and	
33			magnitude of any potential bias.	
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36	Interpretation	#20	Give a cautious overall interpretation considering objectives,	17
37			limitations, multiplicity of analyses, results from similar studies,	
38			and other relevant evidence.	
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41	Generalisability	#21	Discuss the generalisability (external validity) of the study	17
42			results	
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45	Funding	#22	Give the source of funding and the role of the funders for the	17
46			present study and, if applicable, for the original study on which	
47			the present article is based	
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 52 tool made by the [EQUATOR Network](#) in collaboration with [Penelope.ai](#)  
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# BMJ Open

## Physician Mental Workload Scale in China: Development and Psychometric Evaluation

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Keywords:	Physician, MENTAL HEALTH, Workload, Survey and Questionnaires, Hospitals, Public

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**Title page**

Physician Mental Workload Scale in China: Development and Psychometric Evaluation

Chuntao Lu Yinhuan Hu\* Qiang Fu Samuel Governor Liuming Wang Chao Li Lu Deng

Jinzhu Xie

Corresponding author:

\*Yinhuan Hu

Address: No.13 Hangkong Rd., Wuhan, Hubei 430030, P.R. China

Email: [hyh288@hotmail.com](mailto:hyh288@hotmail.com)

Telephone number: 13554285879

Co-author:

**Chuntao Lu:** School of Medicine and Health Management, Tongji Medical College, Huazhong University of Science and Technology, No.13 Hangkong Rd., Wuhan, Hubei 430030, P.R. China

**Yinhuan Hu:** School of Medicine and Health Management, Tongji Medical College, Huazhong University of Science and Technology, No.13 Hangkong Rd., Wuhan, Hubei 430030, P.R. China

**Qiang Fu:** Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, College for Public Health and Social Justice, Saint Louis University, Missouri, MO, United States

**Samuel Governor:** Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, College for Public Health and Social Justice, Saint Louis University, Missouri, MO, United States

**Liuming Wang:** Tongji Hospital, Tongji Medical College of Huazhong University of

1  
2  
3  
4 Science and Technology, No.1095 Jiefang Rd., Wuhan, Hubei 430030, P.R. China  
5

6 **Chao Li:** Jingmen No 2 People's Hospital. No.39 Xiangshan Rd., Jingmen, Hubei 448126,  
7  
8  
9 P.R. China  
10

11 **Lu Deng :** School of Medicine and Health Management, Tongji Medical College,  
12  
13  
14 Huazhong University of Science and Technology, No.13 Hangkong Rd.,Wuhan, Hubei  
15  
16  
17 430030, P.R. China  
18

19 **Jinzhū Xie:** The Third People's Hospital of Hubei Province, No.26 Zhongshan Rd.,  
20  
21  
22 Wuhan, Hubei 430030, P.R. China.  
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## Abstract

**Objective:** The purpose of our study is to develop and perform reliability and validity assessments of mental workload scale for physicians in China.

**Design:** Three phases, involving 396 physicians from different-level of comprehensive public hospitals in China, were conducted to develop the instrument. In the first phase, an initial item pool was developed through systematic literature review. The second phase consisted of two rounds of Delphi expert consultations and a pilot survey. The third phase tested reliability and validity of the instrument.

**Setting:** Public hospitals in China.

**Participants:** A total of 396 physicians from different tiers of comprehensive public hospitals in China participated in this study in 2018.

**Primary and secondary outcome measures:** Cronbach's alpha, content validity index, correlation coefficient between items and dimensions, and indices of confirmatory factor analysis.

**Results:** Six dimensions (mental demand, physical demand, temporal demand, perceived risk, frustration level, and performance) and twelve items were identified in the instrument. For reliability, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for the whole scale was 0.81. For validity, the corrected item-content validity index of each item ranged from 0.85 to 1 and correlation coefficients between dimensions and total scores had a range of 0.37-0.72. The results of confirmatory factor analysis showed that the goodness of indices of the scale was reasonably well.

**Conclusion:** The instrument showed good reliability and validity, and it is useful for

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4 diagnosing mental workload of physicians.  
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6 **Keywords:** Physician; Mental Health; Workload; Survey and Questionnaires; Hospitals,  
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## 11 12 13 14 **Article Summary**

### 15 16 17 **Strengths and limitations of this study**

18  
19 This is the first study to develop a measurement about physician mental workload  
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21 from a subjective perspective in China.  
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24 Qualitative and quantitative methods were involved in item selection.  
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27 There is potential a reporting bias in the self-reported measurements of the workload  
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29 among physicians.  
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32 There existed a selection bias due to all respondents voluntarily rather than randomly  
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34 took part in the survey.  
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37 Among six dimensions, perceived risk only included one item, which may result in  
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39 measurement error.  
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## Introduction

Internationally, there has been a focus on the relationship between physicians' workload and their health. <sup>1</sup> Physicians' health is highly associated with workload. <sup>2</sup> Excessive workload impacts physician's health <sup>3-4</sup> and increases the risk of work-related musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs). <sup>5-6</sup> Exposure to workload has been shown to be related to adverse effects in medical errors <sup>7</sup> and adverse incidents. <sup>8</sup> Physician workload could be a negatively contributing factor to patients' perceived quality of care, <sup>9</sup> and affects patient satisfaction <sup>10</sup> and safety. <sup>11-12</sup> It is possible that these stressors have reached a point where they pose a serious problem for the entire healthcare system. <sup>13</sup> Thus, the unreasonable and overwhelming workload has adverse effects to physicians, patients and healthcare organizations. <sup>14</sup>

Workload is thought to be multidimensional and multifaceted. <sup>15</sup> One aspect of workload includes the subjective psychological experiences of the human operator. <sup>16</sup> Mental workload as a kind of workload has emerged as one of the most important occupational risk factors, which results in burnout or anxiety. <sup>17</sup> Lack of control over workload was expected to correlate most highly with burnout. <sup>18,19</sup> Heavy mental workload can lead to serious health problems (cardiovascular diseases, digestive problems, etc.) for physicians as well. <sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, the excessive mental workload can also lead to an inferior quality of care service. <sup>20</sup> Currently, The European Pact for Mental Health and Welfare is conducting mental workload assessments to promote physical and mental wellbeing. <sup>21</sup>

Different tools have been proposed to assess mental workload. Previous research

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4 has established a brief instrument with six items to measure physician mental  
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6 workload.<sup>22</sup> The NASA-Task Load Index (NASA-TLX) scale which was widely used in  
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8 measuring mental workload<sup>23</sup> has proven to be a sensitive, valid, and reliable  
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10 instrument<sup>24</sup> and can be used in human factors research.<sup>25</sup> Researcher has localized  
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12 it as a 29-item questionnaire in Spain to measure workers' mental workload.<sup>26</sup> The  
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14 existing body of research on NASA-TLX suggested that it could be used to measure  
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16 nurse workload in health care settings.<sup>27-29</sup> In the same vein, the Subjective Workload  
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18 Assessment Technique (SWAT) is a subjective rating technique with three dimensions  
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20 of time load, mental effort load, and psychological stress load, which is used to assess  
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22 mental workload as well.<sup>30</sup> It has been successfully applied in the mental workload  
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24 assessment of several aircraft multitask conditions, such as assessing the mental  
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26 workload of different systems of air defense.<sup>24</sup> Copenhagen Psychosocial  
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28 Questionnaire was a wide-spread tool used in the industrial or in the services branch  
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30 in Europe, which included the main dimensions of the most influential psychosocial  
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32 theories at work.<sup>31</sup> Together these tools provide important insights into workload  
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34 measurement in health care management, especially in nurse workload measurement.  
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36 However, there is still different workload between physicians and nurses essentially,  
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38 meanwhile, these measurement was designed for other workers, so we do not ensure  
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40 these tool can be directly used in physician mental workload measurement.  
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42 Specifically, mental workload measurement needs to be developed for physicians.  
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56 With the increasing of patient demands for health, physicians tend to have a  
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58 heavier workload, worse physical health, more mental strain and more intense  
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4 relationships with patients in China.<sup>32</sup> Data from several studies suggest that most  
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6 physicians' work more than 10 hours in a day<sup>33</sup> to manage outpatients and inpatients.  
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8 On average, a physician in a tertiary hospital is responsible for 8.10 outpatients and  
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10 2.70 beds per day.<sup>32</sup> However, they even have been abused, injured, and in extreme  
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12 cases, murdered by patients or their relatives in hospitals across China,<sup>34</sup> which  
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14 resulted in extremely mental workload. Establishing the workload measurement  
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16 system for medical personnel has been incorporated into Chinese Patient Safety Goals  
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18 by Chinese Hospital Association.<sup>35</sup>  
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25 Existing researches about workload measurement instruments are concentrated  
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27 on objective workload in China, for example, the measurement of work time. Whereas  
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29 physicians' mental workload is an indispensable problem in China, there are few  
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31 instruments exploring physician mental workload in China. The purpose of this paper  
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33 is to develop a scientific mental workload instrument, which can be used to measure  
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35 or assess the actual mental workload of physicians in China.  
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## 44 **Methods**

### 47 **Study design**

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51 The instrument was developed in three phases. In the first phase, an initial item  
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53 pool was developed by integrating previous studies through a systematic literature  
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55 review. The second phase consisted of two rounds of Delphi expert consultations and  
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57 a pilot survey in 2017. The third phase was testing the psychometric properties of the  
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4 instrument, including its reliability and validity, through a survey conducted in 2018 in  
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6 comprehensive public hospitals in China.  
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### 10 **Framework and items of generation and selection**

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14 Based on the framework of NASA-TLX and SWAT, we combined the current  
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16 situation of Chinese physicians' workload to determine the item pool. Six dimensions  
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18 and fifteen items were sent to 20 experts (including physicians, hospital managers,  
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20 researchers, and human resource managers) for consultation. According to two-round  
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22 expert consultation, we deleted four items, added a new item (the intensity of physical  
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24 activities), and revised the description of all the items. Then, there were six dimensions  
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26 (physical demand, mental demand, temporal demand, effort, frustration level, and  
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28 performance) and twelve items, which consisted of the pre-scale with a range from 0  
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30 to 100.  
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37 In the pre-survey analysis, we selected 3 hospitals (1 tertiary hospital, 1  
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39 secondary hospital, and 1 first-tier hospital) through conveniently sampling. A sample  
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41 of 80 physicians was surveyed with a web-based scale during November and  
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43 December 2017. Finally, 74 samples were validated to conduct item selection. Items  
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45 were refined based on the following indexes or methods: critical ratio (CR), coefficient  
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47 of variation (CV), correlation analysis,<sup>36</sup> Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ,<sup>37</sup> and exploratory factor  
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49 analysis (EFA).<sup>38</sup>  
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55 If an item was eliminated by any of the above methods, then the item was  
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57 deleted or revised. The final scale consisted of six dimensions (mental demand,  
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4 physical demand, temporal demand, perceived risk, frustration level, and  
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6 performance) and twelve items (Table 1).  
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### 10 **Data collection for testing the validity and reliability of the scale**

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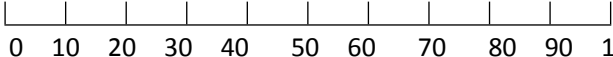
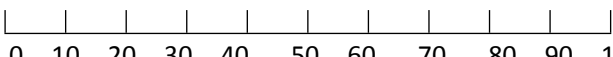
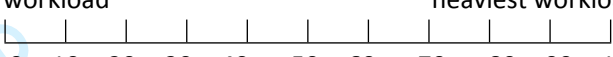
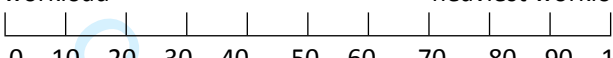
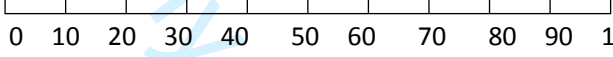
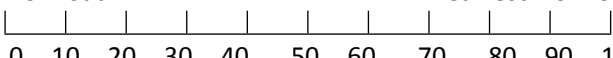
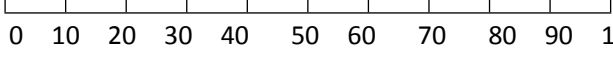
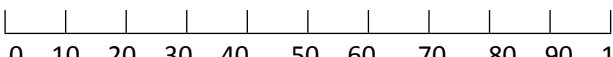
14 To test the validity and reliability of the developed scale, we planned to survey  
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16 400 respondents (physicians are working in hospitals) from different tier hospitals (2  
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18 tertiary hospitals, 2 secondary hospitals, and 2 first-tier hospitals). These hospitals  
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20 were randomly selected from Hubei province, China. We used a website--wenjuanxing  
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22 ([www.wjx.cn](http://www.wjx.cn)) to survey physicians. The human resource at each participating hospital  
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24 sent the access code to the physicians. 396 physicians voluntarily participated in the  
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26 survey before March 2018, finally, 11 invalid samples were deleted.  
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32 There was a detailed description in the guidance of the scale, which showed that  
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34 our scale was anonymous and all physicians were voluntary to answer this question.  
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36 Meanwhile, we described that the aim of our survey was to develop a physician mental  
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38 workload scale, so the results would not be used for other purposes. The physician  
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40 mental workload scale included three parts. The first part of the scale was the principal  
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42 twelve items. The second part was a table which included 15 pairs in our scale, which  
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44 was used to collect the weights of each dimension. Every two dimensions formed a  
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46 pair, and the respondents selected which of the two dimensions in a pair they  
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48 considered to have contributed more to their workload. There were fifteen pairs the  
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50 respondents needed to select from, and the weight of each dimension was equal to  
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52 the number of times that dimension was selected divided by fifteen. The third part  
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was the individual information about the physicians.

