



**ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP AND ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT  
IN MITIGATING JOB BURNOUT AMONG CHINESE  
UNIVERSITY LECTURERS: EVIDENCE FROM THE JD-R  
FRAMEWORK**

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**ABSTRACT**

Job burnout is an important issue faced by university lecturers today. However, there is limited research that explores the predictors of lecturers' burnout from an organizational perspective, where the focus has been on individual psychological factors. This study uses the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework complemented with Conservation of Resources (COR) theory to examine the statistical relationships among role stress, self-efficacy, perceived organisational support, and job burnout among Chinese university lecturers. This cross-sectional study included responses from 328 full-time lecturers at various universities in China and used scales validated in previous studies. Results showed that role stress was positively associated with job burnout ( $\beta = 0.38$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Self-efficacy showed a significant indirect statistical association in the role stress-job burnout relationship (indirect effect = 0.07, 95% CI [0.02, 0.12]). Perceived organisational support significantly moderated the role stress-job burnout relationship ( $\beta = -0.16$ ,  $p = .001$ ), with a weaker positive association between role stress and burnout at higher levels of organisational support. Furthermore, perceived organisational support was positively associated with self-efficacy ( $\beta = 0.31$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Overall, the proposed model explained 34 per cent of the variance in job burnout. These findings position lecturer burnout as an educational management and organisational issue in which workload design, role clarity, institutional support, and management practices warrant attention. Meanwhile, academic leadership is interpreted as a possible organisational mechanism through which perceived support may be enacted rather than as a directly measured predictor.

**Keywords:** Role stress, self-efficacy, perceived organisational support, job burnout, Job Demands-Resources theory, academic leadership, Chinese university lecturers.

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## INTRODUCTION

During the last 20 years, the Chinese higher education system has been characterized by an unparalleled growth trend. The enrolment ratio has grown from approximately 12% in 2000 to 60.8% by 2024, when the universal higher education period in China became fully implemented, and the overall number of enrolments reached 48.46 million in 3,119 regular institutions (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2024). In the context of increased accountability, Chinese university professors find themselves faced with a combination of competing role demands related to teaching, research productivity goals, membership in committees, mentoring of students, and even a performance-based tenure system, which can be considered a workplace environment marked by high levels of role stress (Wang & Kee, 2025; Zhao & Wang, 2023). With all the role demands being aligned, the energy and mental resources of university professors get exhausted, resulting in burnout.

The phenomenon of job burnout, which includes emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased personal accomplishment (Maslach et al., 1996), has been associated with poorer teaching and research outcomes, lower organisational commitment, and stronger intentions to leave among academic staff (Zhang et al., 2022). Reported prevalence estimates indicate that burnout is a substantial concern across academic settings. In China, the issue warrants particular management attention because lecturers commonly work within performance systems that combine research-output expectations, publication-linked promotion, teaching responsibilities, student supervision, and administrative service. These conditions make lecturer well-being relevant to workload design, human resource management, and institutional sustainability.

From an educational management perspective, lecturer well-being is closely connected to how universities allocate workloads, clarify role expectations, structure performance demands, provide staff support, and manage human resources. Burnout should therefore be examined not only as an individual psychological condition but also as an organisational outcome associated with management practices and the institutional resources available to lecturers.

Though awareness has increased regarding the issue, studies conducted on the issue of faculty burnout have tended to look at the matter using an individual psychological perspective, focusing mainly on personality characteristics and coping skills as key influences (Alarcon et al., 2009). From previous meta-analyses, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that neuroticism and extraversion play a crucial role in being associated with burnout; however, these individual difference measures do not lend themselves easily to organizational interventions to counter them. As a consequence, institutional and leadership issues influencing the emergence of burnout have been overlooked somewhat as a result.

The JD-R approach (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2017) is an especially valuable theory for investigating this topic because it proposes two distinct pathways – the health-impairment pathway through which the harmful effect of high job demands on employees leads to the depletion of their energetic resources and ultimately to burnout; and the motivational pathway through which job and personal resources lead to employee engagement and help cope with job demands. In addition, Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001) helps us understand how people try to acquire, retain, and restore valuable resources, and also explains why and how these resources affect the development of burnout over time. Combining both approaches, this research sees role stress as a job demand, self-efficacy as a personal resource, organisational support as a job resource provided by the institution, and job burnout as the health impairment outcome in question. Previous investigations conducted in the context of the JD-R model have already proven that job resources like autonomy, collegiality, and feedback have strong negative correlations with teacher burnout rates and a significant positive impact on engagement levels. Jurnal Pengurusan publications have investigated transformational leadership and spiritual workplace aspects in relation to academicians (Majeed et al., 2019), organisational commitment in relation to lecturer performance (Campbell & Hwa, 2014), and psychological capital vs work engagement (Gupta & Shaheen, 2017). None of them, however, have simultaneously analysed role stress, self-efficacy, organisational support, and burnout from the perspective of a Chinese university lecturer.



Recent MOJEM research further demonstrates growing attention to organisational resources and employee outcomes in higher education. Goi et al. (2025) examined perceived organisational support in relation to occupational stress among academics, while Zhou et al. (2025) examined distributed leadership, self-efficacy, organisational commitment, and teacher satisfaction among academics in Chinese universities. Together, these studies reinforce the value of examining lecturer well-being through organisational and resource-based perspectives.

Accordingly, the study uses the six hypotheses as its primary organising structure: H1-H3 test the direct statistical relationships among role stress, self-efficacy, and job burnout; H4 tests the indirect association through self-efficacy; H5 tests whether perceived organisational support moderates the role stress-job burnout relationship; and H6 tests the relationship between perceived organisational support and self-efficacy. The contribution lies in integrating a job demand, a personal resource, and an organisational resource within the JD-R and COR perspectives in the context of Chinese higher education, with implications for educational management and institutional support practices.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory*

JD-R theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, 2017; Demerouti et al., 2001) is one of the most popular frameworks used in occupational health psychology. The central assumption of this theory is that every occupation includes unique risks, which can be classified into two main categories: job demands (aspects of the occupation requiring constant effort and leading to physiological and psychological costs) and job resources (aspects facilitating goal attainment, reducing demands and related costs, and promoting development).

