



Exploring the dynamics of Supervisor Support, Supervisor Harassment and their impact on Career Satisfaction and Positive Mental Health of Older Working Women

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Abstract

This study examined the independent and combined effects of supervisor support and harassment on career satisfaction and positive mental health of 203 senior managerial and professional women in IT, healthcare, education, and manufacturing across North India. Supervisor harassment independently and negatively predicted career satisfaction, while supervisor support positively influenced both career satisfaction and positive mental health, with stronger effects than harassment. Notably, high supervisor support mitigated the negative impact of sexual harassment on positive mental health. Both supervisor support and supervisor harassment significantly positively predicted positive mental health. The authors emphasize that simultaneous examination of support and harassment provides a nuanced understanding of supervisory relationships, with implications for research and practice.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

As workforces age and women's labour force participation increases globally, understanding the career experiences and psychological well-being of older working women has become an important scholarly and practical concern. Older professional and managerial women constitute a growing yet under-researched segment of the workforce in India and worldwide, whose experiences are shaped by cumulative career trajectories, gendered organizational structures, and age-related transitions (Ng & Feldman, 2010; Riach & Loretto, 2009). In India, rising life expectancy, delayed retirement, and ongoing financial responsibilities have led to increased workforce participation among older employees. Studying older professional and managerial women is therefore critical for understanding the unique challenges they face and for developing organizational practices that effectively address the realities of an aging workforce.

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Their challenges differ significantly from younger women and male counterparts. Understanding their work lives is essential for addressing the challenges of an aging workforce in India. Career satisfaction and positive mental health have emerged as critical indicators of sustainable and meaningful employment, particularly in the later stages of working life.

Within the Indian societal context, the career development of working women has received limited attention in organizational research. Career satisfaction is a key indicator of subjective career success and has become a central construct in career development research (Rigotti et al., 2020). Supportive leadership, flexible work arrangements, and opportunities for continuous learning enhance career satisfaction and positive mental health among older women by helping offset earlier career disadvantages and fostering a sense of purpose and accomplishment in later working life (Kooij et al., 2011). Positive mental health extends beyond the absence of distress to include emotional well-being, resilience, life satisfaction, and a sense of meaning (Keyes, 2002). However, for older working women, maintaining positive mental health is often challenged by cumulative work–family strain, career interruptions, caregiving demands, and long-term exposure to gender-based discrimination (Duxbury & Higgins, 2012; McDonald, 2012).

Workplace relationships specifically with one's supervisor play a critical role in shaping employees' attitudes, well-being, and career trajectories, with supervisors occupying a particularly influential position. Although prior research has typically conceptualized supervisor support and supervisor harassment as mutually exclusive and opposing constructs, emerging evidence indicates that employees may simultaneously experience both behaviours from the same supervisor. This paradoxical coexistence remains underexplored, especially among older working women, who occupy a complex position at the intersection of gender, age, and organizational power structures. The issue of simultaneous perceptions becomes particularly salient for older working women, who often occupy senior professional or managerial roles yet remain vulnerable to subtle forms of discrimination.

Major Objectives of the study

Against this backdrop, the major objective of the present study was to examine the impact of supervisor support and supervisor harassment on career satisfaction and positive mental health of older working women. Further, the study also aimed to examine the joint effect of supervisor support and supervisor harassment on career satisfaction and positive mental health of older working women in India.

Conceptual framework and Hypotheses Development

Supervisor Support and Career Satisfaction and Positive Mental Health

Research consistently identifies supervisory career support as a critical determinant of employees' career development (Karatepe & Olugbade, 2017; Tahiry & Ekmekcioglu, 2023). Supervisor support encompasses both instrumental resources for professional advancement and emotional support, including empathy, feedback, guidance, and advice. It also involves behaviours such as caring for subordinates, respecting their contributions, assisting with work-related problems, and facilitating skill development (Sigursteinsdottir & Karlsdottir, 2022). Within organizations, immediate supervisors function as key agents who control access to resources, performance evaluations, developmental opportunities, and informal networks essential for career advancement. Through close interactions that include guidance, assistance, and performance feedback, employees often perceive supervisors as representatives of the organization itself (Eisenberger et al., 2002).