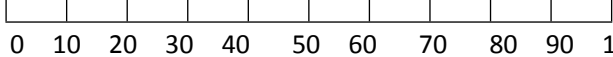
The response endpoints of items are displayed in Table 1. Items were scored as follows: 0, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, 100, the average scores of all items for a corresponding dimension were multiplied by the dimension weight to produce the dimension scores, and then the total scores were the sum of all dimension scores.

Table 1 Dimensions and items of physician mental workload scale

Dimensions and item	Endpoints (0-100)
<b>A Mental demand</b>	
A1 How many cognitive activities (e.g. sensation, perception, remembering, thinking, calculating, attention etc.) were required during your medical work?	no workload <span style="float:right">heaviest workload</span> 
A2 How much emotion and feeling were input (e.g. empathy, sympathy, enthusiasm, negative emotion restraining etc.) during your medical work?	no workload <span style="float:right">heaviest workload</span> 
A3 How hard did you have to work to overcome difficulties in accomplishing your medical work?	no workload <span style="float:right">heaviest workload</span> 
<b>B Physical demand</b>	
B1 How many physical activities were required (e.g. standing, sedentary, controlling, repetitive action etc.) in your medical work?	no workload <span style="float:right">heaviest workload</span> 
B2 How intensive was the physical activity during your medical work? (Was the work restful or laborious?)	no workload <span style="float:right">heaviest workload</span> 
<b>C Temporal demand</b>	
C1 How much time pressure did you feel in your medical work? (Daily medical work required time was more/less than available time?)	no workload <span style="float:right">heaviest workload</span> 
C2 How frequently did you have to complete multiple tasks at the same time (work overlap) in your medical work?	no workload <span style="float:right">heaviest workload</span> 
<b>D Perceived risk</b>	
D1 How much risk did you perceive (e.g. medical dispute etc.) in your medical work?	no workload <span style="float:right">heaviest workload</span> 
<b>E Frustration level</b>	



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4 E1 How depressed or frustrated did you feel in your medical work? no workload heaviest workload  
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E2 How anxious or irritated did you feel in your medical work? no workload heaviest workload  
0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

### F Performance

F1 How successful do you think you were in accomplishing the goals in your medical work? heaviest workload no workload  
0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

F2 How satisfied were you with the outcome in your medical work? heaviest workload no workload  
0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

## Statistical analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to show the characteristics of the respondents, including gender, age, educational level (i.e. Ph.D. degree, Master degree, Undergraduate), job title (i.e. senior, middle, junior), work years, hospital level (i.e. tertiary hospitals, secondary hospitals, first-tier hospital), work hours per week, number of outpatients serviced per day, and self-perceived health status.

For the reliability of the scale, Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of each instrument component. Values of 0.70 or greater for Cronbach's alpha were considered acceptable.<sup>37</sup>

Content validity index (CVI) of each item was calculated to assess the accuracy of the scale using the scores of 1-4. Experts were invited to assess the items with a scale of 1 representing the item not relevant to corresponding dimension and 4 representing the item closely relevant to the corresponding dimension. Corrected item-content validity index (I-CVI) and average scale-content validity index (S-CVI/Ave)

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4 were calculated. Corrected I-CVI of 0.78 or greater and S-CVI/Ave of 0.90 or greater  
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6 were considered acceptable.<sup>39</sup>  
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9 The test of construct validity was tested by correlation coefficient method,  
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11 exploratory factor analysis, and confirmatory factor analysis. Items whose values for  
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13 item-total correlation and dimension-total correlation below 0.40 were revised or  
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15 removed from the scale. A Bartlett's test of sphericity scores lower than 0.05 and a  
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17 Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy higher than 0.70 and closer  
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19 to 1 were considered appropriate for factor analysis.<sup>40</sup> Exploratory factor analysis and  
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21 confirmatory factor analysis was used to further explore and confirm the structure of  
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23 the scale. For the exploratory factor analysis, we used a varimax rotated method to  
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25 examine whether the structure matched the framework. For the confirmatory factor  
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27 analysis, the criterion of model fit indices were listed as follows:  $\chi^2/df < 3$ ; root mean  
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29 square error of approximation (RMSEA) < 0.05; root of mean square residual  
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31 (RMR) < 0.05; goodness of fit (GFI) > 0.90, comparative fit index (CFI) > 0.90, Tucker-  
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33 Lewis index (TLI) > 0.90.<sup>41</sup> Statistical analyses were performed with SPSS V. 21 (IBM  
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35 Corp., Armonk, NY, USA) and AMOS V.17 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA).  
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#### 47 **Patient and public involvement**

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50 This project involves physicians in the second and third phase. All participants  
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52 were voluntary and no incentives were provided for the participation. Meanwhile,  
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54 Participants were not directly involved in the design and recruitment of this study. The  
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56 results were not to be provided back to participants.  
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## Results

### Sample characteristics

396 responses (online survey) were received and 11 questionnaires were excluded due to incomplete demographic information. There were no issues of floor or ceiling effects as questions to every item were responded as required in the form of a web-based survey. The characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Respondents' characteristic of samples

Variable	Valid sample	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	200	51.9
Female	185	48.1
<b>Age</b>		
<45	258	67.0
45-55	121	31.4
>55	6	1.6
<b>Educational level</b>		
Ph.D. degree	36	9.4
Master degree	48	12.5
Undergraduate	184	47.8
Junior college	117	30.3
<b>Job title</b>		
Senior	83	21.6
Middle	146	37.9
Junior	156	40.5
<b>Work years in his/her institutions (year)</b>		
1-5	122	31.7
6-10	91	23.6
11-15	58	15.1
≥16	114	29.6
<b>Hospital level</b>		

Variable	Valid sample	Percentage (%)
Tertiary hospitals	130	33.8
Secondary hospitals	124	32.2
First-level hospitals	131	34.0
<b>Work hours per week</b>		
<=40	73	19.0
41-60	152	39.5
>60	160	41.5
<b>Number of outpatients serviced per day</b>		
<20	135	35.1
20-50	171	44.4
>50	79	20.5
<b>Self-perceived health status</b>		
Poor	65	16.9
Fair	242	62.9
Good	78	20.2

### Reliability of physician mental workload scale

Each of the six components demonstrated at least satisfactory internal consistency higher than 0.70, with Cronbach's  $\alpha$  in the range of 0.70-0.90. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for the whole scale was up to 0.81, which indicated that the scale has good reliability.

### Validity of physician mental workload scale

The corrected I-CVI of each item ranged from 0.85-1 (Table 3), which is higher than 0.78. The S-CVI/Ave was 0.96, which is higher than 0.90. All of these showed good content validity of the scale.

The correlation matrix between items and total scores was inspected to confirm the convergent validity, which was indicated by reasonable coefficients of 0.40 and above, except for F1 and F2 (Table 3). Calculated correlation coefficients between dimensions and total scores had a range of 0.37-0.72, which was an additional index

that showed that dimensions and total scores have a good convergent validity. Also, the correlation coefficients among the dimensions were lower than the correlation coefficients between the dimension-total scores, which indicated that the scale has a good discriminant validity (Table 4).

Table 3 Content validity and correlation coefficient of item-total scores of the scale

Items	Corrected I-CVI	Item-total correlations
A1 Cognitive activity	1	0.57
A2 Emotion and feeling	0.85	0.57
A3 Overcoming difficulties	0.85	0.59
B1 Physical activity	1	0.57
B2 Intensity of physical activity	1	0.65
C1 Time pressure	1	0.69
C2 Multiple task	0.85	0.69
D1 Risk concern	1	0.64
E1 Depressed or frustrated	1	0.75
E2 Anxious or irritated	1	0.75
F1 Successful	1	0.33*
F2 Satisfied	1	0.31*

\*item-total scores were below than 0.4

Table 4 Correlation coefficient matrix between dimensions and total scores of the scale

Dimensions	A	B	C	D	E	F	Total scores
A Mental demand	1						
B Physical demand	0.43	1					
C Temporal demand	0.52	0.47	1				
D Perceived risk	0.46	0.38	0.44	1			
E Frustration level	0.40	0.36	0.54	0.51	1		
F Performance	0.09	0.05	0.01	0.05	0.13	1	
Total scores	0.61	0.52	0.68	0.68	0.72	0.37	1

## Exploratory factor analysis of physician mental workload scale

The KMO sample adequacy measurement was 0.81, which was higher than the recommended value of 0.70, and Bartlett's test of sphericity with Chi-square value 1950.70 and  $p < 0.000$ . Thus, the data were suitable for factor analysis. Considering experts' suggestion, we selected 6 principal components in the exploratory factor analysis and results showed that the six-dimensional model explained 81.88% of the total variance (Table 5).

The component 1 "mental demand" was developed from 3 items that asked for feeling or memory requirement, emotional requirement, and the effort input to overcome difficulties, with the factor loading in the range of 0.74-0.81. The component 2 "frustration level" consisted of 2 items that asked about anxiety and level of depression or frustration, and the factor loading was in the range of 0.86-0.88. The component 3 "physical demand" consisted of 2 items that related to strength requirement and the intensity of work time with a factor loading in the range of 0.84-0.90.

The component 4 "temporal demand" constituted 2 items that asked about the ratio of required time to available time and frequency of completing multiple tasks, with the factor loading in the range of 0.77-0.82. There were 2 items in the "performance demand" component 5, which related to the sense of achievement and job satisfaction regarding work outcome, with the factor loading in the range of 0.85-0.90. The component 6 "perceived risk" included only 1 item that explained the perception of risk in conducting tasks (such as medical dispute and risk of being

infectious) with a factor loading of 0.84.

Table 5 Factor loadings for the rotated component matrix: varimax rotated components

Items	Components					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
A2 Emotion and feeling	0.81					
A1 Cognitive activity	0.76					
A3 Overcoming difficulties	0.74					
E1 Depressed or frustrated		0.88				
E2 Anxious or irritated		0.86				
B1 Physical activity			0.90			
B2 Intensity of physical activity			0.84			
C1 Time pressure				0.82		
C2 Multiple task				0.77		
F1 Successful					0.90	
F2 Satisfied					0.85	
D1 Risk concern						0.84

### Confirmatory factor analysis of physician workload scale

The six-factor model obtained after exploratory factor analysis was tested by confirmatory factor analysis using the maximum likelihood estimation method. The goodness-of-fit model was listed as follows:  $\chi^2/df=1.84 (<3)$ , RMR= 0.04 (<0.05), and GFI=0.97 (>0.9), CFI=0.98 (>0.9), TLI=0.97 (>0.9), RMSEA=0.05 ( $\leq 0.05$ ). Referring to the criterion listed above, the model was a good fit for the data.

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to develop a mental workload scale for physicians

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4 and explore the validity and reliability of the scale. According to the results of the tests,  
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6 the scale is reliable and valid, hence, it is considered as an effective instrument for  
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8 assessing physician mental workload in Chinese comprehensive public hospitals.  
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10 Results show a six-dimensional model which includes aspects related to mental  
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12 demand, physical demand, temporal demand, perceived risk, frustration level, and  
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14 performance. Compared with other relevant scales, this scale only includes 12 items,  
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16 which have strength in the aspects of length, so it could be completed in a short time.  
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18 As for its contents, the dimensions of perceived risk and temporal demand are  
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20 especially distinctive for Chinese physician mental workload.  
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27 The whole Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of the 12 items was beyond 0.7, which indicated that it  
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29 had good reliability. For the content validity, the corrected I-CVI was higher than 0.78  
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31 and the S-CVI/Ave was more than 0.9, which showed that it had a good content validity.  
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33 For the construct validity, except for F1 and F2, the correlation coefficient between  
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35 item and total scores was more than 0.4, which showed that the construct validity was  
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37 at a good level. The item F1 and F2 were to explain the aspect of the performance. In  
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39 our study, the item-total scores of the two items in the dimension of performance  
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41 were near to 0.4, and perhaps, would have been relevant in a reverse scoring.  
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43 Consistent with previous research on NASA-TLX, performance dimension shows a  
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45 limited practical relevance since it is influenced by variations in physical load.<sup>42</sup> Other  
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47 research reported that subjective assessments of mental workload may not provide  
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49 an accurate estimation of the performance dimension.<sup>26</sup> Considering this information,  
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51 we retained the two items but revised their description.  
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4 The specific dimension perceived risk, which is a different dimension and not  
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6 included in the framework of NASA-TLX and SWAT, is highly associated with physician  
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8 mental workload in China. There tends to be an estranged relationship between  
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10 physicians and patients which puts physicians at a dangerous risk of being assaulted,  
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12 by patients or visitors in their line of work.<sup>43</sup> According to the statistics, 96% of medical  
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14 staff have been abused or injured in 2012.<sup>44</sup> The physician-patient relationship is  
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16 becoming more and more fragile and has reached an unprecedented poor level in  
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18 China.<sup>45</sup> The tense relationship resulted in heavy psychological workloads during their  
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27 Another dimension of temporal demand is also fully specific. The gap between  
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29 healthcare demand and supply (thus doctor-patient ratio) in China has caused  
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31 physicians in the secondary and tertiary hospital settings to become overworked.<sup>46</sup>  
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33 They always need to work overtime, even though they conduct more than one task at  
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35 the same time. According to the report by the Chinese Medical Association in 2018,  
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37 physicians in tertiary hospitals had an average workweek of 51.05 hours, which was  
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39 more than legal 40 hours per week.<sup>47</sup> Research has reported that physicians may feel  
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41 stressed when poor scheduling leaves them pressed for time.<sup>48</sup> Mental workload  
42  
43 encompasses the subjective experience of a given task load.<sup>49</sup> High task demands  
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45 require plenty of time and evoke high mental effort and heavy workload for physicians.  
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50 Then, the worse the experience of the task load, the higher the mental workload.<sup>51</sup>

