Original Article
ISSN (Online): 2582-7472

ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts
January-June 2026 7(1), 711–720

MEDIATING ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WORK STRESS AND CAREER COMMITMENT AMONG PRESCHOOL TEACHERS

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Received 13 March 2026
Accepted 19 April 2026
Published 23 May 2026

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DOI
10.29121/shodhkosh.v7.i1.2026.7393

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

ABSTRACT

To improve the gap in the literature, where much of the research on the relationship between work stress and career commitment among preschool teachers has been based on correlation analysis and has not provided comprehensive testing of the mediation pathways, a psychological capital mediation model is brought to this paper. This model takes the four dimensions of psychological resources, self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience and makes them a part of the same analysis model by integrating together and statistically testing the interaction pathways between variables. The standardized scales were used to collect data of a sample of 312 preschool teachers in constructing a mediation structure model of the "work stress--psychological capital--career commitment" joint estimation using bootstrap repeated sampling, testing of reliability and accuracy of data analysis, and mathematical modeling of structural equations. The control variables were co-regressed to enhance the accuracy of path estimation as well as stability of decomposition of the effects, which showed that work related stress had a significant effect on career commitment (β= -0.43, $p < 0.001$) and had a negative predictive effect on psychological capital (β = -0.52, $p < 0.001$). Psychological capital also had a strong positive effect on career commitment (β = 0.61, $p < 0.001$). The mediating indirect effect of -0.32 and the Bootstrap 95% confidence interval that was not equal to zero were significant mediating effects [-0.40, -0.24]. The findings suggest that including the psychological capital as an important variable of psychological resource may lead to the significant effect of the explanatory contribution of the stress-commitment relationship and the increase in the accuracy of path determination at the broken dimension level.

Keywords: Early Childhood Teacher Career Commitment, Work Stress, Psychological Capital, Mediation Effect Model, Bootstrap Path Analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

Within the framework of the ongoing growth of the preschool education system and the constantly growing requirements caused by the quality of the education, the workload and role pressure of the preschool teachers is taking a consistent positive trend. The preschool teachers are exposed to a long-term multi-stress context due to high-intensity

teaching activities, home-school communication responsibilities, and emotional labor demands which not only have significant effects on their physical and mental health, but also impact their career stability and development greatly. As a significant measure of evaluating the professional identity of teachers, readiness to invest and retention intention, professional commitment is regarded as one of the most significant variables to predict the quality of education and stability of the teachers. This means that a systematic study of the path of the effects of work pressure on professional commitment through the lens of the mechanism has both theoretical and practical importance. Peddi and Pandey (2026)

Based on this, this paper incorporates work pressure, psychological capital, and professional commitment into a unified analytical framework, constructs a mediation effect model, and uses multivariate regression and Bootstrap path testing methods to systematically analyze sample data of preschool teachers. The aim is to refine the structure of the interaction paths between variables, improve the accuracy of mechanism explanation, and provide quantitative evidence for teacher support strategies and psychological resource interventions.