Employees' careers are more likely to be enhanced when relationships with supervisors or immediate officers are supportive. Such support includes career-enhancing roles such as visibility, sponsorship, and access to challenging assignments, as well as psychosocial functions including counselling, advice, acceptance, and friendliness (Igbaria & Wormley, 1992; Wickramasinghe & Jayaweera, 2010). Employees rely heavily on supervisors for career advancement, skill development, and promotion opportunities (Loi et al., 2014). Accordingly, supervisory support plays a crucial role in shaping positive career outcomes, including recognition, appreciation, performance,

and advancement, while also reducing turnover intentions (Yang et al., 2018; Kang et al., 2015).

With respect to workplace health and well-being, supervisor support plays a critical role in preventing and managing employee stress, as supervisors are well positioned to understand work-related problems and provide effective coping strategies. Empirical evidence shows that higher supervisor support is associated with reduction in employee stress reactions, including depression, anxiety, fatigue, and psychological distress (Wang et al., 2014; Yang et al., 2018). Women's careers are particularly influenced by social and relational contexts across both work and family domains, making the availability of supervisory support especially consequential during career transitions (Conlon, 2004). Accordingly, enhancing employees' mental health can be effectively achieved by equipping supervisors with appropriate knowledge and interpersonal skills (Tsutsumi et al., 2005). Research in organizational behaviour further suggests that supervisory relationships may play a more salient role in shaping women's career attitudes and well-being compared to men. Based on the above-mentioned discussion, it was hypothesized that older working women's perception of:

H1 Supervisor/Immediate Officer support will be positively related to i) career satisfaction and ii) positive mental health.

Supervisor Harassment and Career Satisfaction and Positive Mental Health

Harassment in the workplace has been examined under various labels, including victimization (Aquino & Lamertz, 2004), workplace bullying (Einarsen et al., 2010), incivility and social undermining (Duffy et al., 2002), and sexual harassment (Hershcovis & Barling, 2010). It also encompasses behaviours such as violence, verbal abuse, intimidation, humiliation, excessive monitoring, gender-based derogation, and misuse of power (Johnson & Indvik, 2006). Across these forms, harassment has been consistently associated with severe negative consequences for employees' physical and mental well-being (Verkuil et al., 2015) and workplace productivity (Hämmig, 2017; Van Woerden et al., 2011).

Harassment of working women by a supervisor or immediate officer typically involves unwelcome, gender-based conduct that creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment, or is linked to employment-related outcomes. This abuse of power can significantly undermine career satisfaction, psychological well-being, physical health, and professional performance. While extensive research has documented the positive effects of supervisor support on various personal and work-related outcomes such as stress, anxiety, depression, emotional exhaustion, sleep quality, psychosomatic complaints, job satisfaction, work engagement, organizational commitment, absenteeism, presenteeism, career progression, and motivation (Verkuil et al., 2015), supervisor harassment remains a common yet relatively under-researched topic (Bhatt, 2024).

For women—particularly older women—harassment is often intensified by intersecting ageist and sexist stereotypes that portray them as less adaptable, ambitious, or competent. Supervisor harassment has a strong negative association with career satisfaction among older working women, as it functions as a significant workplace stressor that reduces job satisfaction, obstructs career progression, and harms both mental and physical health (Bowling & Beehr, 2006). Moreover, hostile supervision creates structural and psychological barriers to advancement, increasing the likelihood that women are excluded from developmental assignments, overlooked for promotions, or subtly pressured to withdraw or retire early. The anticipation of continued mistreatment further discourages older women from pursuing advancement opportunities, thereby disrupting long-term career trajectories (Fitzgerald et al., 1997; McLaughlin et al., 2012).