The theory suggests two parallel processes. One process – health impairment – explains how demands gradually deplete employees' physical and mental energy, resulting in burnout. Another process – motivation – explains how resources contribute to engagement by meeting employees' fundamental psychological needs. An essential component of the theory is its buffer hypothesis: job resources act as a mediator in the demands-burnout relationship, thereby reducing harmful effects when sufficient (Bakker et al., 2005). Recent empirical evidence for this model comes from the Chinese university context. According to one study involving 600 members of academic staff, psychosocial safety climate, an organizational resource, indirectly mitigated the impact of job stress on burnout (Wang & Kee, 2025). Similarly, another cross-level study with 858 participants revealed that teaching-research conflict, which is the manifestation of role conflict within a specific domain, predicted turnover intentions via burnout as a mediating variable (Zhao & Wang, 2023). The current project takes an organizational perspective and interprets role stress as a job demand, POA as a job resource, and self-efficacy as a personal resource, based on the person-environment fit literature where outcomes represent the correspondence between personal needs and environmental supplies (Basit & Arshad, 2016).

### *Conservation Of Resources (COR) Theory*

As JD-R highlights structural mechanisms, the theory of Conservation of Resources (COR; Hobfoll, 1989, 2001, 2012) offers a more thorough understanding of the motivational processes at work here. The core premise of the COR theory is that people have an inherent drive to gain, maintain, safeguard, and develop valuable resources.

There are two key corollaries describing the dynamics of resource processes essential for the current investigation. The principle of resource loss primacy states that the psychological damage caused by the loss of resources greatly outweighs the positive effect of their acquisition; consequently, role stress, being a factor that leads to resource depletion, can result in much greater damage compared to an equivalent gain in resources. The corollaries of resource spirals stipulate that loss produces more losses, while gains promote other gains. For instance, role ambiguity in the lecturer's work can result in diminished self-efficacy, personal resource loss, poor job performance, and even poorer confidence, creating a typical example of a loss spiral. On the other hand, organisational support increasing self-efficacy could lead to a gain spiral where the improved self-confidence will increase coping efforts



and thus self-efficacy and decrease burnout risk. In particular, the dynamics imply that early intervention is critical, as resource loss could escalate fast once the process gets started. In accordance with the current theory, the important notion of resource caravans and caravan passageways is considered by Hobfoll (2012): resources tend to group and travel in caravans, and organisational support, including leadership behaviour, policies, and provision of resources, creates the necessary conditions for development, protection, and mobilisation of personal resources like self-efficacy. This gives a theoretical explanation of the postulated POS–self-efficacy relationship (H6). Previous studies have proven that psychological capital, involving self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience, mediates the organisational environment's impact on employee outcomes (Gupta & Shaheen, 2017), and health-promoting leadership increases employees' performance, decreasing their burnout levels (Sha & Chang, 2025).

### ***Role Stress***

Role stress is a key concept in organizational behaviour theory that has been operationalized into three related constructs of role ambiguity, role conflict, and role overload over a period of more than six decades (Peterson et al., 1995). Role ambiguity pertains to uncertainty about the nature of one's role with regard to role expectations and assessment criteria, for example, the relative importance of teaching versus research in promotion decisions at universities. Role conflict involves situations where two sets of expectations in the same job cannot be fulfilled because they are inconsistent. Role overload implies that the total workload exceeds an individual's available resources of time and energy. Meta-analytic findings based on 60 years of research show that role ambiguity is clearly distinguishable from the other two constructs and stands out as the most consistently harmful predictor of strain (Sawhney et al., 2026). Strong empirical support exists for relationships between all three role stress dimensions and burnout (Bowling et al., 2015; Örtqvist & Wincent, 2006).

In Chinese higher education institutions, there are certain characteristics of role stress that should be noted. The rapid process of massification of higher education has occurred without adequate infrastructure development, leading to a rise in the number of students per faculty member. The management system in place, based on measurable research output, especially strict guidelines concerning research in journals and research funding, produces heavy role demands on employees. Role insecurity becomes a key problem because of the tenure system used by research-intensive universities. In a study involving 591 university instructors in Guangdong Province, high job demands were associated with emotional exhaustion and dejection, whereas decision-making power and supervisor support were major burnout deterrents (Lu & Zeng, 2025).

### ***Self-Efficacy***

Self-efficacy, which is defined as a person's confidence in his or her ability to carry out activities needed to accomplish certain goals (Bandura, 1997), is a crucial concept of social cognitive theory based on four main sources: enactive mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and physiological and affective states. Within the education sphere, there is consistent evidence showing that teachers with higher self-efficacy levels have a lower risk of burnout (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007) and demonstrate better job satisfaction. From a COR framework, self-efficacy is a potential resource that is both depleted by role strain and protected against its negative repercussions. In particular, role ambiguity denies people the opportunity to gain feedback regarding their own achievements needed for self-assessment; role conflict deprives people of enactive mastery experience as success in one field depends on failure in another; role overload consumes mental and emotional reserves necessary to achieve certain goals. On the contrary, lecturers with sufficiently high self-efficacy levels perceive challenges as opportunities to gain mastery and employ problem-solving coping techniques.

The General Self-Efficacy Scale was selected because the present model conceptualises self-efficacy as a broad personal resource rather than as confidence in a single teaching or academic task. This is theoretically consistent with COR and JD-R perspectives, which treat personal resources as general capacities that may support coping across multiple work demands, including teaching, research, administration, and service roles.