2. RELATED WORKS

In recent years, research on the relationship between stress sources, psychological resources and occupational well-being of preschool teachers has been continuously deepened. The relevant empirical results have been systematically explored from various stress models and psychological mechanism paths, forming a relatively rich research foundation and analytical perspective. Wang et al. investigated the effects of psychological capital and emotional tiredness, as well as the effort-reward imbalance, on the occupational well-being of preschool instructors in rural China. Professional well-being is negatively predicted by effort-reward deficit, social exhaustion mediates the relationship between the effort-reward imbalance and occupational well-being, psychological capital moderates both the immediate and subsequent pathways of effort-reward shortage on occupational psychological health, and high psychological capital can mitigate the detrimental effects of effort-reward imbalance on teachers' occupational well-being, according to the study's findings [1]. Shavkatovna touched upon the theoretical foundations of stress and stress resilience diagnosing, showing significance of this topic in contemporary psychology, particularly in preschool teacher population. The physical and mental health of preschool teachers are highly influenced by the level of stress they have to deal with, and the attitude to stressors should remain strong not only to ensure the health of the teachers, but also directly to influence the professional performance [2]. Tang et al. investigated the mechanism of work-family conflict on work engagement using 203 Chinese preschool instructors as a sample. The findings demonstrated that work-family conflict significantly lowers work engagement, and that psychological disengagement, encompassing both explicit and implicit routes, mediates an association between the two. Meanwhile, gender has an ameliorating effect on the connection between explicit psychiatric retreat and workplace-family conflict, but has no significant effect on the implicit pathway. The study provides a practical basis for strategies to improve the professional engagement and support of preschool teachers [3]. In order to investigate the psychological health of preschoolers, parents, and teachers, Özcan and Sak examined the effects of several sociodemographic characteristics. The findings demonstrated that preschoolers, parents, and teachers all have typically excellent psychological well-being. Parents' psychological well-being and children's psychological well-being are substantially positively connected, but there is no meaningful correlation between the two [4]. Zhou et al. explored the relationship between effort-reward imbalance and job burnout among Chinese kindergarten teachers, and analyzed the role of psychological empowerment and teacher employment status. According to the study, employment status acted as a moderator in the relationship between effort-reward discrepancy and psychological empowerment, which was highly associated with burnout for educators [5]. Titheradge et al. examined the impact of classroom-level variables on teachers' mental health based on data from the UK STARS project, with a sample of 80 teachers and 2075 students. They used regression analysis to examine factors such as class size, gender structure, teaching assistant support, and students' psychological status. The results showed that classes with a higher proportion of boys at the beginning of the school year were more associated with teachers' psychological stress, but the association disappeared after 9 months, indicating that interventions for teachers' mental health need to focus on early classroom structure factors [6]. Existing studies mostly focus on single stress models or moderating effect tests, and there is insufficient integrated analysis of the overall mediating path between preschool teachers' work stress, psychological capital, and professional commitment. Furthermore, multivariate joint modeling and mechanism refinement verification are still relatively lacking.

3. METHODS

3.1. VARIABLES AND MEASUREMENT

3.1.1. JOB STRESS (VARIABLE 1)

Job stress, as an independent variable, was defined in this study as the psychological load and perceived stress experienced by preschool teachers in their professional environment. This variable was measured using a scale covering teachers' experiences with task stress, role conflict, and time and responsibility burdens encountered at work. Participants completed the scale by rating each item according to their actual feelings, using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "almost no stress" to "extremely high stress." The approach to evaluation enabled a specific measurement of the overall job stress of each teacher, which forms a basis on further analysis of the moderating effect of psychological capital.

3.1.2. PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL (VARIABLE 2)

In this study, psychological capital was a mediating variable that was assumed to be a significant psychological resource in determining career commitment. It consists of four dimensions as its core, which are self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience. Self-efficacy demonstrates the faith and the control that teachers have over their capabilities to accomplish the educational tasks; hope demonstrates the positive motivation of the teachers to set the goals, build the pathways, and constantly evolve; optimism shows positive expectations of the teachers in the situations of stress and uncertainty; resilience shows the degree of recovery and adaptability of the teachers under stressful conditions. The scales of psychological capital are standardized. The participants are asked to rank their daily teaching psychological condition and all the dimensions have even scoring method in order to provide comparability and integrability of the data. The score of every teacher on the four dimensions is summed up to create a general index of psychological capital, which is utilized to investigate its mediating quality between work stress and professional commitment.

3.1.3. OCCUPATIONAL COMMITMENT (VARIABLE 3)

The dependent variable is occupational commitment which is a measure that indicates emotional identification and responsibility of early childhood teachers to their profession. It is measured using three dimensions namely: affective commitment, continuational commitment and normative commitment. Affective, continuational and normative commitment are the level of attachment of the teachers to the profession, level of the teachers thinking about the investment in the profession and working stability and level of the teachers being responsible and feeling as a moral obligation to their profession respectively. The respondents rated themselves in terms of their degree of engagement and responsibility in their work on a scale. Their commitment to the job was measured by a standardized system of scoring. The measurement of this variable by this study helps to explain the direct effect of work stress on job commitment and gives valid information to conduct the mediation analysis of psychological capital.