Supervisor harassment creates a toxic work environment that undermines older women's professional well-being, severely affecting career satisfaction and long-term career prospects. As a result, affected women may avoid promotion opportunities, change jobs frequently, or even exit their field to escape the harasser or hostile environment, contributing to lower lifetime earnings, the gender pay gap, and reduced career satisfaction. Age and gender intersect to shape these experiences, with older women often demonstrating greater emotional regulation,

clearer career values, and a stronger focus on meaningful and socially impactful work (Ng & Feldman, 2014).

Supervisor harassment has far-reaching effects on both individual well-being and organizational outcomes. Older working women subjected to harassment, particularly by supervisors, often experience serious and sometimes long-lasting mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, general stress, reduced job satisfaction, and lower organizational commitment (Fitzgerald et al., 1997; Pilgaard et al., 2025). Physiological consequences, such as elevated blood pressure, headaches, and gastrointestinal distress, have also been documented in the studies (Baum, 2019).

Based on the above-mentioned discussion, it was hypothesized that older working women's perception of:

H2 Supervisor harassment will be negatively related to i) career satisfaction and ii) positive mental health.

Simultaneous presence of Supervisor Support and Supervisor Harassment experienced by Older working women and their impact on Career Satisfaction and Positive Mental Health

Supervisor support and supervisor harassment are two contrasting supervisory behaviours that often coexist in the workplace. Although research has traditionally examined them as conceptually opposite and mutually exclusive constructs (Duffy et al., 2002; Eisenberger et al., 2002; Tepper, 2017), emerging evidence indicates that employees can simultaneously experience both supportive and harassing behaviours from the same supervisor. Their interaction produces combined effects that are more complex than their individual impacts alone (Hobman et al., 2009; Paquette, 2023), jointly shaping employees' perceptions of career growth, progress, and long-term satisfaction (Nahum-Shani et al., 2014).

The paradoxical coexistence of positive and negative supervisory behaviours remains underexplored, particularly among older working women, who often hold senior professional or managerial roles yet remain vulnerable to subtle discrimination, including ageism, gendered stereotypes, and covert mistreatment (Roscigno et al., 2007). Although supervisor support and

harassment are conceptually opposed, workplace realities are often ambiguous. This duality reflects the complex and sometimes contradictory nature of managerial roles, shaped by performance pressures, organizational norms, and personal biases (Paquette, 2023). As a result, employees may perceive their supervisors as both supportive and harmful, creating cognitive and emotional ambivalence (Rothman et al., 2017).

For example, a supervisor may display hostility in response to poor employee performance, and also offer advice and assistance aiming to improve employee performance. This pattern has been conceptualized in the literature as ambivalent leadership, wherein a supervisor simultaneously displays positive behaviours (e.g., support, mentoring) and negative behaviours (e.g., harassment, control, or excessive demands), leading to mixed and often conflicting employee perceptions and outcomes (Zhang et al., 2018).

Traditional research frameworks that treat supervisor support and harassment as endpoints of a single continuum fail to capture this nuanced lived experience (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). Hence, increased attention was given to investigating how this mixture of supportive and undermining behaviours affects employee outcomes (Duffy et al., 2002; Hobman et al., 2009).

As women age in organizations, they often gain experience and authority but continue to face gendered and age-based biases that question their competence and leadership potential (Riach & Loretto, 2009). Older women may receive instrumental support from supervisors while simultaneously experiencing subtle or overt harassment, such as condescension, exclusion, or ageist and sexist remarks (McDonald & Flood, 2012). Limited research suggests that older women may tolerate or normalize such harassment when accompanied by support, viewing it as a necessary trade-off for career stability. Career-stage considerations, limited external mobility, and proximity to retirement may further constrain their willingness to challenge or report supervisory misconduct.

Examining harassment in isolation may obscure its harmful effects when supportive supervisory behaviours are also present. Investigating simultaneous perceptions of

supervisor support and harassment provides a more nuanced and ecologically valid understanding of supervisory relationships, as employees often experience ambivalent rather than uniformly positive or negative leadership (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). Focusing on older working women addresses a critical gap by highlighting the intersection of gender, age, and power in organizations, a combination that has been historically underexamined despite its relevance for understanding inequality, career sustainability, and well-being (Riach & Loretto, 2009). This approach advances leadership theory by integrating supportive and destructive behaviours within the same relational context (Tepper et al., 2017) and offers practical insights for organizational policy, leadership development, and the creation of more inclusive and psychologically safe workplaces (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012).