Although we have attempted an accurate examination of the measurement properties of the physician mental workload scale by using qualitative and

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4 quantitative methods, there were still some limitations that merit discussions. Firstly,  
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6 among six dimensions, perceived risk only included one item, which may result in  
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8 measurement error. Secondly, there was a potential reporting bias in the self-reported  
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10 measurements of the workload among physicians. Thirdly, all respondents voluntarily  
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12 decided to take part in the survey. This means physicians who were overburdened at  
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14 the time of the survey may not have time to take part in the survey, resulting in a  
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16 selection bias. Thus, all of these above need continued research to improve this scale,  
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18 meanwhile, burnout was relevant to the mental workload, which was a direction for  
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20 further exploration as well.  
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## 28 **Conclusion**

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32 Creating new items from a subjective perspective is of paramount importance in  
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34 investigating the Chinese physician's workload. Physician mental workload scale has  
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36 acceptable preliminary psychometric properties with six dimensions and twelve items.  
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38 The use of a physician mental workload scale can help us to find the main stressors in  
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40 physician mental workload and to implement targeted optimization strategies to  
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42 mitigate these stressors in an effort to ameliorate the physical and mental health of  
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44 physicians. This, consequently, will help us to improve the quality and efficiency of  
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46 healthcare delivery in hospital settings.  
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## 52 **Abbreviations**

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55 CVI: Content Validity Index;

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58 RMR: Root of Mean Square Residual; GFI= Good of Fitness Index; CFI= Comparative Fit  
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4 Index; TLI=Tucker-Lewis index; CR= Critical Ratio; CV=Coefficient of Variation;

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6 NASA-TLX=NASA- Task Load Index; SWAT= Subjective Workload Assessment  
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9 Technique;

10  
11 EMRs= Electronic Medical Records

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13  
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25  
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28  
29 Jinzhu Xie made formal analysis; Yinhuan Hu obtained funding; Jinzhu Xie and Lu Deng  
30  
31 took part in investigation; Liuming Wang, Chuntao Lu and Lu Deng were involved in  
32  
33 data cleaning; Chuntao Lu wrote original draft; Samuel Governor, Qiang Fu and Chao  
34  
35 Li contributed to the interpretation of the results; Chao Li and Chuntao Lu made critical  
36  
37 revision of the manuscript; All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.  
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41  
42 **Competing interests:** We have read and understood BMJ policy on declaration of  
43  
44 interests and declare that we have no competing interests.  
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48 **Patient consent:** Not required.  
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51 **Ethics approval:** The Ethics Committee of Tongji Medical College, Huazhong University  
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53 of Science and Technology (IORG No. IORG0003571) gave the final approval for the  
54  
55 study.  
56

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58 **Data sharing:** The datasets used and/or analyzed during the current study are  
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available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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# Reporting checklist for cross sectional study.

Based on the STROBE cross sectional guidelines.

## Instructions to authors

Complete this checklist by entering the page numbers from your manuscript where readers will find each of the items listed below.

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In your methods section, say that you used the STROBE cross sectional reporting guidelines, and cite them as:

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		Reporting Item	Page Number
<b>Title and abstract</b>			
Title	<a href="#">#1a</a>	Indicate the study's design with a commonly used term in the title or the abstract	1
Abstract	<a href="#">#1b</a>	Provide in the abstract an informative and balanced summary of what was done and what was found	2
<b>Introduction</b>			
Background / rationale	<a href="#">#2</a>	Explain the scientific background and rationale for the investigation being reported	3-4
Objectives	<a href="#">#3</a>	State specific objectives, including any prespecified hypotheses	5
<b>Methods</b>			

1	Study design	<a href="#">#4</a>	Present key elements of study design early in the paper	5
2				
3	Setting	<a href="#">#5</a>	Describe the setting, locations, and relevant dates, including	6-7
4			periods of recruitment, exposure, follow-up, and data collection	
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7	Eligibility criteria	<a href="#">#6a</a>	Give the eligibility criteria, and the sources and methods of	7
8			selection of participants.	
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11		<a href="#">#7</a>	Clearly define all outcomes, exposures, predictors, potential	9-10
12			confounders, and effect modifiers. Give diagnostic criteria, if	
13			applicable	
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16	Data sources /	<a href="#">#8</a>	For each variable of interest give sources of data and details of	n/a
17	measurement		methods of assessment (measurement). Describe	
18			comparability of assessment methods if there is more than one	
19			group. Give information separately for for exposed and	
20			unexposed groups if applicable.	
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24	Bias	<a href="#">#9</a>	Describe any efforts to address potential sources of bias	17
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27	Study size	<a href="#">#10</a>	Explain how the study size was arrived at	7
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29	Quantitative	<a href="#">#11</a>	Explain how quantitative variables were handled in the	n/a
30	variables		analyses. If applicable, describe which groupings were chosen,	
31			and why	
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34	Statistical	<a href="#">#12a</a>	Describe all statistical methods, including those used to control	9-10
35	methods		for confounding	
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38	Statistical	<a href="#">#12b</a>	Describe any methods used to examine subgroups and	n/a
39	methods		interactions	
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42	Statistical	<a href="#">#12c</a>	Explain how missing data were addressed	7
43	methods			
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46	Statistical	<a href="#">#12d</a>	If applicable, describe analytical methods taking account of	9-10
47	methods		sampling strategy	
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50	Statistical	<a href="#">#12e</a>	Describe any sensitivity analyses	n/a
51	methods			
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54	<b>Results</b>			
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56	Participants	<a href="#">#13a</a>	Report numbers of individuals at each stage of study—eg	6-7
57			numbers potentially eligible, examined for eligibility, confirmed	
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eligible, included in the study, completing follow-up, and analysed. Give information separately for for exposed and unexposed groups if applicable.

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5	Participants	<a href="#">#13b</a>	Give reasons for non-participation at each stage	n/a
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7	Participants	<a href="#">#13c</a>	Consider use of a flow diagram	n/a
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10	Descriptive data	<a href="#">#14a</a>	Give characteristics of study participants (eg demographic, clinical, social) and information on exposures and potential confounders. Give information separately for exposed and unexposed groups if applicable.	11
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17	Descriptive data	<a href="#">#14b</a>	Indicate number of participants with missing data for each variable of interest	7
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21	Outcome data	<a href="#">#15</a>	Report numbers of outcome events or summary measures. Give information separately for exposed and unexposed groups if applicable.	12-15
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26	Main results	<a href="#">#16a</a>	Give unadjusted estimates and, if applicable, confounder-adjusted estimates and their precision (eg, 95% confidence interval). Make clear which confounders were adjusted for and why they were included	n/a
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33	Main results	<a href="#">#16b</a>	Report category boundaries when continuous variables were categorized	n/a
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37	Main results	<a href="#">#16c</a>	If relevant, consider translating estimates of relative risk into absolute risk for a meaningful time period	n/a
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41	Other analyses	<a href="#">#17</a>	Report other analyses done—e.g., analyses of subgroups and interactions, and sensitivity analyses	n/a
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44	<b>Discussion</b>			
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46	Key results	<a href="#">#18</a>	Summarise key results with reference to study objectives	15-16
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49	Limitations	<a href="#">#19</a>	Discuss limitations of the study, taking into account sources of potential bias or imprecision. Discuss both direction and magnitude of any potential bias.	17-18
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54	Interpretation	<a href="#">#20</a>	Give a cautious overall interpretation considering objectives, limitations, multiplicity of analyses, results from similar studies, and other relevant evidence.	17
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1 Generalisability [#21](#) Discuss the generalisability (external validity) of the study 18  
2 results  
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5 **Other**  
6 **Information**  
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8  
9 Funding [#22](#) Give the source of funding and the role of the funders for the 19  
10 present study and, if applicable, for the original study on which  
11 the present article is based  
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13  
14 None The STROBE checklist is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution  
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16 made by the [EQUATOR Network](#) in collaboration with [Penelope.ai](#)  
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# BMJ Open

## Physician Mental Workload Scale in China: Development and Psychometric Evaluation

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Keywords:	Physician, MENTAL HEALTH, Workload, Survey and Questionnaires, Hospitals, Public

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**Title page**

Physician Mental Workload Scale in China: Development and Psychometric Evaluation

Chuntao Lu Yinhuan Hu\* Qiang Fu Samuel Governor Liuming Wang Chao Li Lu Deng

Jinzhu Xie

Corresponding author:

\*Yinhuan Hu

Address: No.13 Hangkong Rd., Wuhan, Hubei 430030, P.R. China

Email: [hyh288@hotmail.com](mailto:hyh288@hotmail.com)

Telephone number: 13554285879

Co-author:

**Chuntao Lu:** 1.School of Medicine and Health Management, Tongji Medical College, Huazhong University of Science and Technology, No.13 Hangkong Rd., Wuhan, Hubei 430030, P.R. China.

2. Jingchu University of Technology Affiliated Central Hospital, No.39 Xiangshan Rd., Jingmen, Hubei 448126, P.R. China

**Yinhuan Hu:** School of Medicine and Health Management, Tongji Medical College, Huazhong University of Science and Technology, No.13 Hangkong Rd., Wuhan, Hubei 430030, P.R. China

**Qiang Fu:** Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, College for Public Health and Social Justice, Saint Louis University, Missouri, MO, United States

**Samuel Governor:** Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, College for Public

1  
2  
3  
4 Health and Social Justice, Saint Louis University, Missouri, MO, United States  
5

6 **Liuming Wang:** Tongji Hospital, Tongji Medical College of Huazhong University of  
7  
8  
9 Science and Technology, No.1095 Jiefang Rd., Wuhan, Hubei 430030, P.R. China  
10

11 **Chao Li:** Jingchu University of Technology Affiliated Central Hospital. No.39 Xiangshan  
12  
13  
14 Rd., Jingmen, Hubei 448126, P.R. China  
15

16  
17 **Lu Deng :** School of Medicine and Health Management, Tongji Medical College,  
18  
19 Huazhong University of Science and Technology, No.13 Hangkong Rd., Wuhan, Hubei  
20  
21  
22 430030, P.R. China  
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24 **Jinzhu Xie:** The Third People's Hospital of Hubei Province, No.26 Zhongshan Rd.,  
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## Abstract

**Objective:** The purpose of our study is to develop and perform reliability and validity assessments of mental workload scale for physicians in China.

**Design:** Three phases, involving 396 physicians from different-level of comprehensive public hospitals in China, were conducted to develop the instrument. In the first phase, an initial item pool was developed through a systematic literature review. The second phase consisted of two rounds of Delphi expert consultations and a pilot survey. The third phase tested the reliability and validity of the instrument.

**Setting:** Public hospitals in China.

**Participants:** A total of 396 physicians from different tiers of comprehensive public hospitals in China participated in this study in 2018.

**Primary and secondary outcome measures:** Cronbach's alpha, content validity index, the correlation coefficient between items and dimensions, and indices of confirmatory factor analysis.

**Results:** Six dimensions (mental demands, physical demands, temporal demands, perceived risk, frustration level, and performance), and twelve items were identified in the instrument. For reliability, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for the whole scale was 0.81. For validity, the corrected item-content validity index of each item ranged from 0.85 to 1, and correlation coefficients between dimensions and total scores had a range of 0.37-0.72. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis showed that the goodness of indices of the scale was reasonably well.