## ***Perceived Organisational Support***

The construct of perceived organisational support (POS), emerging from the organisational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986), reflects an employee's overall attitude towards how much the organisation appreciates his/her contribution and cares about him/her. Factors determining POS include process fairness, supervisor support, and organisational rewards and job conditions (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). The indicators of POS in academia are leaders' concern for professors' wellbeing, availability of adequate resources (research funds, teaching aids), opportunities for career growth (promotion prospects, professional training programs), and procedural justice (evaluation process fairness, equal work distribution). Campbell and Hwa (2014) found that workplace spirituality and organisational commitment have a joint impact on faculty members' efficiency, whereas Majeed et al. (2019) proved the positive effect of transformational leadership on workplace spirituality via emotional intelligence. In the proposed conceptual model, POS is viewed as a job resource within the JD-R approach and as a passageway for resource caravan within the COR approach, since it is supposed to serve as a protective factor moderating the impact of work stressors on burnout and fostering self-efficacy development through mastery experiences, vicarious learning, performance feedback, and cognitive appraisal – all contributing to people's confidence in their own abilities (Bandura, 1997).

## ***Job Burnout***

Work burnout refers to a mental condition that develops as a result of stress from interpersonal relationships and emotions at work (Maslach et al., 1996). The tri-component model includes emotional exhaustion (basic component of stress), depersonalisation or cynicism (interpersonal component), and low personal accomplishment (self-evaluation component). MBI, which includes an academic-specific version, MBI-ES, is the most popular test for burnout due to its excellent psychometric properties across cultures. A high prevalence of burnout among Chinese university lecturers, especially young lecturers working in research-oriented universities, was observed (Zhang et al., 2022). A recent COR study among 556 Chinese university teachers demonstrated that good leadership lowers burnout levels as an indirect mechanism for increasing productivity (Sha & Chang, 2025). Within the JD-R model, work burnout is viewed as the end stage of the health impairment process caused by role stress, and the extent of burnout is dependent on resources.

## ***Academic Leadership and Organisational Support: An Integrative Perspective***

Academic leadership holds a unique space as the interface between collegial governance and organisational responsibility. It is at this level that departmental heads, deans, and administrators serve as the chief designers and conduits of organisational support, as it is through their choices concerning workload, resource allocation, recognition, and communication that lecturers develop their perception of organisational support. The COVID-19 period emphasised the key value of adaptive leadership in higher education. This has been highlighted by Xueyun et al. (2024) in a systematic review published in the *Jurnal Pengurusan*, which deals with the effects of the use of entrepreneurial leadership during crises on organisational resilience and wellbeing. For this paper, academic leadership is not an independent variable but the organisational tool for delivering and interpreting organisational support. In this way, a successful leader creates a context where role stress can be managed, self-efficacy promoted, and the risk of burnout avoided.

Academic leadership is not directly measured in this study. It is therefore treated as one plausible organisational mechanism through which lecturers may experience perceived organisational support, rather than as an empirical predictor whose effect is tested by the present model.

## ***Relationship Between the Constructs and Hypotheses Development***

The six hypotheses are grounded in the JD-R and COR frameworks. Within the JD-R model, role stress is specified as a job demand expected to be positively associated with job burnout. Role ambiguity, role conflict, and role overload represent sustained demands that are theoretically consistent with the health-impairment pathway, while prior meta-analytic evidence has shown positive associations between role stressors and burnout (Bowling et al., 2015; Örtqvist & Wincent, 2006). H1 therefore proposes a significant positive relationship between role stress and job



burnout.

H2 draws on COR theory's resource-loss logic. Role ambiguity may limit clear performance feedback, role conflict may undermine perceptions of successful task accomplishment, and role overload may strain the personal resources available for coping. Accordingly, H2 proposes a significant negative relationship between role stress and self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy is treated as a personal resource within the JD-R/COR framework. Lecturers with stronger efficacy beliefs may appraise demanding situations as more manageable and may use more active coping strategies. Prior research reports a negative association between teacher self-efficacy and burnout (Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007). H3 therefore proposes a significant negative relationship between self-efficacy and job burnout.

H4 combines the two preceding relationships in a statistical mediation model. The proposed indirect pathway is consistent with the possibility that role stress is associated with lower self-efficacy and that lower self-efficacy is, in turn, associated with higher job burnout. Because the study is cross-sectional, H4 tests an indirect statistical association rather than a temporal causal mechanism.

The JD-R buffer proposition suggests that job resources may weaken the relationship between job demands and strain. Perceived organisational support provides instrumental and socio-emotional resources that may help lecturers manage demanding work conditions. H5 therefore proposes that the positive relationship between role stress and job burnout will be weaker when perceived organisational support is high than when it is low.

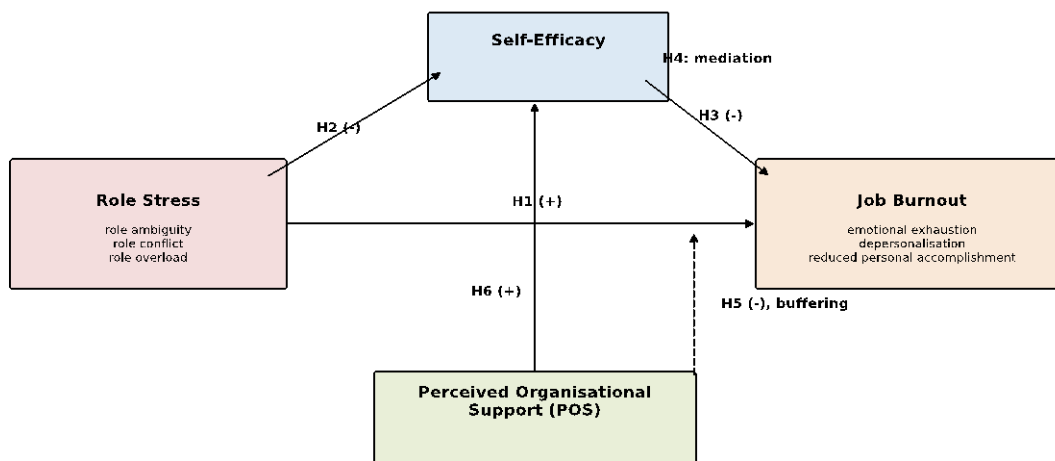
COR theory also provides a rationale for expecting organisational resources to be positively associated with personal resources. Supportive environments can provide access to mastery opportunities, mentoring, constructive feedback, recognition, and psychological safety, all of which are theoretically relevant to efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997). H6 therefore proposes a significant positive relationship between perceived organisational support and self-efficacy.