Theoretical mechanisms explaining the overriding effect of supervisor support on supervisor harassment

The theoretical mechanism explaining how supervisor support can override (or, more accurately, buffer) the effects of supervisor harassment is primarily rooted in the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, general social support theory and social-cognitive theory.

Conservation of Resources (COR) theory

Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory posits that individuals strive to obtain, protect, and maintain valued resources, and experience stress when these resources are threatened or lost (Hobfoll, 1989). Supervisor harassment represents a major workplace stressor that accelerates resource loss by depleting employees' emotional energy, self-esteem, well-being, and motivation (Einarsen et al., 2020). In contrast, supervisor support serves as a vital resource passageway, providing emotional (e.g., affection, affiliation, empathy, understanding, validation), informational, and instrumental resources (e.g., guidance, workload assistance, flexible work arrangements) that help employees cope with job demands and counterbalance resource losses (Hobfoll et al., 2018; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). By replenishing resources and fostering psychologically safe environments, supportive supervisors can reduce resource

depletion and prevent loss spirals associated with chronic stress.

Social Support Theory

According to Social Support Theory (Cohen & Wills, 1985), supervisor support functions as a psychological buffer by providing emotional reassurance (e.g., affection, affiliation, respect), guidance and mentoring, recognition, and fair treatment. These resources enhance employees' resilience, enabling them to cope more effectively with stressful or hostile interactions. Consequently, high supervisor support can reduce the emotional and cognitive harm caused by harassment, allowing employees to continue perceiving their careers as progressing positively because supportive actions carry greater weight in shaping career perceptions. Supportive supervisory behaviours often carry greater weight in shaping career perceptions, thereby counterbalancing negative impressions created by harassment. By reframing adverse experiences as temporary or unintentional, supportive supervisors reduce perceived threat and protect career satisfaction (Reynolds, 2020). Thus, although supervisor harassment negatively affects career satisfaction, its impact is substantially weakened in the presence of strong supervisor support. Moreover, for positive mental health, supervisor support acts as a critical protective factor, helping restore confidence and promote psychological well-being among women employees facing harassment, even when the harassment itself remains a significant challenge.

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) posits that behaviour, cognition, and affect are shaped through reciprocal interactions among personal factors, environmental influences, and behavioural experiences (Bandura, 1986). In the workplace, supervisors serve as salient social models whose supportive or harassing behaviours signal norms and shape employees' cognitive appraisals, self-regulation, and outcomes. Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) explains that supervisor support can override the effects of harassment primarily by enhancing an employee's self-efficacy, providing positive social learning models, and shaping their outcome expectations through a process of reciprocal determinism. Supportive supervisors provide verbal persuasion, constructive feedback, and modeling of

respectful and competent behaviour, all of which are central mechanisms through which efficacy beliefs are developed in SCT (Bandura, 1986). Emotional support enhances employees' confidence in managing job demands, while instrumental support offers mastery experiences that reinforce beliefs in personal capability. As a result, supported employees are more likely to engage in adaptive self-regulation, persist in the face of challenges, and pursue long-term career goals. When support and harassment coexist, employees cognitively reconcile these conflicting cues by reframing negative experiences and restoring efficacy beliefs. Supportive behaviours can partially counteract the efficacy-undermining effects of harassment by sustaining confidence and adaptive self-regulation. However, the overall impact depends on the relative intensity, frequency, and credibility of supportive versus harassing behaviours, as well as employees' prior efficacy beliefs and coping resources. Hence, based on the mentioned discussion, we assume the following hypotheses:

H3 After controlling for the effect of supervisor harassment, supervisor support will still be positively associated with (i) career satisfaction and (ii) positive mental health of older working women and the positive effect of supervisor support is greater than the negative effect of supervisor harassment for both the outcomes.