**Conclusion:** The instrument showed good reliability and validity, and it is useful for



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4 diagnosing the mental workload of physicians.  
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6 **Keywords:** Physician; Mental Health; Workload; Survey and Questionnaires; Hospitals,  
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## 11 12 13 14 **Article Summary**

### 15 16 17 **Strengths and limitations of this study**

18  
19 This is the first study to develop a measurement about physician mental workload  
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21 from a subjective perspective in China.  
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24 Qualitative and quantitative methods were involved in item selection.  
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27 There is a potential reporting bias in the self-reported measurements of the workload  
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29 among physicians.  
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31  
32 There existed a selection bias due to all respondents voluntarily rather than randomly  
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34 took part in the survey.  
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37 Among six dimensions, perceived risk only included one item, which may result in  
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39 measurement error.  
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## Introduction

Internationally, there has been a focus on the relationship between physicians' workload and their health. <sup>1</sup> Physicians' health is highly associated with the workload. <sup>2</sup> Excessive workload impacts physician's health <sup>3-4</sup> and increases the risk of work-related musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs). <sup>5-6</sup> Exposure to workload is related to adverse effects in medical errors <sup>7</sup> and adverse incidents. <sup>8</sup> Physician workload could be a negatively contributing factor to patients' perceived quality of care, <sup>9</sup> and affects patient satisfaction <sup>10</sup> and safety. <sup>11-12</sup> It is possible that these stressors have reached a point where they pose a severe problem for the entire healthcare system. <sup>13</sup> Thus, the unreasonable and overwhelming workload has adverse effects on physicians, patients, and healthcare organizations. <sup>14</sup>

The workload is thought to be multidimensional and multifaceted. <sup>15</sup> One aspect of workload includes the subjective psychological experiences of the human operator. <sup>16</sup> Mental workload as a kind of workload has emerged as one of the most critical occupational risk factors, which results in burnout or anxiety. <sup>17</sup> Lack of control over workload was expected to correlate most highly with burnout. <sup>18,19</sup> Heavy mental workload can lead to serious health problems (cardiovascular diseases, digestive problems, etc.) for physicians as well. <sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, the excessive mental workload can also lead to an inferior quality of care service. <sup>20</sup> Currently, The European Pact for Mental Health and Welfare is conducting mental workload assessments to promote physical and mental wellbeing. <sup>21</sup>

Different tools have been proposed to assess mental workload. Previous research

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4 has established a brief instrument with six items to measure physician mental  
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6 workload.<sup>22</sup> The NASA-Task Load Index (NASA-TLX) scale, which was widely used in  
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8 measuring mental workload<sup>23</sup> has proven to be a sensitive, valid, and reliable  
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10 instrument<sup>24</sup> and can be used in human factors research.<sup>25</sup> The researcher has  
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12 localized it as a 29-item questionnaire in Spain to measure workers' mental workload.  
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26 The existing body of research on NASA-TLX suggested that it could be used to measure nurse workload in health care settings.<sup>27-29</sup> In the same vein, the Subjective Workload Assessment Technique (SWAT) is a subjective rating technique with three dimensions of time load, mental effort load, and psychological stress load, which is used to assess mental workload as well.<sup>30</sup> It has been successfully applied in the mental workload assessment of several aircraft multitask conditions, such as assessing the mental workload of different systems of air defense.<sup>24</sup> Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire was a wide-spread tool used in the industrial or the branch of the service in Europe, which included the main dimensions of the most influential psychosocial theories at work.<sup>31</sup> Together these tools provide essential insights into workload measurement in health care management, especially in nurse workload measurement. However, there is still different workload between physicians and nurses essentially, meanwhile, these measurements were designed for other workers, so we do not ensure these tool can be directly used in physician mental workload measurement. Specifically, mental workload measurement needs to be developed for physicians.

With the increasing of patient demands for health, physicians tend to have a

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4 heavier workload, worse physical health, more mental strain, and more intense  
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6 relationships with patients in China.<sup>32</sup> Data from several studies suggest that most  
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8 physicians work more than 10 hours a day<sup>33</sup> to manage outpatients and inpatients.  
9  
10 On average, a physician in a tertiary hospital is responsible for 8.10 outpatients and  
11  
12 2.70 beds per day.<sup>32</sup> However, they even have been abused, injured, and in extreme  
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14 cases, murdered by patients or their relatives in hospitals across China,<sup>34</sup> which  
15  
16 resulted in extremely mental workload. Establishing the workload measurement  
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18 system for medical personnel has been incorporated into Chinese Patient Safety Goals  
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20 by the Chinese Hospital Association.<sup>35</sup>  
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27 Existing researches about workload measurement instruments are concentrated  
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29 on objective workload in China, for example, the measurement of work time. Whereas  
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31 physicians' mental workload is an indispensable problem, there are few instruments  
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33 exploring physician mental workload in China. The purpose of this paper is to develop  
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35 a scientific mental workload instrument, which can be used to measure or assess the  
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37 actual mental workload of physicians.  
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## 48 **Methods**

### 49 **Study design**

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54 The instrument was developed in three phases. In the first phase, an initial item  
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56 pool was developed by integrating previous studies through a systematic literature  
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58 review. The second phase consisted of two rounds of Delphi expert consultations and  
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4 a pilot survey in 2017. The third phase was testing the psychometric properties of the  
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6 instrument, including its reliability and validity, through a study conducted in 2018 in  
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8 comprehensive public hospitals in China.  
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### 10 11 12 **Framework and items of generation and selection**

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16 Based on the framework of NASA-TLX and SWAT, we combined the current  
17  
18 situation of Chinese physicians' workload to determine the item pool. Six dimensions  
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20 and fifteen items were sent to 20 experts (including physicians, hospital managers,  
21  
22 researchers, and human resource managers) for consultation. According to two-round  
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24 expert consultation, we deleted four items, added a new item (the intensity of physical  
25  
26 activities), and revised the description of all the items. Then, there were six dimensions  
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28 (physical demands, mental demands, temporal demands, effort, frustration level, and  
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30 performance) and twelve items, which consisted of the pre-scale with a range from 0  
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32 to 100.  
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40 In the pre-survey analysis, we selected three hospitals (one tertiary hospital, one  
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42 secondary hospital, and one first-tier hospital) through conveniently sampling. A  
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44 sample of 80 physicians was surveyed with a web-based scale during November and  
45  
46 December 2017. Finally, 74 samples were validated to conduct item selection. Items  
47  
48 were refined based on the following indexes or methods: critical ratio (CR), coefficient  
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50 of variation (CV), correlation analysis,<sup>36</sup> Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ,<sup>37</sup> and exploratory factor  
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52 analysis (EFA).<sup>38</sup>  
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58 If an item was eliminated by any of the above methods, then the item was  
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4 deleted or revised. The final scale consisted of six dimensions (mental demands,  
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6 physical demands, temporal demands, perceived risk, frustration level, and  
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8 performance), and twelve items (Table 1).  
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### 11 12 **Data collection for testing the validity and reliability of the scale**

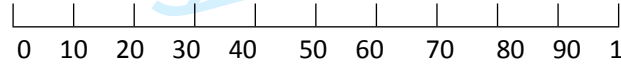
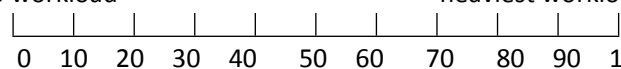
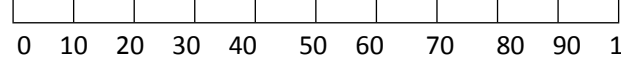

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16 To check the validity and reliability of the developed scale, we planned to survey  
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18 400 respondents (physicians are working in hospitals) from different tier hospitals  
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20 (two tertiary hospitals, two secondary hospitals, and two first-tier hospitals). These  
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22 hospitals were randomly selected from Hubei province, China. We used a website--  
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24 wenjuanxing (www.wjx.cn), which is a widely used platform to conduct surveys in  
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26 China, to develop an electronic questionnaire to survey physicians. The electronic  
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28 questionnaire is a kind of access code or website, and respondents can scan the access  
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30 code or click the website by their phones to complete the questionnaire. We sent the  
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32 access code or website to the human resources at each participating hospital. Then,  
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34 human resources sent the access code to the physicians' online communication group  
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36 at each hospital. Three hundred ninety-six physicians voluntarily participated in the  
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38 survey before March 2018; finally, 11 invalid samples were deleted.  
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48 There was a detailed description of the guidance of the scale, which showed that  
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50 our scale was anonymous, and all physicians were voluntary to answer this question.  
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52 Meanwhile, we described that our survey aimed to develop a physician mental  
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54 workload scale, so the results would not be used for other purposes. The physician  
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56 mental workload scale included three parts. The first part of the scale included twelve  
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4 items, and respondents need to score them one by one. The second part was a table  
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6 which included 15 pairs in our scale, which was used to collect the weights of each  
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8 dimension. Every two dimensions formed a pair (e.g., Mental demands vs. Physical  
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10 demands, Mental demands vs. Temporal demands, etc.). Thus, there were fifteen  
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12 pairs the respondents needed to select from. The respondents need to choose a  
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14 dimension which was contributed more to their workload in each pair. Then, the  
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16 weight of each dimension was equal to the number of times that dimension was  
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18 selected divided by fifteen. The third part of the scale was the individual information  
19  
20 about the physicians.  
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27 The response endpoints of items are displayed in Table 1. Items were scored as  
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29 follows: 0, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, 100, the average scores of all items for a  
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31 corresponding dimension were multiplied by the dimension weight to produce the  
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33 dimension scores, and then the total scores were the sum of all dimension scores.  
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38 Table 1 Dimensions and items of physician mental workload scale

Dimensions and item	Endpoints (0-100)
<b>A Mental demands</b>	
A1 How demanding of cognitive activities (e.g., sensation, perception, remembering, thinking, calculating, attention, etc.) were required during your medical work?	no workload <span style="float: right;">heaviest workload</span> 
A2 How demanding of emotion and feeling were input (e.g., empathy, sympathy, enthusiasm, negative emotion restraining, etc.) during your medical work?	no workload <span style="float: right;">heaviest workload</span> 
A3 How hard did you have to work to overcome difficulties in accomplishing your medical work?	no workload <span style="float: right;">heaviest workload</span> 
<b>B Physical demands</b>	
B1 How demanding of physical activities were	no workload <span style="float: right;">heaviest workload</span> 

required (e.g., standing, stationary, controlling, repetitive action, etc.) in your medical work?


0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

B2 How intensive was the physical activity during your medical work? (Was the work restful or laborious?)


no workload heaviest workload  
  
 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

### C Temporal demands

C1 How pressured did you feel about work time in your medical work? (Daily medical work required time was more/less than available time?)


no workload heaviest workload  
  
 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

C2 How frequently did you have to complete multiple tasks at the same time (work overlap) in your medical work?

no workload heaviest workload  
  
 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100


### D Perceived risk

D1 How risky did you perceive (e.g., medical dispute, etc.) in your medical work?


no workload heaviest workload  
  
 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

### E Frustration level

E1 How depressed or frustrated did you feel in your medical work?


no workload heaviest workload  
  
 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

E2 How anxious or irritated did you feel in your medical work?


no workload heaviest workload  
  
 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

### F Performance

F1 How successfully do you think you were in accomplishing the goals in your medical work?

heaviest workload no workload  
  
 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

F2 How satisfied were you with the outcome in your medical work?

heaviest workload no workload  
  
 0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

## Statistical analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to show the characteristics of the respondents, including gender, age, educational level (i.e. Ph.D. degree, Master degree, Undergraduate), job title (i.e. senior, middle, junior), work years, hospital-level (i.e. tertiary hospitals, secondary hospitals, first-tier hospital), work hours per week, number of outpatients serviced per day, and self-perceived health status.



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4 For the reliability of the scale, Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the internal  
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6 consistency of each instrument component. Values of 0.70 or higher for Cronbach's  
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8 alpha were considered acceptable.<sup>37</sup>  
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11 Content validity index (CVI) of each item was calculated to assess the accuracy of  
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13 the scale using the scores of 1-4. Experts were invited to evaluate the items with a  
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15 scale of 1 representing the item not relevant to corresponding dimension and 4  
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17 representing the item closely related to the corresponding dimension. Corrected item-  
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19 content validity index (I-CVI) and average scale-content validity index (S-CVI/Ave) were  
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21 calculated. Corrected I-CVI of 0.78 or higher and S-CVI/Ave of 0.90 or greater were  
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23 considered acceptable.<sup>39</sup>  
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30 The test of construct validity was tested by correlation coefficient method,  
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32 exploratory factor analysis, and confirmatory factor analysis. Items whose values for  
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34 item-total correlation and dimension-total correlation below 0.40 were revised or  
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36 removed from the scale. A Bartlett's test of sphericity scores lower than 0.05 and a  
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38 Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy higher than 0.70 and closer  
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40 to 1 were considered appropriate for factor analysis.<sup>40</sup> Exploratory factor analysis and  
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42 confirmatory factor analysis were used to explore and confirm the structure of the  
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44 scale. For the exploratory factor analysis, we used a varimax rotated method to  
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46 examine whether the structure matched the framework. For the confirmatory factor  
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48 analysis, the criterion of model fit indices were listed as follows:  $\chi^2/df < 3$ ; root mean  
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50 square error of approximation (RMSEA)  $< 0.05$ ; root of mean square residual  
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52 (RMR)  $< 0.05$ ; goodness of fit (GFI)  $> 0.90$ , comparative fit index (CFI)  $> 0.90$ , Tucker-  
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Lewis index (TLI)>0.90. <sup>41</sup>Statistical analyses were performed with SPSS V. 21 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA) and AMOS V.17 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA).

### Patient and public involvement

Our participants were physicians working in hospitals. They took part in the pre-survey and formal survey to complete our scale. All participants were voluntary, and no incentives were provided for their participation. Meanwhile, Participants were not directly involved in the design and recruitment of this study. The results were not provided back to participants.