### ***Theoretical Framework***

The theoretical framework is illustrated in Figure 1. The JD-R theory forms the overall theoretical context, where role stress is specified as a job demand statistically related to burnout as the health-impairment outcome. Meanwhile, COR theory explains the resource-loss logic underlying the role stress-self-efficacy-burnout pathway and the resource-gain logic underlying the relationship between perceived organisational support and self-efficacy. The moderating role of perceived organisational support is represented in the role stress-job burnout relationship. Because the study is cross-sectional, these paths are interpreted as theory-consistent statistical relationships rather than evidence of temporal or causal effects.



**Figure 1**  
*Conceptual Framework*



The six hypotheses provide the primary organising structure for the empirical analysis and are directly evaluated in the Findings section.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Research Design*

A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was adopted, consistent with deductive theory-testing objectives and the predominant methodological approach in JD-R research (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

### *Instruments*

Validity and reliability were ensured through the use of validated measures. The questionnaire, developed in English, was translated into Chinese through the method of back-translation (Brislin, 1970), with expert input from a bilingual panel composed of three experts. A 5-point Likert scale (with options ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree") was utilised in all substantive questions.

Role stress was assessed with an adapted 15-item measure with three dimensions: role ambiguity (5 items), role conflict (5 items), and role overload (5 items), following Peterson et al. (1995), with past subscales having reliability coefficients from 0.78 to 0.87. General self-efficacy was measured through the 10-item General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995), with past subscale reliability coefficients ranging from 0.76 to 0.90. Organisational support was measured using the 8-item short-form SPOS-8 (Eisenberger et al., 1986), with reliability coefficients from 0.87 to 0.93. Job burnout was measured through the 22-item MBI-Educators Survey (MBI-ES; Maslach et al., 1996), which assesses emotional exhaustion (9 items), depersonalisation (5 items), and diminished personal accomplishment (8 items with reversed scoring), with reliability coefficients from 0.72 to 0.90. Finally, six demographic questions (gender, age group, number of years in the teaching profession, academic rank, academic field, and institutional type) were added, along with two attention-check items, to reach 63 items (estimated 8–12-minute survey duration).

### *Respondents and Sampling*

The population of interest was full-time university lecturers in Chinese universities. Any form of lecturer part-timers, dual appointees, and graduate teaching assistants were omitted to ensure that the sample included only core academic faculty members. A stratified sampling method was applied, with stratification of universities into three tiers (national key universities, provincial public universities, and private undergraduate universities) as well as by



regions (East, Central, and West China) to reflect the structural diversity within the Chinese higher education system. This represents an efficient compromise between representativeness and feasibility, which is typical of most sampling methods in higher education literature.

A two-fold sample size determination method was used. Using G\*Power 3.1 (Faul et al., 2009), the minimum sample required for a six-predictor regression model ( $f^2 = 0.15$ ,  $\alpha = 0.05$ , power = 0.95) was found to be 146; however, using SEM guidelines (Kline, 2016), 200 is the absolute minimum needed. A total of 440 questionnaires were sent out to allow room for invalid responses. From the valid responses (74.5%), 328 samples remained after removing any invalid responses and those who failed attention checks. Questionnaires were completed over a period of four weeks, mostly via an online survey in Chinese, and occasionally some were done by hand.

### **Analytical Procedure**

The analysis of data was performed through five phases using SPSS 26.0 and AMOS 26.0.

**Phase I. Data Screening.** The MCAR test by Little indicated randomness of missing data ( $\chi^2 = 213.46$ ,  $df = 198$ ,  $p = 0.214$ ); missing data cases (fewer than 3% of values per variable) were handled using expectation-maximisation technique. Outliers (based on Mahalanobis Distance) without any signs of careless responding were kept as data. Skewness (values  $<1.2$ ) and kurtosis (values  $<1.8$ ) were adequate for the use of maximum likelihood estimation.

**Phase II. Common Method Bias.** Procedure-related controls included the use of anonymity of responding, counterbalancing of items, and instructions stressing that there are no right or wrong answers. The single-factor test from Harman yielded 29.4% of variance from the first factor, much lower than the threshold of 50%. The comparison between common latent factors revealed that all standardised regression weight differences were less than 0.15.

These diagnostic procedures did not indicate serious common method bias in the observed data; however, they cannot establish that common method variance is entirely absent.

**Stage 3. Descriptive and Correlation Analysis.** The means, standard deviation, coefficient of internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ), and the zero-order correlation between all study variables were calculated.

**Stage 4. Measurement Model.** The fit of the CFA was assessed using  $\chi^2/df < 3.0$ ,  $CFI \geq 0.90$ ,  $TLI \geq 0.90$ ,  $RMSEA \leq 0.08$ ,  $SRMR \leq 0.08$  (Hu & Bentler, 1999); the convergent validity with respect to factor loadings ( $\geq 0.60$ ), composite reliability ( $CR \geq 0.70$ ), average variance extracted ( $AVE \geq 0.50$ ); the discriminant validity by applying the Fornell-Larcker criterion and HTMT ratio ( $< 0.85$ ; Henseler et al., 2015).

**Stage 5. Structural Model.** The direct effect hypotheses (H1-H3) were tested using standardised path coefficients ( $\beta$ ). Mediation analysis of H4 was tested using bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals (95% CI with 5,000 resamples; Preacher & Hayes, 2008). The moderating effect (H5) was tested using the latent interaction model by employing a two-stage approach using the matched-pair product-indicators, where role stress and POS indicators were mean-centred.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The present study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. The study protocol was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the institution from which the researchers hail (Approval No.: IRB-2024-HED-018). Written informed consent was obtained from all subjects, who were told that they could discontinue participation at any point without any penalty or consequence. The confidentiality of the participants was assured.