3.2. DATA ANALYSIS METHODS

3.2.1. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

In order to understand the key characteristics of the sample and how the variables are organized, a descriptive statistical inquiry was first performed on all the parameters in this paper. The mean "(" "X" ¯"")" and standard deviation (SD) are the descriptive statistics along with such indicators as skew and kurtosis of each variable. The mean and the standard deviation quantify the general level of data and the dispersion respectively. Supposing that variable (Xi) is the measurement value of the (i)th subject, the formulae of calculating the mean value and standard deviation are as follows:

$$\bar{X}=\frac{1}{n}\sum_{i=1}^{n}X_i$$

$$SD=\sqrt{\frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n}(X_i-\bar{X})^2}{n-1}}$$

Through the statistical analysis of the mean and standard deviation of the work pressure, psychological capital, and career commitment, the rationality of the variable distribution and the consistency of the data can be preliminarily assessed, which forms the basis of the following regression analysis and testing the effect of mediation.

3.2.2. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY TESTING

In order to achieve the scientific validity and reliability of the scale measures, the research carried out reliability and validity tests on the work stress, psychological capital, and career commitment scales. The Cronbach's α coefficient was used in order to have when reliability evaluations, which was calculated as given below:

$$\alpha=\frac{k}{k-1}\left(1-\frac{\sum_{i=1}^{k}\sigma_i^2}{\sigma_T^2}\right)$$

The (k) is the number of units of the scale,"(" "σ" _"i" ^"2" ")" is the dispersion of the (i)th object, and "(" "σ" _"T" ^"2" ")" is the total assessment unpredictability. The greater Cronbach α coefficient, the greater internal consistency of the scale.

Each scale's reliability regarding constructs was examined using confirmatory factor analysis, also referred for validity testing. Fit indices, such as the root mean square error approximation (RMSEA), a comparable fit index (CFI), and chi-square value (chi2)), were used to evaluate the model's reasonableness. Model fit is typically evaluated using the following criteria: CFI > 0.90, RMSEA < 0.08, which indicates that the scale has strong the validity of constructs

3.2.3. MEDIATION EFFECT TESTING

The main goal of this research is to determine how psychological asset influences the relationship between professional commitment and work stressful situations. Mediation effect analysis uses a regression analysis framework, combined with the Bootstrap method for significance testing. Considering that career committment is the factor that depends (Y), social capital is the variable that mediates (M), and job stress is the independent factor (X), the mediation model can be expressed as two regression equations:

Mediating variable regression equation:

$$M=aX+\sum_i \gamma_i C_i+\varepsilon_1$$

Dependent variable regression equation:

$$M=aX+\sum_i \gamma_i C_i+\varepsilon_1$$

Among them, "(" "C" _"i" ")" represents the control variable, "(" "ε" _"1" ")" and "(" "ε" _"2" ")" are the residuals, (a) represents the effect of work stress on psychological capital, (b) represents the effect of psychological capital on career commitment, (c') represents the direct effect after controlling for the mediating variable, and the indirect effect is "(a×b)" . The oblique effect's 95% CI was determined by the use of Bootstrap repeating sampling. The mediation impact was deemed noteworthy if there was no absence in the timeframe.

Additionally, in order to investigate the distinct routes of each dimension in the relationship between job stress and career enthusiasm, this study performed independent mediation examinations on each of the four elements of psychological capital.

3.2.4. CONTROL VARIABLE HANDLING

In the regression analysis and mediation effect testing, it was taken into consideration that demographic variables could be confounding career commitment and therefore the aspect of teaching experience and the age of the teacher were considered as control variables in the model. Some of the control variables were standardized and then inserted into the regression equation to minimize confounding effect, and enhance the mediation effect analysis. Specifically, each control variable was standardized according to its mean and standard deviation, and then simultaneously added to the regression model along with the independent and mediating variables to ensure the reliability and explanatory power of the model estimates.