## Results

### Sample characteristics

Three hundred ninety-six responses (online survey) were received, and 11 questionnaires were excluded due to incomplete demographic information. There were no issues about floor or ceiling effects as questions to every item were responded as required in the form of a web-based survey. The characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Respondents' characteristic of samples

Variable	Valid sample	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	200	51.9
Female	185	48.1
<b>Age</b>		
<45	258	67.0

Variable	Valid sample	Percentage (%)
45-55	121	31.4
>55	6	1.6
<b>Educational level</b>		
Ph.D. degree	36	9.4
Master degree	48	12.5
Bachelor degree	184	47.8
Below bachelor college	117	30.3
<b>Job title</b>		
Senior title	83	21.6
Middle title	146	37.9
Junior title	156	40.5
<b>Work years in his/her institutions (year)</b>		
1-5	122	31.7
6-10	91	23.6
11-15	58	15.1
>=16	114	29.6
<b>Hospital level</b>		
Tertiary hospitals	130	33.8
Secondary hospitals	124	32.2
First-tier hospitals	131	34.0
<b>Work hours per week</b>		
<=40	73	19.0
41-60	152	39.5
>60	160	41.5
<b>Number of outpatients serviced per day</b>		
<20	135	35.1
20-50	171	44.4
>50	79	20.5
<b>Self-perceived health status</b>		
Poor	65	16.9
Fair	242	62.9
Good	78	20.2

### Reliability of physician mental workload scale

Each of the six components demonstrated at least satisfactory internal consistency higher than 0.70, with Cronbach's  $\alpha$  in the range of 0.70-0.90. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for the whole scale was up to 0.81, which indicated that the scale has excellent

reliability.

### The validity of physician mental workload scale

The corrected I-CVI of each item ranged from 0.85-1 (Table 3), which is higher than 0.78. The S-CVI/Ave was 0.96, which is higher than 0.90. All of these showed good content validity of the scale.

The correlation matrix between items and total scores were inspected to confirm the convergent validity, which was indicated by reasonable coefficients of 0.40 and above, except for F1 and F2 (Table 3). Calculated correlation coefficients between dimensions and total scores had a range of 0.37-0.72, which was an additional index that showed dimensions and total scores have good convergent validity. Also, the correlation coefficients among the dimensions were lower than the correlation coefficients between the dimension-total scores, which indicated that the scale has a good discriminant validity (Table 4).

Table 3 Content validity and correlation coefficient of item-total scores of the scale

Items	Corrected I-CVI	Item-total correlations
A1 Cognitive activity	1	0.57
A2 Emotion and feeling	0.85	0.57
A3 Overcoming difficulties	0.85	0.59
B1 Physical activity	1	0.57
B2 Intensity of physical activity	1	0.65
C1 Time pressure	1	0.69
C2 Multiple tasks	0.85	0.69
D1 Risk concern	1	0.64
E1 Depressed or frustrated	1	0.75
E2 Anxious or irritated	1	0.75
F1 Successful	1	0.33*
F2 Satisfied	1	0.31*

\*item-total scores were below than 0.4

Table 4 Correlation coefficient matrix between dimensions and total scores of the scale

Dimensions	A	B	C	D	E	F	Total scores
A Mental demands	1						
B Physical demands	0.43	1					
C Temporal demands	0.52	0.47	1				
D Perceived risk	0.46	0.38	0.44	1			
E Frustration level	0.40	0.36	0.54	0.51	1		
F Performance	0.09	0.05	0.01	0.05	0.13	1	
Total scores	0.61	0.52	0.68	0.68	0.72	0.37	1

### Exploratory factor analysis of physician mental workload scale

The KMO sample adequacy measurement was 0.81, which was higher than the recommended value of 0.70, and Bartlett's test of sphericity with Chi-square value 1950.70 and  $p < 0.000$ . Thus, the data was suitable for factor analysis. Considering experts' suggestion, we selected six principal components in the exploratory factor analysis, and results showed that the six-dimensional model explained 81.88% of the total variance (Table 5).

The component 1 "mental demands" was developed from 3 items that asked for feeling or memory requirement, emotional requirement, and the effort input to overcome difficulties, with the factor loading in the range of 0.74-0.81. The component 2 "frustration level" consisted of 2 items that asked about anxiety and level of depression or frustration, and the factor loading was in the range of 0.86-0.88. The component 3 "physical demands" consisted of 2 items that related to strength requirement and the intensity of work time with a factor loading in the range of 0.84-

0.90.

The component 4 “temporal demands” constituted two items that asked about the ratio of required time to available time and frequency of completing multiple tasks, with the factor loading in the range of 0.77-0.82. There were two items in the “performance” component 5, which related to the sense of achievement and job satisfaction regarding work outcome, with the factor loading in the range of 0.85-0.90. The component 6 “perceived risk” included only 1 item that explained the perception of risk in conducting tasks (such as medical dispute and risk of being infectious) with a factor loading of 0.84.

Table 5 Factor loadings for the rotated component matrix: varimax rotated components

Items	Components					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
A2 Emotion and feeling	0.81					
A1 Cognitive activity	0.76					
A3 Overcoming difficulties	0.74					
E1 Depressed or frustrated		0.88				
E2 Anxious or irritated		0.86				
B1 Physical activity			0.90			
B2 Intensity of physical activity			0.84			
C1 Time pressure				0.82		
C2 Multiple tasks				0.77		
F1 Successful					0.90	
F2 Satisfied					0.85	
D1 Risk concern						0.84

### Confirmatory factor analysis of physician workload scale

The six-factor model obtained after exploratory factor analysis was tested by

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4 confirmatory factor analysis using the maximum likelihood estimation method. The  
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6 goodness-of-fit model was listed as follows:  $\chi^2/df=1.84 (<3)$ , RMR= 0.04 (<0.05), and  
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8 GFI=0.97 (>0.9), CFI=0.98 (>0.9), TLI=0.97 (>0.9), RMSEA=0.05 ( $\leq 0.05$ ). Referring to  
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10 the criterion listed above, the model was a good fit for the data.  
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## 18 Discussion

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21 The purpose of this study was to develop a mental workload scale for physicians  
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23 and explore the validity and reliability of the scale. According to the results of the tests,  
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25 the scale is reliable and valid; hence, it is considered as an effective instrument for  
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27 assessing physician mental workload in Chinese comprehensive public hospitals.  
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29 Results show a six-dimensional model which includes aspects related to mental  
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31 demands, physical demands, temporal demands, perceived risk, frustration level, and  
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33 performance. Compared with other relevant scales, this scale only includes 12 items,  
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35 which have strength in the aspects of length so that it could be completed in a short  
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37 time. As for its contents, the dimensions of perceived risk and temporal demands are  
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39 uniquely distinctive for physician mental workload in China.  
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48 The whole Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of the 12 items was beyond 0.7, which indicated that it  
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50 had excellent reliability. For the content validity, the corrected I-CVI was higher than  
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52 0.78, and the S-CVI/Ave was more than 0.9, which showed that it had good content  
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54 validity. For the construct validity, except for F1 and F2, the correlation coefficient  
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56 between item and total scores was more than 0.4, which showed that the construct  
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4 validity was at a good level. The item-total scores of the two items in the dimension  
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6 of performance were near to 0.4, and perhaps, would have been relevant in a reverse  
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8 scoring. Consistent with previous research on NASA-TLX, performance dimension  
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10 shows a limited practical relevance since variations influence it in physical load.<sup>42</sup>  
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12 Other study reported that subjective assessments of mental workload might not  
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14 provide an accurate estimation of the performance dimension.<sup>26</sup> Considering this  
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16 information, we retained the two items but revised their description.  
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22 The specific dimension perceived risk, which is a different dimension and not  
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24 included in the framework of NASA-TLX and SWAT, is highly associated with physician  
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26 mental workload in China. There tends to be an estranged relationship between  
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28 physicians and patients, which puts physicians at a dangerous risk of being assaulted,  
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30 by patients or visitors in their line of work.<sup>43</sup> According to the statistics, 96% of medical  
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32 staff have been abused or injured in 2012.<sup>44</sup> The physician-patient relationship is  
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34 becoming more and more fragile and has reached an unprecedented poor level in  
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36 China.<sup>45</sup> The tense relationship resulted in heavy psychological workloads during their  
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38 work.  
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45 Another dimension of temporal demands is also entirely specific. The gap  
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47 between healthcare demand and supply (thus doctor-patient ratio) in China has  
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49 caused physicians in the secondary and tertiary hospital settings to become  
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51 overworked.<sup>46</sup> They always need to work overtime, even though they conduct more  
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53 than one task at the same time. According to the report by the Chinese Medical  
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55 Association in 2018, physicians in tertiary hospitals had an average workweek of 51.05  
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4 hours, which was more than legal 40 hours per week.<sup>47</sup> Research has reported that  
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6 physicians may feel stressed when poor scheduling leaves them pressed for time.<sup>48</sup>  
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9 Mental workload encompasses the subjective experience of a given task load.<sup>49</sup> High  
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11 task demands require plenty of time and evoke high mental effort and heavy workload  
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13 for physicians.<sup>50</sup> Then, the worse the experience of the task load, the higher the  
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17 mental workload.<sup>51</sup>

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19 Although we have attempted an accurate examination of the measurement  
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21 properties of the physician mental workload scale by using qualitative and  
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23 quantitative methods, there were still some limitations that merit discussions. Firstly,  
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25 among six dimensions, perceived risk only included one item, which may result in  
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27 measurement error. Secondly, there was a potential reporting bias in the self-reported  
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29 measurements of the workload among physicians. Thirdly, all respondents voluntarily  
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31 decided to take part in the survey. Physicians who were overburdened at the time of  
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33 the study may not have time to take part in the investigation, which resulted in a  
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35 selection bias. Thus, all of these above need continued research to improve this scale.  
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43 Meanwhile, burnout was relevant to the mental workload, which was a direction for  
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45 further exploration as well.  
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## 49 **Conclusion**

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53 Creating new items from a subjective perspective is of paramount importance in  
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55 investigating the Chinese physician's workload. Physician mental workload scale has  
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57 acceptable preliminary psychometric properties with six dimensions and twelve items.  
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4 The use of a physician mental workload scale can help us to find the main stressors in  
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6 physician mental workload, and to implement targeted optimization strategies to  
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8 mitigate these stressors so that the physical and mental health of physicians can be  
9  
10 enhanced. This, consequently, will help us to improve the quality and efficiency of  
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12 healthcare delivery in hospital settings.  
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15

### 16 **Abbreviations**

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19 CVI: Content Validity Index;

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22 RMR: Root of Mean Square Residual; GFI= Good of Fitness Index; CFI= Comparative Fit  
23  
24 Index; TLI=Tucker-Lewis index; CR= Critical Ratio; CV=Coefficient of Variation;

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26  
27 NASA-TLX=NASA- Task Load Index; SWAT= Subjective Workload Assessment  
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29 Technique;

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31  
32 EMRs= Electronic Medical Records

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34  
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47

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50  
51 Jinzhu Xie made formal analysis; Yinhuan Hu obtained funding; Jinzhu Xie and Lu Deng  
52  
53 took part in the investigation; Liuming Wang, Chuntao Lu and Lu Deng were involved  
54  
55 in data cleaning; Chuntao Lu wrote the original draft; Samuel Governor, Qiang Fu and  
56  
57 Chao Li contributed to the interpretation of the results; Chao Li and Chuntao Lu made  
58  
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4 critical revision of the manuscript; All authors have read and approved the final  
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6 manuscript.  
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8  
9 **Competing interests:** We have read and understood BMJ policy on declaration of  
10  
11 interests and declare that we have no competing interests.  
12

13  
14 **Patient consent:** Not required.  
15

16  
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18  
19 of Science and Technology (IORG No. IORG0003571) gave the final approval for the  
20  
21 study.  
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24 **Data sharing:** The datasets used and/or analyzed during the current study are  
25  
26 available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.  
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# Reporting checklist for cross sectional study.

Based on the STROBE cross sectional guidelines.

## Instructions to authors

Complete this checklist by entering the page numbers from your manuscript where readers will find each of the items listed below.

Your article may not currently address all the items on the checklist. Please modify your text to include the missing information. If you are certain that an item does not apply, please write "n/a" and provide a short explanation.

Upload your completed checklist as an extra file when you submit to a journal.

In your methods section, say that you used the STROBE cross sectional reporting guidelines, and cite them as:

von Elm E, Altman DG, Egger M, Pocock SJ, Gotsche PC, Vandembroucke JP. The Strengthening the Reporting of Observational Studies in Epidemiology (STROBE) Statement: guidelines for reporting observational studies.