## FINDINGS

### *Respondent Profile*

The demographic information of the participants can be found in Table 1. The survey involved 184 men (56.1%) and 144 women (43.9%). The most predominant age group was that of 30 to 39 years (42.7%), while the second most common age group was that of 40 to 49 years (28.4%), followed by those under 30 years (16.2%) and those aged 50 and above (12.8%). As per the institution, 41.2 percent were from provincial public universities, 36.0 percent from national key universities, and 22.9 percent from private undergraduate colleges. As per the subject area, the distribution is social sciences (35.4 percent), engineering (24.7 percent), natural sciences (22.0 percent), and humanities (17.9 percent). Years of teaching experience: 5–10 years (37.8%), under 5 years (26.5%), 10–20 years (22.9%), and over 20 years (12.8%).

**Table 1**

*Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 328)*

| Variable            | Category                      | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Gender              | Male                          | 184       | 56.1       |
|                     | Female                        | 144       | 43.9       |
| Age Group           | Below 30 years                | 53        | 16.2       |
|                     | 30–39 years                   | 140       | 42.7       |
|                     | 40–49 years                   | 93        | 28.4       |
|                     | 50 years and above            | 42        | 12.8       |
| Academic Rank       | Teaching Assistant            | 42        | 12.8       |
|                     | Lecturer                      | 168       | 51.2       |
|                     | Associate Professor           | 90        | 27.4       |
|                     | Professor                     | 28        | 8.5        |
| Teaching Experience | Less than 5 years             | 87        | 26.5       |
|                     | 5–10 years                    | 124       | 37.8       |
|                     | 10–20 years                   | 75        | 22.9       |
|                     | More than 20 years            | 42        | 12.8       |
| Disciplinary Field  | Social Sciences               | 116       | 35.4       |
|                     | Engineering                   | 81        | 24.7       |
|                     | Natural Sciences              | 72        | 22.0       |
|                     | Humanities                    | 59        | 17.9       |
| Institutional Type  | Provincial Public University  | 135       | 41.2       |
|                     | National Key University       | 118       | 36.0       |
|                     | Private Undergraduate College | 75        | 22.9       |

*Note.* N = 328. Percentages may not sum to exactly 100% due to rounding.

### *Descriptive Statistics and Correlations*

Table 2 below indicates means, standard deviations, alphas, and inter-construct correlations. Internal consistencies for all scales were satisfactory ( $\alpha = 0.84$  to  $0.89$ ). Mean role stress was 3.32 (SD = 0.68). The dimension that had the largest mean among burnout sub-dimensions was EE (3.18, SD = 0.82), while the means for DP and PA were 2.56 (SD = 0.79) and 2.91 (SD = 0.71), respectively. The mean for self-efficacy was 3.41 (SD = 0.59), whereas the POS mean was 3.08 (SD = 0.74). Correlations showed a significant positive relationship between role stress and burnout ( $r = 0.46$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and a negative association with self-efficacy ( $r = -0.33$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). A significant negative association was found between self-efficacy and burnout ( $r = -0.36$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). POS was significantly and positively associated with self-efficacy ( $r = 0.35$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and negatively with burnout ( $r = -0.31$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), all consistent with hypothesised directions.



**Table 2**

*Means, Standard Deviations, Reliability Coefficients, and Inter-Construct Correlations*

| Construct                           | M    | SD   | $\alpha$ | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     |
|-------------------------------------|------|------|----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. Role Stress                      | 3.32 | 0.68 | .85      | (.77) |       |       |       |
| 2. Self-Efficacy                    | 3.41 | 0.59 | .87      | -.33* | (.76) |       |       |
| 3. Job Burnout                      | 2.88 | 0.70 | .89      | .46*  | -.36* | (.73) |       |
| 4. Perceived Organisational Support | 3.08 | 0.74 | .84      | -.14* | .35*  | -.31* | (.75) |

*Note.* N = 328.  $\alpha$  = Cronbach's alpha. Diagonal values in parentheses are square roots of AVE (VAVE). Role stress = composite of role ambiguity, role conflict, and role overload. Job burnout = composite of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and reduced personal accomplishment (reverse-scored). \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001.

### **Measurement Model**

The proposed four-factor model exhibited satisfactory goodness-of-fit indices:  $\chi^2/df = 1.92$ , CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.053 (90% CI: 0.048 to 0.058), SRMR = 0.048. In comparison with a one-factor model, a two-factor model (demand vs. resources), and a three-factor model (self-efficacy and POS merged), the proposed model provided a significantly better fit ( $\Delta\chi^2$  range: 663.76 to 3,548.11,  $\Delta df$ : 3 to 6, all  $p < 0.001$ ; Table 3), confirming construct distinctiveness.

**Table 3**

*Comparison of Alternative Measurement Models*

| Model                            | $\chi^2$     | df    | $\chi^2/df$ | CFI | TLI | RMSEA [90% CI]    | SRMR | $\Delta\chi^2$<br>( $\Delta df$ ) | Decision |
|----------------------------------|--------------|-------|-------------|-----|-----|-------------------|------|-----------------------------------|----------|
| 1-Factor (all combined)          | 6,26<br>8.60 | 1,424 | 4.40        | .71 | .69 | .102 [.096, .108] | .119 | 3,548.1<br>1 (6)*                 | Rejected |
| 2-Factor (demands vs. resources) | 4,62<br>8.60 | 1,423 | 3.25        | .81 | .80 | .083 [.077, .089] | .095 | 1,908.1<br>1 (5)*                 | Rejected |
| 3-Factor (POS + SE combined)     | 3,38<br>4.25 | 1,421 | 2.38        | .87 | .86 | .065 [.059, .071] | .072 | 663.76<br>(3)*                    | Rejected |
| 4-Factor (hypothesised)          | 2,72<br>0.49 | 1,418 | 1.92        | .93 | .92 | .053 [.048, .058] | .048 | —                                 | Retained |

*Note.* N = 328. Range refers to standardised factor loadings ( $\lambda$ ). CR = Composite Reliability. AVE = Average Variance Extracted. R = Reverse-scored items. All loadings were significant at  $p < .001$ .

The Fornell-Larcker criterion was satisfied for all pairs, and all HTMT ratios fell below 0.85 (range: 0.18–0.52; Table 5).