3.3. MODEL FITTING AND PATH

3.3.1. MEDIATION MODEL CONSTRUCTION

The construction of the mediation model follows the classic three-step method, while combining the modern Bootstrap method to improve the accuracy of the test. First, the sum of the independent variable's effects on the dependent variable is calculated and given as follows:

"c=Total Effect of X on Y" (6)

Second, the mediating variable is included in the model, and the direct and indirect effects are estimated respectively. The model equations are as follows:

Mediation variable regression equation:

$$M=aX+\sum_i \gamma_i C_i+\varepsilon_1$$

Dependency variable regression equation:

$$Y=c'X+bM+\sum_i \delta_i C_i+\varepsilon_2$$

Among them, "(" "C" _"i" ")" is the control variable, "(" "ε" _"1" ")" and "(" "ε" _"2" ")" are error terms, (a) represents the path coefficient of work stress on psychological capital, (b) represents the path coefficient of psychological capital on career commitment, and (c') represents the direct effect after controlling for psychological capital. The indirect effect is calculated as follows:

$$Indirect\ Effect=a\times b$$

The aggregate of the indirect and direct effects is the overall effect:

$$Total\ Effect=c'+(a\times b)$$

Through this structure, the model can clearly distinguish between the direct impact of work stress on career commitment and its contribution through the indirect impact of psychological capital.

3.3.2. PATH AND FIT INDICATORS

Routes analysis employed structural equation modelling (SEM) to ascertain and verify the applicability of each circuit components.Some of the measures that were used to gauge the fit of the model include; the coefficient of chi-square to combinations with regard to liberty ratio (($\chi 2/df$)), the Comparing Fit Index (CFI), the Trigger Lift Index (TLI), the root mean square error Approximation (RMSEA), and the Simplified Residual roots Mean Square (SRMR). The overall criteria was ($\chi 2/df<3$), CFI > 0.90, TLI > 0.90, RMSEA < 0.08, and SRMR < 0.08 and this implied good fit of the model. These indicators are capable of confirming the ability of the mediation model to explain the association between work stress, psychological capital, and career commitment in a reasonable way.

3.3.3. EXPLANATION OF DIRECT, INDIRECT, AND TOTAL EFFECTS

The direct effect (c') depicts the intensity of the independent effects of work stress on job commitment that takes into account the effects of psychological capital. It shows the direct moderating work stress on job commitment. Indirect effect (a×b) which depicts the mediating role of psychological capital in eliminating stress or improving commitment depicts the role played by work stress on commitment to the position using psychological resources. The overall impact "(c=c'+a×b)" is a complete measure of overall effects of work stress on job commitment.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. SAMPLE SELECTION AND DATA SOURCES

This research was applied to in-service preschool teachers as the survey participants and a combination of stratified cluster sampling and convenience sampling was used to collect data. To increase the sample diversity and data stability, the sample was inclusive of teachers in various preschools of various teaching experience levels. The inclusion criteria were as follows: the participant had to hold a formal teaching job, have more than one year of continuous employment in the preschool education sector, and had to be capable of filling out the questionnaire by themselves. In order to achieve data quality, invalid questionnaire criteria were formulated, such as the ability to rule out samples whose answers were the same in consecutive order, clearly regular answers and unavailability of answers more than a fixed limit. Subsequent statistical modeling and mediation effect testing were done using the final sample.

Anonymous questionnaires were employed in data collection, which was done and received in a similar system of online questionnaire. No identification was obtained in the completion process, just only those demographic variables needed to conduct statistical analysis were stored to minimize the interference of social expectation bias and pressure to assess the results.

4.2. EXPERIMENTAL MEASUREMENT TOOLS AND ADMINISTRATION PROCEDURES

The measurement instruments of the experiment include three scales that are used to measure the variables of work stress, psychological capital and career commitment, respectively. Both scales use a mature framework and attain standard scaling. Each of the items is rated on the same scale in order to make cross-variable comparisons and model estimations stable. Before formal administration there was a little pre-test to check the understanding of items and the time taken to complete items and a critical revision of individual statements was made as per the feedback of the test.

The formal administration phase involved the use of standardized instructions and assessment of the participants was conducted on the basis of their recent work experience in the real world. The questionnaire design used to minimize common method bias used cross-sorting of different items of the variables, and the item of the question was included to reverse-score in order to diminish the mechanical response factor. The questionnaire system also has an obligatory verification system to avoid missing important variables.

4.3. DATA PROCESSING AND PREPROCESSING

After the questionnaires were collected, the data was first cleaned and coded to convert the original scores into a numerical data matrix. The reverse-scored items were then converted using the following formula:

$$X'=(k+1)-X$$

Among them, (X) is the original score, (k) is the highest score on the scale, and (X') is the converted score. Subsequently, the items for each dimension were composite-scored, and the mean method was used to generate the variable observation values:

$$Score=\frac{1}{m}\sum_{j=1}^{m}x_j$$

Among them, (m) is the number of items in that dimension, and "(" "x" _"j" ")" is the score of a single item.