METHOD

Sample and Procedure

The study included 203 senior managerial and professional women from IT (17.7%), healthcare (25.6%), education (48.8%), and manufacturing (7.9%) sectors across three major North Indian cities. Participants, including doctors, professors, department heads, deans, section officers, senior managers, and engineers, were selected through purposive sampling. Eligible respondents were ≥ 40 years old, had at least 10 years of work experience, and maintained relatively uninterrupted career paths. The selection process for participants followed ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects. Out of 350 distributed questionnaires, 203 (58%) were complete. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained to ensure anonymity. Completed

questionnaires were kept confidential and reviewed only by the researcher.

MEASURES

Assessment of Predictor Variables

Supervisor Support

Supervisor support was assessed using 16-item Supervisor/ Immediate Officer Scale taken from Functional Social Support Questionnaire (FSSQ) developed by Srivastava and Singh (2006). The items were scored on a four-point rating scale (1= Never to 4 =Always) and alpha coefficient of the scale was found to be .93.

Supervisor Sexual Harassment

Supervisor sexual harassment was assessed using the 17-item Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ) developed by Fitzgerald et al., (1995). The scale consisted of three dimensions namely 1) gender harassment 2) unwanted sexual attention 3) sexual coercion Responses were made on a Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (most of the time). The alpha coefficient of the total scale was found to be .89.

Assessment of Criterion Variables

Career Satisfaction

In the present study, career satisfaction of the participants was assessed with help of the scale developed by Greenhaus et al. (1990) was used to measure the career satisfaction of respondents in this study. It is a five- item instrument scale and the responses were measured on five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. The internal consistency correlation of the scale was found to be 0.86.

Positive mental health of the participants was assessed using 14 positively worded items Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) developed by Tennant et al. (2007). This scale consisted of 14 positively worded items that was developed through research conducted at Warwick and Edinburgh Universities. The items were scored on five-point response categories from 1 to 5 (1= none of the time' to 5= all of the time) and total score was obtained by summing responses to each item. The time frame for assessment of the positive

mental health is previous two weeks. The alpha coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.89.

RESULTS

Data Analysis

The results were analysed using correlation and regression analysis.

Correlation coefficients between Supervisor Support and Supervisor Sexual Harassment and Outcome Variables of Career Satisfaction and Positive Mental Health.

Correlation coefficients between supervisor support, supervisor sexual harassment, career satisfaction, and positive mental health are presented in **Table 1**. Supervisor support was significantly positively correlated with career satisfaction ($r = .487, p < .01$) and positive mental health ($r = .378, p < .01$). In contrast, supervisor harassment was significantly negatively correlated with career satisfaction ($r = -.402, p < .01$), but showed a negligible and non-significant relationship with positive mental health ($r = -.023, p > .05$). Overall, for both outcomes, supervisor support demonstrated stronger correlations than supervisor harassment.

Table-1 Correlation coefficients between Supervisor Harassment and Supervisor Support and Outcome Variables of Career Satisfaction and Positive Mental Health

	Career Satisfaction	Positive Mental Health
Supervisor Support	.487**	.378**
Supervisor Harassment	-.402**	-.022

Given the study's objective of examining the dynamics of simultaneous perceptions of supervisor support and supervisor sexual harassment among working women, hierarchical regression analysis

was conducted. The results corroborated the correlational findings. After controlling for supervisor harassment, supervisor support remained significantly and positively associated with both career satisfaction and positive mental health among older working women. Moreover, the positive effect of supervisor support was stronger than the negative effect of supervisor harassment for both outcomes (**Table-2**). Supervisor harassment was entered in Step I of the regression analysis, followed by supervisor support in Step II. In predicting career satisfaction, supervisor harassment accounted for 16.2% of the variance at Step I ($F_{1,201} = 38.759, p < .01$). At Step II, after controlling for supervisor harassment, supervisor support explained an additional 12.6% of the variance ($\Delta F_{1,200} = 35.523, p < .01$). Both predictors were significant: supervisor support positively predicted career satisfaction ($\beta = .389, p < .01$), whereas supervisor harassment negatively predicted career satisfaction ($\beta = -.245, p < .01$). These results indicate that supervisor support is a stronger and more important predictor of career satisfaction than supervisor harassment, even when both are perceived simultaneously by older working women.