**Table 5**

*Discriminant Validity Based on the Fornell-Larcker Criterion and HTMT Ratios*

Panel A: Fornell-Larcker Criterion

| Construct                           | 1     | 2     | 3     | 4     |
|-------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. Role Stress                      | (.77) |       |       |       |
| 2. Self-Efficacy                    | -.33  | (.76) |       |       |
| 3. Job Burnout                      | .46   | -.36  | (.73) |       |
| 4. Perceived Organisational Support | -.14  | .35   | -.31  | (.75) |

Panel B: HTMT Ratios

| Construct Pair                                   | HTMT |
|--------------------------------------------------|------|
| Role Stress ↔ Self-Efficacy                      | .39  |
| Role Stress ↔ Job Burnout                        | .52  |
| Role Stress ↔ Perceived Organisational Support   | .18  |
| Self-Efficacy ↔ Job Burnout                      | .42  |
| Self-Efficacy ↔ Perceived Organisational Support | .41  |
| Perceived Organisational Support ↔ Job Burnout   | .37  |

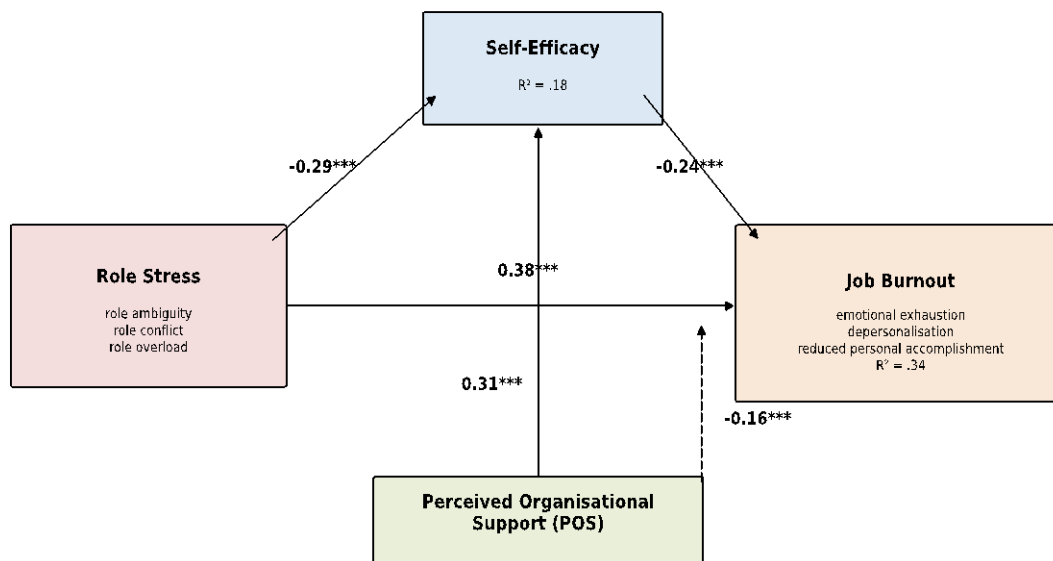
Note. N = 328. Panel A: Diagonal values (bold, parentheses) = VAVE. Panel B: HTMT = Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio. All HTMT values < .85 (Henseler et al., 2015).

### **Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing**

The structural model showed acceptable fit:  $\chi^2/df = 2.04$ , CFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.056 (90% CI [0.051, 0.062]), SRMR = 0.055 (Figure 2).

**Figure 2**

*Structural Model with Standardised Path Coefficients*



Direct effects (Table 6). In the structural model, role stress statistically predicted higher job burnout ( $\beta = 0.38$ , SE = 0.064,  $t = 5.94$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting H1. Role stress statistically predicted lower self-efficacy ( $\beta = -0.29$ , SE = 0.056,  $t = 5.18$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting H2. Self-efficacy statistically predicted lower job burnout ( $\beta = -0.24$ , SE = 0.055,  $t = 4.36$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting H3. Perceived organisational support statistically predicted higher self-efficacy ( $\beta = 0.31$ , SE = 0.063,  $t = 4.92$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting H6. These coefficients indicate statistical prediction within a cross-



sectional model and should not be interpreted as evidence of temporal causation. Among controls, only teaching experience showed a significant negative association with burnout ( $\beta = -0.12$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ); gender, age, academic rank, discipline, and institution type were non-significant.

**Table 6**

*Structural Model Results for Direct Effects and Hypothesis Decisions*

| Hypothesis | Path                                      | $\beta$ | SE   | t    | p      | 95% BC CI    | Decision  |
|------------|-------------------------------------------|---------|------|------|--------|--------------|-----------|
| H1         | Role Stress $\rightarrow$ Job Burnout     | .38     | .064 | 5.94 | < .001 | [.25, .51]   | Supported |
| H2         | Role Stress $\rightarrow$ Self-Efficacy   | -.29    | .056 | 5.18 | < .001 | [-.40, -.18] | Supported |
| H3         | Self-Efficacy $\rightarrow$ Job Burnout   | -.24    | .055 | 4.36 | < .001 | [-.35, -.13] | Supported |
| H6         | POS $\rightarrow$ Self-Efficacy           | .31     | .063 | 4.92 | < .001 | [.19, .43]   | Supported |
| —          | Gender $\rightarrow$ Burnout              | -.04    | .053 | 0.75 | .450   | [-.14, .06]  | n.s.      |
| —          | Age $\rightarrow$ Burnout                 | -.07    | .062 | 1.13 | .259   | [-.19, .05]  | n.s.      |
| —          | Teaching Experience $\rightarrow$ Burnout | -.12    | .057 | 2.11 | .035   | [-.23, -.01] | Sig.      |
| —          | Academic Rank $\rightarrow$ Burnout       | -.05    | .059 | 0.85 | .397   | [-.17, .07]  | n.s.      |
| —          | Discipline $\rightarrow$ Burnout          | .03     | .052 | 0.58 | .564   | [-.07, .13]  | n.s.      |
| —          | Institution Type $\rightarrow$ Burnout    | .06     | .051 | 1.18 | .239   | [-.04, .16]  | n.s.      |

*Note.* N = 328.  $\beta$  = Standardised path coefficient. SE = Standard Error. BC CI = Bias-Corrected Bootstrap CI (5,000 resamples). POS = Perceived Organisational Support. n.s. = not significant. Model fit:  $\chi^2/df = 2.04$ , CFI = .92, TLI = .91, RMSEA = .056 (90% CI [.051, .062]), SRMR = .055.  $R^2$ (Job Burnout) = .34;  $R^2$ (Self-Efficacy) = .18.