For missing values, a combination of mean substitution and sample elimination was used: when the individual missing rate was lower than a set proportion, the dimension mean was used for imputation; if it was higher than the threshold, the sample record was deleted. The standard scoring technique was used to identify outliers:

$$Z=\frac{X-\bar{X}}{SD}$$

When (|Z|>3), it was determined to be an extreme value, and whether to retain it was determined based on the distribution.

4.4. EXPERIMENTAL IMPLEMENTATION AND MODEL VALIDATION STEPS

The experimental analysis was conducted in the order of "measurement test—correlation analysis—mediation test—path fitting". First, the three different scales' structural credibility and dependability were examined. After meeting the requirements of internal consistency and factor structure, the subsequent model analysis stage began. Next, the correlation matrix of each variable was calculated to test the direction and strength of linear correlation between variables, providing a prerequisite for establishing the mediation model.

Then, a mediation regression model and a structural equation path model were constructed to estimate the path coefficients between work stress, psychological capital, and career commitment. Using the Bootstrap multiple sampling procedure, the mediation impact was thoroughly examined. The interval of confidence of the indirect effect was calculated by the historical dispersion and percent probability of consecutive sampling events by setting (B) consecutively:

$$CI_{indirect}=[L_B, U_B]$$

Where the zero was not present in the interval, then the path of dispute resolution procedures was considered significant. Moreover, the four dimensions of psychological capabilities were developed into parallel mediation path models, and the impact of each sub-path was compared to determine the significant mediating factors.

4.5. BIAS CONTROL AND ROBUSTNESS TREATMENT

In the implementation of the experiment, the threat of systematic error was minimized by procedural control as well as statistical control. There were procedural controls including completion anonymity, mixed item arrangement, and reversed question design and also statistical controls were incorporated in the form of the introduction of variables like teaching experience and age as covariates to the model. The estimated path coefficients were at the same time standardized and unstandardized, and different models were compared and estimated to ensure stability of the path structure.

In order to examine the strength of the findings, there was repetition of estimation of the path parameters using alternative indicators and multidimensional models. The findings were taken as stable when the direction of paths and significance were similar with various model structures.

Table 1

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis Results for Each Variable (N = 312)

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Work Stress	3.42	0.68	1					
2 Self-Efficacy	3.76	0.59	-0.48**	1				
3 Hope	3.71	0.62	-0.44**	0.63**	1			
4 Optimism	3.69	0.57	-0.39**	0.58**	0.61**	1		
5 Resilience	3.73	0.6	-0.46**	0.66**	0.64**	0.59**	1	
6 Occupational Commitment	3.81	0.63	-0.41**	0.55**	0.53**	0.49**	0.57**	1

Note: *p < 0.05, *p < 0.01.

The descriptive statistics of every variable are depicted in Table 1, and it is between 3.42 and 3.81, which is mostly at medium to high level. The fundamental principle deviation is between 0.57 and 0.68, which implies the moderate range of dispersion and a comparably stable distribution of the sample responses with no extreme skew values. Job commitment was the most important variable with the highest mean (M = 3.81), which shows that the sample teachers had high level of overall job identification and engagement. The mean of work stress (M = 3.42) was relatively smaller, and the largest standard deviation (SD = 0.68) was obtained, which indicated that there is a greater difference between the perception of stress among various teachers. Correlation analysis revealed that higher stress levels were related to lower levels of career commitment, but the relationship variables were statistically significant and showed a moderately strong negative association between occupational stress and professional commitment (r = -0.41, p < 0.01). At the same time, work stress had a moderately strong negative correlation with all four dimensions of psychological capital (r ranged between -0.39 and -0.48, p < 0.01), which indicated that work-related stress has a consistent negative effect on the positive psychological resources of teachers. The psychological investment elements' ratios of correlation varied between 0.58 and 0.66, indicating a moderately high positive correlation, reflecting a shared foundation of psychological resources without reaching excessively high correlations that could lead to multicollinearity. Furthermore, all dimensions of psychological capital demonstrated a strong positive association with dedication to one's work, with resilience showing the strongest correlation (r = 0.57, p < 0.01), followed by self-efficacy (r = 0.55, p < 0.01). Hope and optimism had correlations of 0.53 and 0.49, respectively, indicating that different components of psychological capital had a stable promoting effect on career commitment. Overall, the relevant directions are consistent with the theoretical path assumptions, and the variables simultaneously meet the mediation test precondition of "independent variable - mediating variable - dependent variable" significant correlation, providing a statistical basis for subsequent mediation effect and path model analysis.