		Reporting Item	Page Number
<b>Title and abstract</b>			
Title	<a href="#">#1a</a>	Indicate the study's design with a commonly used term in the title or the abstract	1
Abstract	<a href="#">#1b</a>	Provide in the abstract an informative and balanced summary of what was done and what was found	2
<b>Introduction</b>			
Background / rationale	<a href="#">#2</a>	Explain the scientific background and rationale for the investigation being reported	3-4
Objectives	<a href="#">#3</a>	State specific objectives, including any prespecified hypotheses	5
<b>Methods</b>			



1	Study design	<a href="#">#4</a>	Present key elements of study design early in the paper	5
2				
3	Setting	<a href="#">#5</a>	Describe the setting, locations, and relevant dates, including	6-7
4			periods of recruitment, exposure, follow-up, and data collection	
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7	Eligibility criteria	<a href="#">#6a</a>	Give the eligibility criteria, and the sources and methods of	7
8			selection of participants.	
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11		<a href="#">#7</a>	Clearly define all outcomes, exposures, predictors, potential	9-10
12			confounders, and effect modifiers. Give diagnostic criteria, if	
13			applicable	
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16	Data sources /	<a href="#">#8</a>	For each variable of interest give sources of data and details of	n/a
17	measurement		methods of assessment (measurement). Describe	
18			comparability of assessment methods if there is more than one	
19			group. Give information separately for for exposed and	
20			unexposed groups if applicable.	
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24	Bias	<a href="#">#9</a>	Describe any efforts to address potential sources of bias	17
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27	Study size	<a href="#">#10</a>	Explain how the study size was arrived at	7
28				
29	Quantitative	<a href="#">#11</a>	Explain how quantitative variables were handled in the	n/a
30	variables		analyses. If applicable, describe which groupings were chosen,	
31			and why	
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34	Statistical	<a href="#">#12a</a>	Describe all statistical methods, including those used to control	9-10
35	methods		for confounding	
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38	Statistical	<a href="#">#12b</a>	Describe any methods used to examine subgroups and	n/a
39	methods		interactions	
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42	Statistical	<a href="#">#12c</a>	Explain how missing data were addressed	7
43	methods			
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46	Statistical	<a href="#">#12d</a>	If applicable, describe analytical methods taking account of	9-10
47	methods		sampling strategy	
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50	Statistical	<a href="#">#12e</a>	Describe any sensitivity analyses	n/a
51	methods			
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54	<b>Results</b>			
55				
56	Participants	<a href="#">#13a</a>	Report numbers of individuals at each stage of study—eg	6-7
57			numbers potentially eligible, examined for eligibility, confirmed	
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eligible, included in the study, completing follow-up, and analysed. Give information separately for for exposed and unexposed groups if applicable.

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5	Participants	<a href="#">#13b</a>	Give reasons for non-participation at each stage n/a
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7	Participants	<a href="#">#13c</a>	Consider use of a flow diagram n/a
8			
9			
10	Descriptive data	<a href="#">#14a</a>	Give characteristics of study participants (eg demographic, 11
11			clinical, social) and information on exposures and potential
12			confounders. Give information separately for exposed and
13			unexposed groups if applicable.
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17	Descriptive data	<a href="#">#14b</a>	Indicate number of participants with missing data for each 7
18			variable of interest
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21	Outcome data	<a href="#">#15</a>	Report numbers of outcome events or summary measures. 12-15
22			Give information separately for exposed and unexposed
23			groups if applicable.
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26	Main results	<a href="#">#16a</a>	Give unadjusted estimates and, if applicable, confounder- n/a
27			adjusted estimates and their precision (eg, 95% confidence
28			interval). Make clear which confounders were adjusted for and
29			why they were included
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33	Main results	<a href="#">#16b</a>	Report category boundaries when continuous variables were n/a
34			categorized
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37	Main results	<a href="#">#16c</a>	If relevant, consider translating estimates of relative risk into n/a
38			absolute risk for a meaningful time period
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41	Other analyses	<a href="#">#17</a>	Report other analyses done—e.g., analyses of subgroups and n/a
42			interactions, and sensitivity analyses
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44	<b>Discussion</b>		
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46	Key results	<a href="#">#18</a>	Summarise key results with reference to study objectives 15-16
47			
48			
49	Limitations	<a href="#">#19</a>	Discuss limitations of the study, taking into account sources of 17-18
50			potential bias or imprecision. Discuss both direction and
51			magnitude of any potential bias.
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54	Interpretation	<a href="#">#20</a>	Give a cautious overall interpretation considering objectives, 17
55			limitations, multiplicity of analyses, results from similar studies,
56			and other relevant evidence.
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1 Generalisability [#21](#) Discuss the generalisability (external validity) of the study 18  
2 results  
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4  
5 **Other**  
6 **Information**  
7

8  
9 Funding [#22](#) Give the source of funding and the role of the funders for the 19  
10 present study and, if applicable, for the original study on which  
11 the present article is based  
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13  
14 None The STROBE checklist is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution  
15 License CC-BY. This checklist can be completed online using <https://www.goodreports.org/>, a tool  
16 made by the [EQUATOR Network](#) in collaboration with [Penelope.ai](#)  
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# BMJ Open

## Physician Mental Workload Scale in China: Development and Psychometric Evaluation

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<b>Primary Subject Heading</b>:	Mental health
Secondary Subject Heading:	Mental health
Keywords:	Physician, MENTAL HEALTH, Workload, Survey and Questionnaires, Hospitals, Public

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**Title page**

Physician Mental Workload Scale in China: Development and Psychometric  
Evaluation

Chuntao Lu Yinhan Hu\* Qiang Fu Samuel Governor Liuming Wang Chao Li Lu Deng  
Jinzhu Xie

Corresponding author:

\*Yinhan Hu

Address: No.13 Hangkong Rd., Wuhan, Hubei 430030, P.R. China

Email: [hyh288@hotmail.com](mailto:hyh288@hotmail.com)

Telephone number: 13554285879

Co-author:

Chuntao Lu: 1.School of Medicine and Health Management, Tongji Medical College,  
Huazhong University of Science and Technology, No.13 Hangkong Rd., Wuhan, Hubei  
430030, P.R. China.

2. Jingchu University of Technology Affiliated Central Hospital, No.39 Xiangshan Rd.,  
Jingmen, Hubei 448126, P.R. China

Yinhan Hu: School of Medicine and Health Management, Tongji Medical College,  
Huazhong University of Science and Technology, No.13 Hangkong Rd., Wuhan, Hubei  
430030, P.R. China

Qiang Fu: Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, College for Public Health

1  
2  
3  
4 and Social Justice, Saint Louis University, Missouri, MO, United States  
5

6 Samuel Governor: Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, College for Public  
7  
8 Health and Social Justice, Saint Louis University, Missouri, MO, United States  
9

10  
11 Liuming Wang: Tongji Hospital, Tongji Medical College of Huazhong University of  
12  
13 Science and Technology, No.1095 Jiefang Rd., Wuhan, Hubei 430030, P.R. China  
14  
15

16  
17 Chao Li: Jingchu University of Technology Affiliated Central Hospital. No.39  
18  
19 Xiangshan Rd., Jingmen, Hubei 448126, P.R. China  
20  
21

22  
23 Lu Deng : School of Medicine and Health Management, Tongji Medical College,  
24  
25 Huazhong University of Science and Technology, No.13 Hangkong Rd., Wuhan, Hubei  
26  
27 430030, P.R. China  
28

29  
30 Jinzhu Xie: The Third People's Hospital of Hubei Province, No.26 Zhongshan Rd.,  
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## Abstract

**Objective:** The purpose of our study is to develop a mental workload scale for physicians in China and assess the scale's reliability and validity.

**Design:** The instrument was developed over three phases involving 396 physicians from different tiers of comprehensive public hospitals in China. In the first phase, an initial item pool was developed through a systematic literature review. The second phase consisted of two rounds of Delphi expert consultations and a pilot survey. The third phase tested the reliability and validity of the instrument.

**Setting:** Public hospitals in China.

**Participants:** A total of 396 physicians from different tiers of comprehensive public hospitals in China participated in this study in 2018.

**Primary and secondary outcome measures:** Cronbach's alpha, content validity index, the correlation coefficient between the items and dimensions, and indices of confirmatory factor analysis.

**Results:** Six dimensions (mental demands, physical demands, temporal demands, perceived risk, frustration level, and performance) and twelve items were identified in the instrument. For reliability, Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for the whole scale was 0.81. For validity, the corrected item-content validity index of each item ranged from 0.85 to 1, and the correlation coefficients between the dimensions and total scores ranged from 0.37-0.72. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis showed that the goodness-of-fit indices of the scale were satisfactory.

**Conclusion:** The instrument showed good reliability and validity, and it is useful for

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4 diagnosing the mental workload of physicians.  
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6 **Keywords:** Physician; Mental Health; Workload; Survey and Questionnaires;  
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9 Hospitals, Public  
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## 11 12 13 14 **Article summary**

### 15 16 17 **Strengths and limitations of this study**

18  
19 This is the first study to develop a measurement of physician mental workload from  
20  
21 a subjective perspective in China.  
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24 Qualitative and quantitative methods were involved in item selection.  
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27 There was a potential reporting bias in the self-reported measurements of physician  
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29 workload.  
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32 There was a selection bias due to all respondents voluntarily rather than randomly  
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34 participating in the survey.  
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37 Among the six dimensions, perceived risk included only one item, which may have  
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39 resulted in measurement error.  
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## Introduction

Internationally, there has been a focus on the relationship between physicians' workload and their health. <sup>1</sup> Physicians' health is highly associated with their workload. <sup>2</sup> Excessive workload impacts physicians' health <sup>3-4</sup> and increases the risk of work-related musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs). <sup>5-6</sup> High workload is related to adverse effects in the form of medical errors <sup>7</sup> and adverse incidents. <sup>8</sup> Physician workload can negatively contribute to patients' perceived quality of care <sup>9</sup> and affect patient satisfaction <sup>10</sup> and safety. <sup>11-12</sup> It is possible that these stressors have reached a point where they pose a severe problem for the entire healthcare system, <sup>13</sup> as physicians' unreasonable and overwhelming workload has adverse effects on physicians, patients, and healthcare organizations. <sup>14</sup>

Workload is thought to be multidimensional and multifaceted. <sup>15</sup> One aspect of workload includes the subjective psychological experiences of the human operator. <sup>16</sup> Mental workload has emerged as one of the most critical occupational risk factors that results in burnout or anxiety. <sup>17</sup> A lack of control over workload is expected to correlate closely with burnout. <sup>18,19</sup> Heavy mental workload can lead to serious health problems (cardiovascular diseases, digestive problems, etc.) for physicians<sup>17</sup> and an inferior quality of care service. <sup>20</sup> Currently, The European Pact for Mental Health and Welfare is conducting mental workload assessments to promote physical and mental wellbeing. <sup>21</sup>

Different tools have been proposed to assess mental workload. Previous research established a brief instrument with six items to measure physician mental

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4 workload. <sup>22</sup> The NASA-Task Load Index (NASA-TLX) scale, which is widely used in  
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6 measuring mental workload <sup>23</sup>, has proven to be a sensitive, valid, and reliable  
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8 instrument <sup>24</sup> and can be used in human factor research. <sup>25</sup> Researcher has localized  
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10 it as a 29-item questionnaire in Spain to measure workers' mental workload. <sup>26</sup> The  
11  
12 existing body of research on NASA-TLX suggests that it can be used to measure nurse  
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14 workload in health care settings. <sup>27-29</sup> In the same vein, the Subjective Workload  
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16 Assessment Technique (SWAT) is a subjective rating technique with three  
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18 dimensions—time load, mental effort load, and psychological stress load—and is  
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20 used to assess mental workload. <sup>30</sup> It has been successfully applied in assessing the  
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22 mental workload of several aircraft multitasking conditions, such as in assessing the  
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24 mental workload required by different systems of air defence. <sup>24</sup> The Copenhagen  
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26 Psychosocial Questionnaire is a widespread tool used in the industrial and service  
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28 branches in Europe, and its main dimensions include the most influential  
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30 psychosocial theories at work. <sup>31</sup> Together, these tools provide essential insights into  
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32 workload measurement in health care management, especially in nurse workload  
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34 measurement. However, the workload of physicians and nurses is essentially  
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36 different from the workload of the workers that previous measurements were  
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38 designed to assess. Thus, it remains unclear whether these tools can be directly used  
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40 in measuring physician mental workload, and a mental workload measurement must  
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42 be developed for physicians.  
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56 With increasing patient health demands, physicians tend to have a heavier  
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58 workload, worse physical health, more mental strain, and more intense relationships  
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4 with patients in China. <sup>32</sup> Data from several studies suggest that most physicians  
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6 work more than 10 hours a day <sup>33</sup> to manage outpatients and inpatients. On average,  
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8 a physician in a tertiary hospital is responsible for 8.10 outpatients and 2.70 beds per  
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10 day. <sup>32</sup> Physicians have been abused, injured, and, in extreme cases, murdered by  
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12 patients or their relatives in hospitals across China, <sup>34</sup> which results in psychological  
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14 stress. Establishing a workload measurement system for medical personnel has been  
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16 incorporated into the Chinese Patient Safety Goals by the Chinese Hospital  
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18 Association. <sup>35</sup>

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25 Existing studies on workload measurement instruments are concentrated on  
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27 assessing objective workload in China, for example, measuring work time. While  
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29 physicians' mental workload is a critical problem, there are few instruments  
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31 exploring this problem in China. The purpose of this paper is to develop a scientific  
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33 mental workload instrument that can be used to assess the mental workload of  
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35 physicians.  
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## 44 **Methods**

### 45 46 47 **Study design**

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51 The instrument was developed in three phases. In the first phase, an initial item  
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53 pool was developed by integrating previous studies through a systematic literature  
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55 review. The second phase consisted of two rounds of Delphi expert consultations  
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57 and a pilot survey in 2017. The third phase involved testing the psychometric  
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4 properties of the instrument, including its reliability and validity, through a study  
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6 conducted in 2018 in comprehensive public hospitals in China.  
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### 10 **Framework and item generation and selection**