Mediation (H4). The bootstrap analysis using 5,000 resamples indicated a significant indirect statistical association of 0.07, with a 95% bias-corrected confidence interval [0.02, 0.12], supporting H4. The direct association between role stress and job burnout remained significant ( $\beta = 0.38$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating partial statistical mediation in the specified cross-sectional model. The indirect component represented approximately 15.6% of the total association. This result should be interpreted as an indirect association consistent with the proposed theory, not as evidence of a temporal causal mechanism.

**Table 7**

*Bootstrap Mediation Results for Total, Direct, and Indirect Effects*

| Effect Type          | Path                                                   | $\beta$ | SE   | 95% BC CI    | p      |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|---------|------|--------------|--------|
| Total Effect         | Role Stress $\rightarrow$ Job Burnout                  | .45     | .067 | [.32, .58]   | < .001 |
| Direct Effect        | Role Stress $\rightarrow$ Job Burnout                  | .38     | .064 | [.25, .51]   | < .001 |
| Indirect Effect (H4) | Role Stress $\rightarrow$ SE $\rightarrow$ Job Burnout | .07     | .027 | [.02, .12]   | .010   |
| Component Path (a)   | Role Stress $\rightarrow$ Self-Efficacy                | -.29    | .056 | [-.40, -.18] | < .001 |
| Component Path (b)   | Self-Efficacy $\rightarrow$ Job Burnout                | -.24    | .055 | [-.35, -.13] | < .001 |

*Note.* N = 328. BC CI = Bias-Corrected Bootstrap Confidence Interval (5,000 resamples). SE = Self-Efficacy. Indirect effect =  $a \times b = (-.29) \times (-.24) = .07$ . Ratio =  $.07/.45 = .156$  ( $\approx 15.6\%$ ). Partial mediation confirmed as direct effect



remains significant.

Hypothesis H5 (Moderation). The latent interaction between role stress and perceived organisational support was significant ( $\beta = -0.16$ ,  $SE = 0.048$ ,  $t = 3.33$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = 0.03$ ). The positive relationship between role stress and job burnout was stronger at low perceived organisational support ( $\beta = 0.54$ ,  $t = 6.43$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and weaker at high perceived organisational support ( $\beta = 0.22$ ,  $t = 2.42$ ,  $p = .016$ ), supporting H5. At the mean level of perceived organisational support, the conditional association was  $\beta = 0.38$  ( $t = 4.81$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These results indicate a statistically significant buffering pattern within the cross-sectional model.

**Figure 3**

*Moderating Effect of Perceived Organisational Support on the Role Stress–Burnout Relationship*

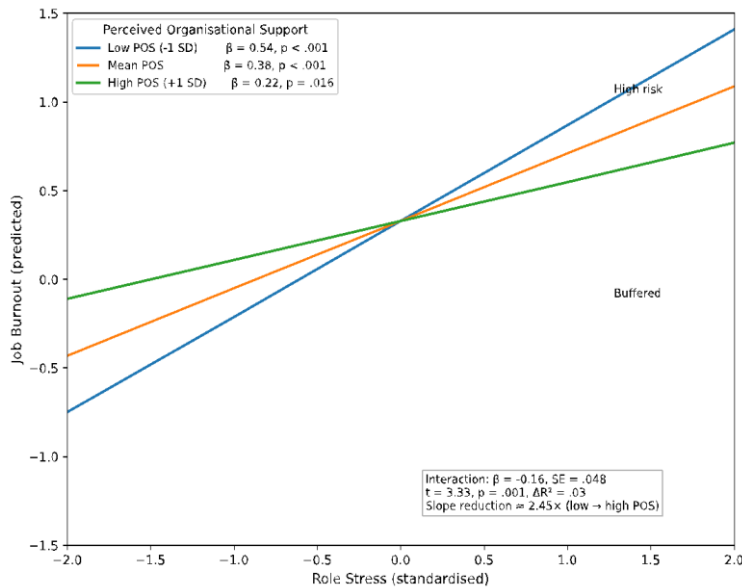


**Table 8**

*Simple Slope Analysis of Conditional Effects of Role Stress on Job Burnout at Three Levels of POS.*

| Level of POS | $\beta$ | SE   | t    | p      | 95% CI     |
|--------------|---------|------|------|--------|------------|
| Low (-1 SD)  | .54     | .084 | 6.43 | < .001 | [.38, .70] |
| Mean         | .38     | .079 | 4.81 | < .001 | [.22, .54] |
| High (+1 SD) | .22     | .091 | 2.42 | .016   | [.04, .40] |

*Note.* N = 328. POS = Perceived Organisational Support. Interaction term:  $\beta = -.16$ ,  $SE = .048$ ,  $t = 3.33$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = .03$ . Slope reduction:  $\approx 2.45\times$  from low to high POS.

The model explained 34% of the variance in burnout ( $R^2 = 0.34$ ) and 18% in self-efficacy ( $R^2 = 0.18$ ). The  $\Delta R^2$  of 0.03 for the interaction was consistent with typical field-study interaction effect sizes (Kurtessis et al., 2017) and comparable to cross-sectional JD-R educational studies (cf. Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007).