The regression results for positive mental health showed that supervisor sexual harassment did not explain any significant variance at Step I ($\beta = -.021, p > .05; F_{1,201} = .094, p > .05$). At Step II, after controlling for supervisor harassment, supervisor support explained an additional 16.3% of the variance in positive mental health ($\Delta F_{1,200} = 38.96, p < .01$). It is interesting to note that in the presence of high supervisor support, the effect of supervisor harassment changed. Both supervisor support and supervisor harassment significantly positively predicted positive mental health ($\beta = .441, p < .01$) and ($\beta = .156, p < .05$) respectively (Table-2). These findings suggest that strong supervisor support buffers the emotional and cognitive harm associated with occasional harassment, enabling older women employees to maintain positive mental health despite exposure to negative supervisory behaviour. Accordingly, Hypotheses H1 and H3 were fully supported, while H2 was partially supported.

Table- 2 Results of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Career Satisfaction and Positive Mental Health from Supervisor Support After Controlling the Effects of Supervisor Harassment

Predictor	β	Multiple R	R ²	ΔR^2	F	F change
Dependent Variable: Career Satisfaction						
Step 1 SupH	-.402**	.402	.162	.162	F _(1,201) = 38.759**	F _(1,201) = 38.759**
Step 2 Sup H+ SUS	-.245** .389**	.537	.288	.126	F _(2,200) = 40.469**	F _(1,200) = 35.523**
Dependent Variable: Positive Mental Health						
Step 1 Sup H	-.022	.022	.000	.000	F _(1,201) = .094	F _(1,201) = .094
Step 2 Sup H+ SUS	.156* .441**	.404	.163	.163	F _(2,200) = 19.538**	F _(1,200) = 38.965**

+Sup H (Supervisor Harassment), SUS (Supervisor Support)

Discussion, Implications and Future Research Suggestions

The major objective of the present study is to examine the independent and simultaneous impact of supervisor support and supervisor harassment on career satisfaction and positive mental health of older working women of India. Overall findings of the study indicated that supervisor support significantly positively predicted and supervisor harassment significantly negatively predicted career satisfaction. Further, both supervisor support significantly positively predicted positive mental health of older working women.

The positive relationship between supervisor support and career satisfaction is consistent with past studies (Karatepe & Olugbade, 2017; Tahiry, & Ekmekcioglu, 2023) and can be explained with the help of Conservation of Resources perspective. According to Conservation of Resources perspective, supervisors function as key gatekeepers of valued resources such as feedback, development opportunities, and performance evaluations that support career advancement.

Because employees view supervisors as organizational representatives (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Eisenberger et al., 2002), supervisory support helps replenish and protect employees' personal and career-related resources, thereby fostering positive career outcomes such as recognition and advancement (Yang et al., 2018). The results further indicated that supervisor support was found to be the significant predictor of positive mental health of older working women. This finding is consistent with the studies of Hammig (2017) and Adi et al. (2022). Supervisor support promotes positive mental health by providing emotional, instrumental, and informational resources that help employees manage stress and reduce anxiety and emotional exhaustion. Feeling valued and cared for by supervisors enhances employees' emotional stability, self-esteem, and overall well-being. From a Conservation of Resources (COR) perspective, supervisor support protects older working women from resource depletion associated with age-related challenges and career plateaus while fostering resilience (Hobfoll, 1989). Social Cognitive

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Theory (SCT) further explains that supportive supervision enhances self-efficacy by reinforcing competence and control over work outcomes, thereby reducing psychological strain (Bandura, 1986). Overall, supervisor support acts as a key protective factor for sustained positive mental health among older working women. Thus, H1 of the study is fully supported.