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14 We combined the dimensions of the NASA-TLX and SWAT frameworks to  
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16 determine the item pool so that it would measure the current situation of Chinese  
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18 physicians' workload. Six dimensions and fifteen items were sent to 20 experts  
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20 (including physicians, hospital managers, researchers, and human resource  
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22 managers) for consultation. In accordance with the findings from two rounds of  
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24 expert consultation, we deleted four items, added a new item (the intensity of  
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26 physical activities), and revised the descriptions of all items. Then, there were six  
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28 dimensions (physical demands, mental demands, temporal demands, effort,  
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30 frustration level, and performance) and twelve items, which consisted of a pre-scale  
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32 ranging from 0 to 100.  
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40 In the pre-survey analysis, we selected three hospitals (one tertiary hospital,  
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42 one secondary hospital, and one first-tier hospital) through convenience sampling. A  
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44 sample of 80 physicians was surveyed with a web-based scale during November and  
45  
46 December 2017. Finally, a valid sample of 74 physicians was used for item selection.  
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48 Items were refined based on the following indexes or methods: critical ratio (CR),  
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50 coefficient of variation (CV), correlation analysis,<sup>36</sup> Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ,<sup>37</sup> and exploratory  
51  
52 factor analysis (EFA).<sup>38</sup>  
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58 If an item was eliminated by any of the above methods, then the item was  
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4 deleted or revised. The final scale consisted of six dimensions (mental demands,  
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6 physical demands, temporal demands, perceived risk, frustration level, and  
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8 performance) and twelve items (Table 1).  
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### 11 12 **Data collection for testing the validity and reliability of the scale**

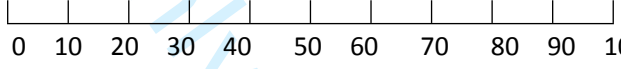
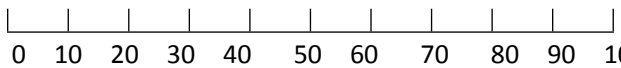
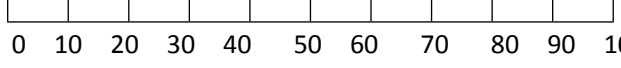
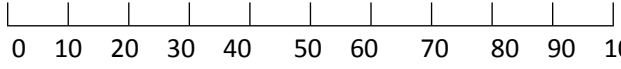
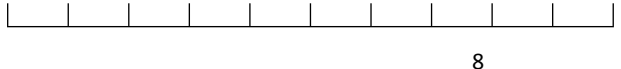
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16 To check the validity and reliability of the developed scale, we planned to  
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18 survey 400 respondents (physicians working in hospitals) from different tiers of  
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20 hospitals (two tertiary hospitals, two secondary hospitals, and two first-tier  
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22 hospitals). These hospitals were randomly selected from Hubei province, China. We  
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24 used wenjuanxing (www.wjx.cn), a widely used website for conducting surveys in  
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26 China, to develop an electronic questionnaire with which to survey physicians.  
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28 Respondents could scan the access code or click on the website using their phones to  
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30 access and complete the electronic questionnaire. We sent the access code and  
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32 website to the human resource managers at each participating hospital, who then  
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34 sent the access code to the physicians' online communication group at each hospital.  
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36 Three hundred ninety-six physicians voluntarily participated in the survey before  
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38 March 2018; eleven invalid samples were deleted.  
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48 The detailed scale instructions indicated that our scale was anonymous, that  
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50 participation was voluntary, and that our survey aimed to develop a physician  
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52 mental workload scale, so the results would not be used for other purposes. The  
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54 physician mental workload scale included three parts. The first part of the scale  
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56 included twelve items that respondents scored one by one. The second part was a  
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table that included 15 pairs of dimensions and was used to collect the weights of each dimension. Every two dimensions formed a pair (e.g., Mental demands vs. Physical demands, Mental demands vs. Temporal demands, etc.). Respondents chose which of the two dimensions in each of the fifteen pairs contributed more to their workload. Then, the weight of each dimension was equal to the number of times that dimension was selected divided by 15. The third part of the scale was designed to collect physicians' individual characteristics.

The response endpoints of the items are displayed in Table 1. Items were scored as follows: 0, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, and 100. The average scores of all items for a corresponding dimension were multiplied by the dimension weight to produce the dimension scores, and then, the total scores were calculated as the sum of all dimension scores.

Table 1 Dimensions and items of physician mental workload scale

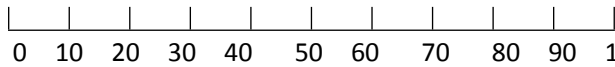
Dimensions and item	Endpoints (0-100)
<b>A Mental demands</b>	
A1 How demanding are the cognitive activities (e.g., sensation, perception, remembering, thinking, calculating, attention) required during your medical work?	no workload <span style="float: right;">heaviest workload</span> 
A2 How demanding are emotion and feeling (e.g., empathy, sympathy, enthusiasm, negative emotion restraining) during your medical work?	no workload <span style="float: right;">heaviest workload</span> 
A3 How hard do you have to work to overcome difficulties in accomplishing your medical work?	no workload <span style="float: right;">heaviest workload</span> 
<b>B Physical demands</b>	
B1 How demanding are the physical activities required (e.g., standing, stationary, controlling, repetitive action) in your medical work?	no workload <span style="float: right;">heaviest workload</span> 
B2 How intensive is the physical activity during	no workload <span style="float: right;">heaviest workload</span> 

your medical work? (Is the work restful or laborious?)

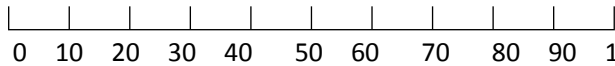
0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

### C Temporal demands

C1 How much pressure do you feel related to work time in your medical work? (Daily medical work required time is more/less than available time.)

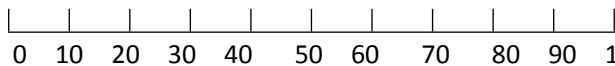
no workload heaviest workload  


C2 How frequently do you have to complete multiple tasks at the same time (work overlap) in your medical work?

no workload heaviest workload  


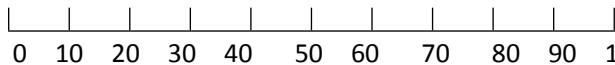
### D Perceived risk

D1 How risky do you perceive (e.g., medical disputes) your medical work to be?

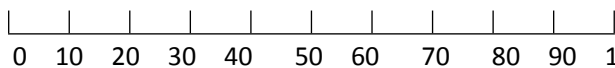
no workload heaviest workload  


### E Frustration level

E1 How depressed or frustrated do you feel in your medical work?

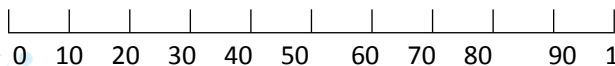
no workload heaviest workload  


E2 How anxious or irritated do you feel in your medical work?

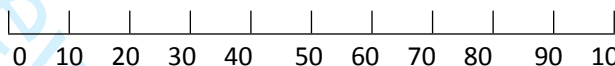
no workload heaviest workload  


### F Performance

F1 How successful do you think you are in accomplishing the goals in your medical work?

heaviest workload no workload  


F2 How satisfied are you with the outcomes of your medical work?

heaviest workload no workload  


## Statistical analysis

Descriptive statistics are used to show the characteristics of the respondents, including gender, age, and educational level (i.e., Ph.D. degree, master's degree, undergraduate), job title (i.e., senior, middle, junior), work years, hospital level (i.e., tertiary hospitals, secondary hospitals, first-tier hospital), work hours per week, number of outpatients serviced per day, and self-perceived health status.

For the reliability of the scale, Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the internal

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4 consistency of each instrument component. Values of 0.70 or higher for Cronbach's  
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6 alpha were considered acceptable.<sup>37</sup>  
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9 The content validity index (CVI) of each item was calculated to assess the  
10 accuracy of the scale using scores of 1-4. Experts were invited to evaluate the items,  
11 with a score of 1 representing an item not relevant to the corresponding dimension  
12 and a score of 4 representing an item closely related to the corresponding  
13 dimension. The corrected item-content validity index (I-CVI) and average  
14 scale-content validity index (S-CVI/Ave) were calculated. A corrected I-CVI of 0.78 or  
15 higher and an S-CVI/Ave of 0.90 or greater were considered acceptable.<sup>39</sup>  
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27 The test of construct validity was performed using the correlation coefficient  
28 method, EFA, and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Items with item-total  
29 correlation and dimension-total correlation values below 0.40 were revised or  
30 removed from the scale. Bartlett's test of sphericity scores lower than 0.05 and a  
31 Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) score of sampling adequacy higher than 0.70 and close to  
32 1 were considered appropriate for factor analysis.<sup>40</sup> EFA and CFA were used to  
33 explore and confirm the structure of the scale. For the EFA, we used the varimax  
34 rotation method to examine whether the structure matched the framework. For the  
35 CFA, the criteria for the model fit indices were as follows:  $\chi^2/df < 3$ ; root mean square  
36 error of approximation (RMSEA)  $< 0.05$ ; root mean square residual (RMR)  $< 0.05$ ;  
37 goodness-of-fit index (GFI)  $> 0.90$ , comparative fit index (CFI)  $> 0.90$ , and Tucker-Lewis  
38 index (TLI)  $> 0.90$ .<sup>41</sup> Statistical analyses were performed with SPSS V. 21 (IBM Corp.,  
39 Armonk, NY, USA) and AMOS V.17 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA).  
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## Patient and public involvement

Our participants were physicians working in hospitals. They took part in the pre-survey and formal survey to complete our scale. Participation was voluntary, and no incentives were provided for participation. Participants were not directly involved in the design or recruitment of this study. The results were not provided to participants.

## Results

### Sample characteristics

Three hundred ninety-six responses (online survey) were received, and 11 were excluded due to incomplete demographic information. There were no issues related to floor or ceiling effects as the questions for every item were responded to in the form of a web-based survey. The characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Respondents' characteristics

Variable	Valid sample	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	200	51.9
Female	185	48.1
<b>Age</b>		
<45	258	67.0
45-55	121	31.4
>55	6	1.6
<b>Educational level</b>		
Ph.D. degree	36	9.4
Master's degree	48	12.5

Variable	Valid sample	Percentage (%)
Bachelor's degree	184	47.8
Below bachelor's college	117	30.3
<b>Job title</b>		
Senior title	83	21.6
Middle title	146	37.9
Junior title	156	40.5
<b>Work years in current institution (year)</b>		
1-5	122	31.7
6-10	91	23.6
11-15	58	15.1
>=16	114	29.6
<b>Hospital level</b>		
Tertiary hospital	130	33.8
Secondary hospital	124	32.2
First-tier hospital	131	34.0
<b>Work hours per week</b>		
<=40	73	19.0
41-60	152	39.5
>60	160	41.5
<b>Number of outpatients serviced per day</b>		
<20	135	35.1
20-50	171	44.4
>50	79	20.5
<b>Self-perceived health status</b>		
Poor	65	16.9
Fair	242	62.9
Good	78	20.2

### Reliability of physician mental workload scale

Each of the six components demonstrated at least satisfactory internal consistency (higher than 0.70), with Cronbach's  $\alpha$  in the range of 0.70-0.90. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for the whole scale reached as high as 0.81, which indicated that the scale had excellent reliability.

### Validity of physician mental workload scale

The corrected I-CVI of each item ranged from 0.85-1 (Table 3), which was higher than 0.78. The S-CVI/Ave was 0.96, which was higher than 0.90. All of these values supported the good content validity of the scale.

The correlation matrix between items and total scores was inspected to confirm the convergent validity, which was indicated by reasonable coefficients of 0.40 and above, except for F1 and F2 (Table 3). The calculated correlation coefficients between dimensions and the total scores had a range of 0.37-0.72, showing that the dimensions and total scores had good convergent validity. Additionally, the correlation coefficients among the dimensions were lower than the correlation coefficients between the dimension-total scores, which indicated that the scale had good discriminant validity (Table 4).

Table 3 Content validity and correlation coefficient of item-total scores of the scale

Items	Corrected I-CVI	Item-total correlations
A1 Cognitive activity	1	0.57
A2 Emotion and feeling	0.85	0.57
A3 Overcoming difficulties	0.85	0.59
B1 Physical activity	1	0.57
B2 Intensity of physical activity	1	0.65
C1 Time pressure	1	0.69
C2 Multiple tasks	0.85	0.69
D1 Risk concern	1	0.64
E1 Depressed or frustrated	1	0.75
E2 Anxious or irritated	1	0.75
F1 Successful	1	0.33*
F2 Satisfied	1	0.31*

\*Item-total scores were below 0.4.

Table 4 Correlation coefficient matrix between dimensions and total scores of the

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4 scale

Dimensions	A	B	C	D	E	F	Total scores
A Mental demands	1						
B Physical demands	0.43	1					
C Temporal demands	0.52	0.47	1				
D Perceived risk	0.46	0.38	0.44	1			
E Frustration level	0.40	0.36	0.54	0.51	1		
F Performance	0.09	0.05	0.01	0.05	0.13	1	
Total scores	0.61	0.52	0.68	0.68	0.72	0.37	1

### Exploratory factor analysis of physician mental workload scale

The KMO sample adequacy measurement was 0.81, which was higher than the recommended value of 0.70. Bartlett's test of sphericity value with the chi-square values was 1950.70 ( $p < 0.000$ ). Thus, the data were suitable for factor analysis. Considering the experts' suggestions, we selected six principal components in the EFA, and the results showed that the six-dimensional model explained 81.88% of the total variance (Table 5).