## DISCUSSION

### *Organisational Support as an Institutional Resource for Lecturer Well-Being*

The moderation and perceived organisational support-self-efficacy findings indicate that organisational support may operate in two complementary ways: by weakening the statistical association between role stress and burnout, and by being positively associated with a personal coping resource. This pattern is consistent with the JD-R view of organisational resources as buffers and with COR theory's resource-caravan logic. Importantly, the findings concern



perceived organisational support rather than academic leadership itself. Leadership practices such as workload communication, recognition, access to resources, and supervisory support are therefore best interpreted as possible organisational channels through which POS may be experienced. The comparison with recent MOJEM evidence is informative. Goi et al. (2025) found that POS was directly related to lower occupational stress among academics but did not significantly moderate the cyberbullying-stress relationship. By contrast, the present model identifies a significant buffering pattern for role stress and burnout. This difference suggests that the buffering function of POS may depend on the type of stressor and the organisational conditions under which support is experienced.

### ***Self-Efficacy as a Personal Resource in the Role Stress-Burnout Relationship***

The indirect-association results align with the proposition that self-efficacy functions as a personal resource within the JD-R/COR framework. Role stress was associated with lower self-efficacy, and lower self-efficacy was in turn associated with higher burnout. Because the design is cross-sectional, this pattern does not establish a temporal depletion process, but it is consistent with COR theory's expectation that threatened or reduced personal resources may accompany greater strain. The result also complements Zhou et al. (2025), who reported that self-efficacy played an important role in work-related outcomes among academics in Chinese universities. Taken together, the evidence supports treating self-efficacy as a relevant personal resource while recognising that institutional conditions remain important and that individual-resource interventions should not substitute for organisational management of excessive demands.

### ***The Buffering Role of Perceived Organisational Support Under Role Stress***

The role stress and moderation findings further show that burnout is associated with both work demands and the organisational resource context in which those demands are experienced. This interpretation extends an individualised account of lecturer burnout by locating it within educational management decisions concerning workload allocation, role clarity, performance expectations, resource access, and staff support. In Chinese higher education, where teaching, research, administrative, and promotion demands can converge, the findings support closer attention to how universities organise work and communicate expectations. The results therefore contribute to educational management by showing that perceived organisational support is a relevant institutional resource associated with lecturer well-being under conditions of role stress, without implying that the present cross-sectional evidence demonstrates causal effects.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

### ***Theoretical Implications***

The study makes a focused theoretical contribution by integrating a job demand, a personal resource, and an organisational resource within the JD-R and COR perspectives in Chinese higher education. The JD-R framework provides the demand-resource structure for understanding the statistical relationships with burnout, while COR theory offers a complementary resource-based explanation for the indirect association involving self-efficacy and the buffering role of perceived organisational support. Examining mediation and moderation within the same model provides a more integrated account of how personal and organisational resources relate to lecturer well-being. Academic leadership is not treated as an empirically tested construct; rather, it is positioned as one possible organisational mechanism through which perceived organisational support may be enacted in practice.

### ***Implications For Academic Leadership***

Academic leaders need to ensure that work audits are done periodically to evaluate how work is allocated among lecturers in terms of teaching, research, and administrative work, and to have an adjustment mechanism during high-demand periods. This can help to prevent role overload by giving proper guidelines as to what should be expected from lecturers. There needs to be a clear understanding of performance standards and criteria for promotion and the institutional priorities. Lecturers can have institutionalized means of sorting out expectations through regular meetings between supervisors and lecturers.



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At university and faculty levels, perceived organisational support can be translated into observable management practices by using transparent workload-allocation criteria, clarifying teaching-research-service priorities, communicating promotion and performance expectations consistently, providing mentoring and professional development, recognising staff contributions, ensuring timely access to teaching and research resources, and establishing accessible channels for staff to seek support when role demands become difficult to manage.

## ***Implications for Human Resource Management***

The use of mentoring schemes where young lecturers are paired with senior lecturers provides vicarious experience and social persuasion, both of which serve as sources of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Professional development initiatives such as teaching workshops, research methodological training, and grant writing can serve as mastery experiences for self-efficacy purposes and demonstrate that the institution is willing to invest in its staff.

## ***Policy Implications***

Higher education policymakers and university managers should consider workload policies that specify realistic expectations for teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities and allow adjustment when demands become excessive. Institutional quality-assurance and staff well-being processes may also incorporate indicators related to workload clarity, access to support, and staff development so that management attention extends beyond individual coping to the conditions under which academic work is organised.

## **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

Several issues require attention. First, the cross-sectional design prevents temporal or causal inference. Although the specified paths are theoretically grounded, longitudinal designs with at least three measurement points would be needed to assess temporal ordering, such as whether changes in self-efficacy precede changes in burnout or whether the buffering pattern associated with perceived organisational support changes over time. Second, all focal variables were measured using self-report instruments, which leaves the study vulnerable to common method variance. The diagnostic analyses did not indicate serious common method bias, but they cannot demonstrate its complete absence. Third, the study focused on lecturers in China, so replication across other higher education systems is needed before broader generalisation. Fourth, perceived organisational support was measured as lecturers' subjective assessment of organisational support rather than through observable leadership or management practices. Consequently, the study cannot determine which specific leadership behaviours or management interventions produced the reported perceptions of support.

Future research could examine how specific leadership and management practices affects perceived organisational support, and whether these relationships differ across transformational, servant, distributed, or authentic leadership contexts. Further studies could also include work engagement, organisational commitment, academic resilience, and actual retention outcomes; undertake cross-national comparisons; combine surveys with qualitative evidence; and use longitudinal or intervention designs capable of testing temporal ordering and change more directly.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study shows that lecturer burnout in Chinese higher education is statistically associated with both role stress and the organisational resource context in which lecturers work. Role stress was positively associated with job burnout; self-efficacy showed a significant indirect statistical association in this relationship, and perceived organisational support moderated the role stress-job burnout relationship while also being positively associated with self-efficacy. These findings are consistent with the JD-R and COR perspectives and suggest that lecturer well-being should be considered an educational management issue involving workload allocation, role clarity, performance expectations, resource provision, staff development, recognition, and support. Perceived organisational support appears to be an important institutional resource under conditions of role stress. Academic



leadership may contribute to how such support is enacted, but leadership was not directly measured in the present study and should not be interpreted as an empirically tested causal factor. Given the cross-sectional design, all findings are interpreted as statistical associations rather than evidence of causation.

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