Figure 1

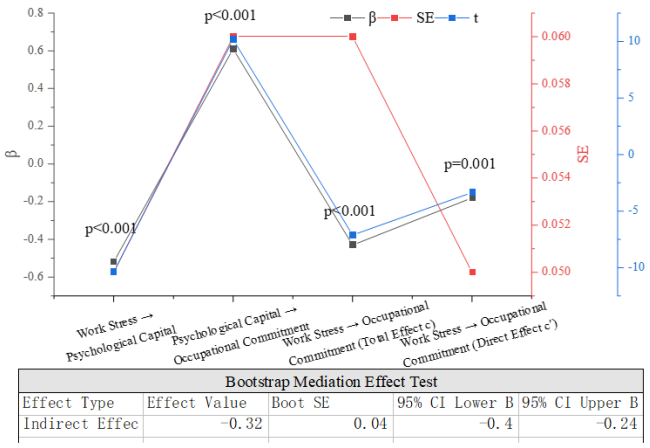

Figure 1 Regression and Path Coefficient Results of Mediation Effects

As shown in Figure 1, the regression and path coefficient results of mediation effects all reached a significant level, indicating that the constructed mediation model has good statistical support. First, the regression coefficient of work stress on psychological capital is $\beta = -0.52$ (SE = 0.05, t = −10.40, $p < 0.001$), indicating that work stress significantly impairs emotional wealth as a predictor, and the influence is relatively strong, suggesting that increased stress levels significantly weaken teachers' positive psychological resources. Second, in the model that includes both independent and mediating variables, the path coefficient of psychological capital on career commitment is $\beta = 0.61$ (SE = 0.06, t = 10.17, $p < 0.001$), showing a significant positive effect. This indicates that the higher the level of psychological capital, the stronger the teachers' career commitment. Furthermore, this path coefficient is the largest positive coefficient in the model, showing that psychological capital makes a strong contribution to explaining differences in career commitment.

The statistical importance of psychological capital's mediating function connecting work-related stress and professional commitment was further supported by the cascade sample repetition results. The indirect impact was estimated using repeated sampling, which is and the associated 95% confidence range was [-0.40, -0.24], the Bootstrap standard error was 0.04, and the mediation path effect estimate was -0.32. Through the mediator variable known as psychological capital, work stress can have a consistent detrimental indirect impact on professional dedication because the indirect effect is statistically significant and the range of trust is completely below nothing and excludes zero.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In order to investigate the relationship between stress from work and career commitment among teachers of preschoolers, this study builds a path model using psychological asset as the moderating factor. Systematic test and path analysis of the relationship of variables was performed based on questionnaire data. The research establishes an entire empirical path between measuring variables and reliability and validity tests on one hand and mediation regression and bootstrap robustness test on the other hand. The results show that psychological assets positively affect career commitment at a large extent and work stress levels negatively affect career dedication at a large extent with a significant indirect effect of the work stress on career commitment with psychological capital playing a major mediation role between the two. From a dimensional structure perspective, all components of psychological capital maintain a stable positive correlation with career commitment, indicating that positive psychological resources have a comprehensive promoting function in buffering the impact of stress and maintaining career engagement. The relevant statistical indicators are consistent with the path coefficients, and the model fitting and interval estimation results support the stable existence of the mediation mechanism. This study still has certain limitations. First, the data comes from a single-point questionnaire survey, and the strength of causal inference is still limited by the cross-sectional design. Second, the sample area and source structure are concentrated, and the extrapolation still needs to be further verified in a larger sample. In addition, the model only includes a single mediator variable structure. Future research can introduce multiple mediation or moderation-mediation joint models, and combine longitudinal tracking data and behavioral indicators to further improve the depth of mechanism explanation and the robustness of results.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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