Component 1, "mental demands", was developed from 3 items that asked about feeling or memory requirements, emotional requirements, and the effort required to overcome difficulties, with a factor loading in the range of 0.74-0.81. Component 2, "frustration level", consisted of 2 items that asked about anxiety and levels of depression or frustration, and the factor loading was in the range of 0.86-0.88. Component 3, "physical demands", consisted of 2 items related to strength requirements and the intensity of work time, with a factor loading in the range of 0.84-0.90.

Component 4, “temporal demands”, constituted two items that asked about the ratio of required time to available time and the frequency of multi-tasking, with a factor loading in the range of 0.77-0.82. There were two items in “performance” component 5, which related to the sense of achievement and job satisfaction regarding work outcomes, with the factor loading in the range of 0.85-0.90. Component 6, “perceived risk”, included only 1 item that explained the perception of risk in conducting tasks (such as medical disputes and risk of being infectious), with a factor loading of 0.84.

Table 5 Factor loadings for the rotated component matrix: varimax rotated components

Items	Components					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
A2 Emotion and feeling	0.81					
A1 Cognitive activity	0.76					
A3 Overcoming difficulties	0.74					
E1 Depressed or frustrated		0.88				
E2 Anxious or irritated		0.86				
B1 Physical activity			0.90			
B2 Intensity of physical activity			0.84			
C1 Time pressure				0.82		
C2 Multiple tasks				0.77		
F1 Successful					0.90	
F2 Satisfied					0.85	
D1 Risk concern						0.84

### Confirmatory factor analysis of physician workload scale

The six-factor model obtained after EFA was tested by CFA using the maximum likelihood estimation method. The goodness-of-fit model was as follows:  $\chi^2/df=1.84$

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4 (<3), RMR=0.04 (<0.05), GFI=0.97 (>0.9), CFI=0.98 (>0.9), TLI=0.97 (>0.9), and  
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6 RMSEA=0.05 ( $\leq$ 0.05). Based on these criteria, the model was a good fit for the data.  
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## 10 11 12 13 **Discussion** 14

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16 The purpose of this study was to develop a mental workload scale for physicians  
17 and explore its validity and reliability. The test results show that the scale is reliable  
18 and valid; hence, it is considered an effective instrument for assessing physician  
19 and valid; hence, it is considered an effective instrument for assessing physician  
20 mental workload in Chinese comprehensive public hospitals. The results show a  
21 six-dimensional model that includes aspects related to mental demands, physical  
22 demands, temporal demands, perceived risk, frustration level, and performance. In  
23 contrast to other relevant scales, this scale includes only 12 items; thus, its length is  
24 a strength because it can be completed in a short time. As for the scale's contents,  
25 the dimensions of perceived risk and temporal demands are uniquely distinctive for  
26 physician mental workload in China.  
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42 The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of the whole scale was higher than 0.7, which indicated that  
43 the scale had excellent reliability. Additionally, the corrected I-CVI was higher than  
44 0.78, and the S-CVI/Ave was more than 0.9, which showed that it had good content  
45 validity. For the construct validity, except for F1 and F2, the correlation coefficient  
46 between the item and total scores was more than 0.4, which showed that the  
47 construct validity was good. The item-total scores of the two items in the dimension  
48 of performance were near 0.4 and perhaps would have been relevant with reverse  
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4 scoring. Consistent with previous research on NASA-TLX, the performance dimension  
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6 shows limited practical relevance since variations influence it in terms of physical  
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8 load.<sup>42</sup> Another study reported that subjective assessments of mental workload  
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10 might not provide an accurate estimation of the performance dimension.<sup>26</sup>  
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12 Considering this information, we retained the two items but revised their  
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14 description.  
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19 The specific dimension perceived risk, which is not included in the NASA-TLX or  
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21 SWAT frameworks, is highly associated with physician mental workload in China.  
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23 There tends to be an estranged relationship between physicians and patients, which  
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25 puts physicians at a dangerous risk of being assaulted by patients or visitors.<sup>43</sup>  
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27 According to statistics, 96% of medical staff were abused or injured in 2012.<sup>44</sup> The  
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29 physician-patient relationship is becoming increasingly fragile and has reached an  
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31 unprecedented poor level in China.<sup>45</sup> This tense relationship results in heavy  
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33 psychological workload during physicians' work.  
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40 Another dimension, temporal demands, is also highly specific. The gap between  
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42 healthcare demand and supply (and thus the doctor-patient ratio) in China has  
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44 caused physicians in secondary and tertiary hospital settings to become overworked.  
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48<sup>46</sup> They frequently need to work overtime and perform more than one task at the  
49  
50 same time. According to a report by the Chinese Medical Association in 2018,  
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52 physicians in tertiary hospitals had an average workweek of 51.05 hours, which was  
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54 more than the legal 40 hours per week.<sup>47</sup> Research has reported that physicians may  
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56 feel stressed when poor scheduling leaves them pressed for time.<sup>48</sup> Mental  
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4 workload encompasses the subjective experience of a given task load.<sup>49</sup> High task  
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6 demands require considerable time and mental effort and represent a heavy  
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8 workload for physicians.<sup>50</sup> The worse physicians' experience of their task load, the  
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10 higher their mental workload is.<sup>51</sup>  
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14 Although we have attempted an accurate examination of the measurement  
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16 properties of the physician mental workload scale by using qualitative and  
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18 quantitative methods, there are still some limitations that merit discussion. First,  
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20 among the six dimensions, perceived risk included only one item, which may have  
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22 resulted in measurement error. Second, there was a potential reporting bias in the  
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24 self-reported measurements of workload among physicians. Third, all respondents  
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26 voluntarily decided to take part in the survey. Physicians who were overburdened at  
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28 the time of the study may not have had time to take part in the investigation, which  
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30 could have resulted in selection bias. Thus, these findings reveal the need for  
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32 continued research to improve this scale. Burnout is also relevant to mental  
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34 workload and is another direction for further exploration.  
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## 44 **Conclusion**

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47 Creating new items from a subjective perspective is of paramount importance in  
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49 investigating Chinese physicians' workload. The physician mental workload scale has  
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51 acceptable preliminary psychometric properties, with six dimensions and twelve  
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53 items. The use of this scale can help us identify the main stressors in physician  
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55 mental workload and implement targeted optimization strategies to mitigate these  
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4 stressors in order to enhance the physical and mental health of physicians. Doing so  
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6 will consequently improve the quality and efficiency of healthcare delivery in  
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8 hospital settings.  
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## 10 11 **Abbreviations**

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14 CVI=Content Validity Index;

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17 EFA= Confirmatory Factor Analysis; CFA= Exploratory Factor Analysis;

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20 RMR=Root Mean Square Residual; GFI=Good-of-Fit Index; CFI=Comparative Fit Index;

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22  
23 TLI=Tucker-Lewis Index; CR=Critical Ratio; CV=Coefficient of Variation;

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25  
26 NASA-TLX=NASA Task Load Index; SWAT=Subjective Workload Assessment  
27  
28 Technique;

29  
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33  
34 design, data collection, analysis, decision to publish the manuscript, or manuscript  
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36 preparation.  
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44

45  
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47  
48 Jinzhu Xie performed formal analysis; Yinhan Hu obtained funding; Jinzhu Xie and  
49  
50 Lu Deng took part in the investigation; Liuming Wang, Chuntao Lu and Lu Deng were  
51  
52 involved in data cleaning; Chuntao Lu wrote the original draft; Samuel Governor,  
53  
54 Qiang Fu and Chao Li contributed to the interpretation of the results; and Chao Li  
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56 and Chuntao Lu performed critical revisions of the manuscript; All authors have read  
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4 and approved the final manuscript.  
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6 **Competing interests:** We have read and understood BMJ's policy on the declaration  
7  
8 of interests and declare that we have no competing interests.  
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11 **Patient consent:** Not required.  
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14 **Ethics approval:** The Ethics Committee of Tongji Medical College, Huazhong  
15  
16 University of Science and Technology (IORG No. IORG0003571), gave the final  
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18 approval for the study.  
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21 **Data sharing:** The datasets used and/or analysed during the current study are  
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23 available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.  
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# Reporting checklist for cross sectional study.

Based on the STROBE cross sectional guidelines.

## Instructions to authors

Complete this checklist by entering the page numbers from your manuscript where readers will find each of the items listed below.

Your article may not currently address all the items on the checklist. Please modify your text to include the missing information. If you are certain that an item does not apply, please write "n/a" and provide a short explanation.

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In your methods section, say that you used the STROBE cross sectional reporting guidelines, and cite them as:

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		Reporting Item	Page Number
<b>Title and abstract</b>			
Title	<a href="#">#1a</a>	Indicate the study's design with a commonly used term in the title or the abstract	1
Abstract	<a href="#">#1b</a>	Provide in the abstract an informative and balanced summary of what was done and what was found	2
<b>Introduction</b>			
Background / rationale	<a href="#">#2</a>	Explain the scientific background and rationale for the investigation being reported	3-4
Objectives	<a href="#">#3</a>	State specific objectives, including any prespecified hypotheses	5
<b>Methods</b>			

1	Study design	<a href="#">#4</a>	Present key elements of study design early in the paper	5
2				
3	Setting	<a href="#">#5</a>	Describe the setting, locations, and relevant dates, including	6-7
4			periods of recruitment, exposure, follow-up, and data collection	
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7	Eligibility criteria	<a href="#">#6a</a>	Give the eligibility criteria, and the sources and methods of	7
8			selection of participants.	
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11		<a href="#">#7</a>	Clearly define all outcomes, exposures, predictors, potential	9-10
12			confounders, and effect modifiers. Give diagnostic criteria, if	
13			applicable	
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16	Data sources /	<a href="#">#8</a>	For each variable of interest give sources of data and details of	n/a
17	measurement		methods of assessment (measurement). Describe	
18			comparability of assessment methods if there is more than one	
19			group. Give information separately for for exposed and	
20			unexposed groups if applicable.	
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24	Bias	<a href="#">#9</a>	Describe any efforts to address potential sources of bias	17
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27	Study size	<a href="#">#10</a>	Explain how the study size was arrived at	7
28				
29	Quantitative	<a href="#">#11</a>	Explain how quantitative variables were handled in the	n/a
30	variables		analyses. If applicable, describe which groupings were chosen,	
31			and why	
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34	Statistical	<a href="#">#12a</a>	Describe all statistical methods, including those used to control	9-10
35	methods		for confounding	
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38	Statistical	<a href="#">#12b</a>	Describe any methods used to examine subgroups and	n/a
39	methods		interactions	
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42	Statistical	<a href="#">#12c</a>	Explain how missing data were addressed	7
43	methods			
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46	Statistical	<a href="#">#12d</a>	If applicable, describe analytical methods taking account of	9-10
47	methods		sampling strategy	
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50	Statistical	<a href="#">#12e</a>	Describe any sensitivity analyses	n/a
51	methods			
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54	<b>Results</b>			
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56	Participants	<a href="#">#13a</a>	Report numbers of individuals at each stage of study—eg	6-7
57			numbers potentially eligible, examined for eligibility, confirmed	
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eligible, included in the study, completing follow-up, and analysed. Give information separately for for exposed and unexposed groups if applicable.

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5	Participants	<a href="#">#13b</a>	Give reasons for non-participation at each stage	n/a
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7	Participants	<a href="#">#13c</a>	Consider use of a flow diagram	n/a
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10	Descriptive data	<a href="#">#14a</a>	Give characteristics of study participants (eg demographic, clinical, social) and information on exposures and potential confounders. Give information separately for exposed and unexposed groups if applicable.	11
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17	Descriptive data	<a href="#">#14b</a>	Indicate number of participants with missing data for each variable of interest	7
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21	Outcome data	<a href="#">#15</a>	Report numbers of outcome events or summary measures. Give information separately for exposed and unexposed groups if applicable.	12-15
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26	Main results	<a href="#">#16a</a>	Give unadjusted estimates and, if applicable, confounder-adjusted estimates and their precision (eg, 95% confidence interval). Make clear which confounders were adjusted for and why they were included	n/a
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33	Main results	<a href="#">#16b</a>	Report category boundaries when continuous variables were categorized	n/a
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37	Main results	<a href="#">#16c</a>	If relevant, consider translating estimates of relative risk into absolute risk for a meaningful time period	n/a
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41	Other analyses	<a href="#">#17</a>	Report other analyses done—e.g., analyses of subgroups and interactions, and sensitivity analyses	n/a
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44	<b>Discussion</b>			
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46	Key results	<a href="#">#18</a>	Summarise key results with reference to study objectives	15-16
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49	Limitations	<a href="#">#19</a>	Discuss limitations of the study, taking into account sources of potential bias or imprecision. Discuss both direction and magnitude of any potential bias.	17-18
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54	Interpretation	<a href="#">#20</a>	Give a cautious overall interpretation considering objectives, limitations, multiplicity of analyses, results from similar studies, and other relevant evidence.	17
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1 Generalisability [#21](#) Discuss the generalisability (external validity) of the study 18  
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5 **Other**  
6 **Information**  
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9 Funding [#22](#) Give the source of funding and the role of the funders for the 19  
10 present study and, if applicable, for the original study on which  
11 the present article is based  
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13  
14 None The STROBE checklist is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution  
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