As far as the relationships between supervisor harassment and career satisfaction and positive mental health are concerned the results indicated that supervisor harassment significantly negatively predicted career satisfaction of older working women. Several researchers (Fitzgerald et al., 1997; McLaughlin et al., 2012) have explained the relationship between supervisor harassment and career satisfaction. Supervisor harassment creates a toxic work environment that depletes older working women's emotional and professional resources, thereby undermining career satisfaction and long-term career prospects. From a Conservation of Resources perspective, sustained exposure to harassment represents a significant resource loss that disrupts career continuity. Such experiences often function as career shocks, prompting women to avoid promotion opportunities, change jobs frequently, or exit their field altogether to escape the harasser or the hostile work environment. However, it significantly positively predicted mental health contrary to our expectations. It is evident from this finding that high supervisor support reduced the emotional and cognitive damage caused by occasional harassment and even when harassment occurred, older women employees still evaluated their career as progressing well because supportive actions carry greater weight in shaping career perceptions. Elevated supervisor support attenuated the emotional and cognitive strain caused by occasional harassment. Despite such negative experiences, older women employees evaluated their career trajectories as progressing well, indicating that supportive supervisory behaviours were more salient in in shaping career perceptions. Thus, H2 of the study is partially supported. Regarding simultaneous perceptions of supervisor support and supervisor harassment experienced by older working women H3 of the study indicated after controlling for the effect of supervisor harassment, supervisor support will still be positively associated with (i) career satisfaction and

(ii) positive mental health of older working women and the positive effect of supervisor support is greater than the negative effect of supervisor harassment for both the outcomes. The results of the study fully supported H3 of the study.

The overriding effect of supervisor support on supervisor harassment in shaping career satisfaction can be explained through Conservation of Resource, Social Cognitive, and Social Support theories. From a conservation of resource perspective, supervisor harassment depletes emotional and career-related resources, whereas supervisor support acts as a compensatory resource that restores these losses and protects career satisfaction. When supportive behaviours are consistently present, employees perceive greater resource security, which weakens the negative impact of harassment on career satisfaction. From a social cognitive perspective, supportive supervisors enhance employees' self-efficacy by providing encouragement, feedback, and role modeling. This strengthened sense of competence and control enables employees to cognitively reframe negative experiences, reducing the extent to which harassment undermines their career evaluations. As a result, employees maintain more positive perceptions of career progress and satisfaction despite adverse interactions.

Social Support theory further explains that emotional and instrumental support buffers the stress of harassment by fostering psychological safety and belongingness. Together, these mechanisms allow supervisor support to outweigh the negative effects of harassment, thereby sustaining career satisfaction. This finding is the major contribution of the study as studies related to joint effect of supervisor support on supervisor harassment on study outcomes are extremely limited (Nahum-Shani et al., 2014; Li et al., 2020). Despite growing attention to leadership practices in organizations, this paradoxical coexistence of supportive and adverse supervisory behaviours remains insufficiently examined, especially among older working women who, despite holding senior professional or managerial positions, continue to face vulnerability to subtle discrimination such as ageism, gender-based stereotypes, and covert forms of workplace mistreatment. Hence, future researchers are suggested to validate these findings on women employees of younger age groups.

In sum, examining the simultaneous perceptions of supervisor support and supervisor harassment offers a more realistic and psychologically grounded understanding of supervisory relationships. Focusing on older working women addresses a significant gap in the literature by foregrounding a group whose experiences are shaped by intersecting gendered and age-related power dynamics. Such an approach not only advances theoretical clarity but also has important implications for organizational policy, leadership training, and the promotion of sustainable and equitable work environments. Organizations should adopt clearly enforced anti-harassment policies and confidential reporting mechanisms to protect older working women from subtle and overt mistreatment. Mandatory supervisory training and accessible mental health support are essential for fostering a respectful and psychologically safe work environment. Prompt, fair investigations with swift disciplinary action further reinforce organizational commitment to employee well-being and career sustainability.

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