Research Square

Preprints are preliminary reports that have not undergone peer review.
They should not be considered conclusive, used to inform clinical practice,
or referenced by the media as validated information.

Structural modelling of the relationship between psychological capital and psychological empowerment among school counsellors: a sequential explanatory mixed-methods study in Saudi Arabia

Abdulaziz Mohammed Alismail

amaalismail@kfu.edu.sa

King Faisal University

Abdulaziz Rashed Alghamdi

Research Article

Keywords: psychological capital, psychological empowerment, school counsellors, mixed methods, structural equation modelling, professional experience, Saudi Arabia

Posted Date: November 25th, 2026

DOI: https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-11368792/v1

License: This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.
Read Full License

Additional Declarations: No competing interests reported.

Abstract

Background

The relationship between psychological capital and psychological empowerment of school counsellors in high-stress educational environments like in the Arab school systems is unexplored. In this study, we estimated their levels, tested for gender- and experience-related differences, and examined their structural association among school counsellors in Saudi Arabia.

Methods

A sequential explanatory mixed methods design was adopted. The data were collected through questionnaires distributed to 400 school counsellors in the Jazan educational region. Descriptive statistics, two-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with follow-up univariate tests and structural equation modelling were used. Moreover, 67 survey participants responded to open-ended questions online, the responses to which were thematically analysed and integrated with the quantitative results.

Results

The mean scores were leaning toward the high end of the five-point response scale for psychological capital (M = 3.854, SD = 1.009) and psychological empowerment (M = 3.820, SD = 1.003). Male counsellors had a slightly higher level of psychological capital (g = 0.22) and psychological empowerment (g = 0.31) than female counsellors. Experience was related to psychological capital, but not psychological empowerment. Gender by experience interactions were non-significant. Psychological capital was significantly related to psychological empowerment in the structural model (beta = 0.774, B = 0.565, SE = 0.054, $p < 0.001$) and the fit indices reported satisfied conventional standards. The association was placed in context by six qualitative themes: positive coping, professional learning, emotional regulation, confidence, decisional autonomy and collaborative influence.

Conclusions

Perceived empowerment and positive psychological resources were highly correlated in this regional sample. The data were cross-sectional and self-reported, and thus the model should be read as evidence of association, not causality. More longitudinal multi-region research using established measures and organisational indicators is needed before any inferences can be made about the effects of interventions.

Background

School counsellors are at the intersection of academic support, mental health, family engagement, and school policy. Their effectiveness is thus a function not only of technical knowledge but also of psychological resources that enable them to persist, adapt and exercise sound professional judgement. Two constructs are particularly relevant: psychological capital, which includes hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism; and psychological empowerment, which includes meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact [1–3].

Professional experience can influence these resources, but years alone do not guarantee that counsellors will feel hopeful, capable, autonomous, or influential. Therefore, to understand if differences are more personal, related to career or embedded in the work context, it is useful to study gender and experience as well as the relation between psychological capital and empowerment. Such evidence may be used to inform professional learning and organisational support for school counsellors [4].

Psychological capital has evolved from positive organisational behaviour, which moved the attention away from listing deficits toward the identification of psychological resources that can be developed and that facilitate functioning at work [1, 3]. These resources were subsequently linked to leadership, performance and adaptive work behaviour [5].

Psychological capital (PsyCap) is a higher order resource characterised by hope, optimism, self-efficacy and resilience. These components work in concert, with efficacy bolstering effort, hope sustaining routes to goals, optimism shaping expectations, and resilience supporting recovery and adaptation [6, 7], although they are conceptually different. Conservation of Resources Theory offers a complementary explanation. It suggests that individuals are motivated to acquire, own and protect valuable resources and that resources often co-evolve in reinforcing clusters [8]. Thus, psychological capital serves as a personal reservoir of resources, and supportive working conditions serve as a reservoir of protection and replenishment. The theory, however, does not establish a one-way causal sequence in cross-section data.

Psychological empowerment is about the way people think about their work role. Thomas and Velthouse describe it as intrinsic task motivation moderated by meaning, competence, choice, and impact [9]. This formulation moved empowerment away from something that managers simply “give” to employees to a set of cognitions through which employees experience their work.

Organisational practices still matter. “Access to information, resources, support and decision latitude can increase employees’ opportunities to act and their belief that their actions count [10, 11]. Hence, psychological empowerment is best conceptualised as a person-in-context construct, rather than a stable personal attribute. Spreitzer operationalised psychological empowerment with four interrelated dimensions: meaning, competence, self-determination and impact [12]. Together they capture whether work has personal meaning, whether people feel competent, whether they can exercise choice, and whether they can influence outcomes.

Meta-analytic evidence indicates psychological empowerment is related to job satisfaction, organisational commitment, performance and lower turnover intentions, with leadership and supportive organisational structures as important antecedents [13]. Thus, empowerment is a psychologically meaningful experience and an organisationally relevant outcome [14].

The Self-Determination Theory provides a possible motivational bridge between the two constructs. Work contexts that support autonomy, competence and relatedness can enhance internalised motivation [15]. Empowering contexts may help sustain psychological capital, and psychological capital may help counsellors to make use of such opportunities. The present cross-sectional design tests the association but not the causal ordering of the association.

Literature review

Psychological capital

Psychological capital is a positive, developable psychological state, characterised by having confidence when confronting a challenge, making a commitment to goals and pathways for goal attainment, seeing the positive in situations, surmounting obstacles and problems, and persevering, even in the face of setbacks [1, 16]. It is not seen as a set of nice feelings. The construct is about resources that can mobilise effort and persistence at work.

Psychological capital is mutable rather than fixed. The research found that supportive management, learning opportunities and readiness to change have been related to stronger psychological capital, i.e., work settings can create or destroy these resources [17]. This developmental focus is significant for school counselling, where complex cases and institutional constraints can make psychological resources important for sustained practice.

Hope involves goal-directed energy and perceived pathways to desired outcomes [18]. Optimism is defined as generalised expectations that future outcomes can be positive [19]. Self-efficacy refers to the belief that one can organise and execute the actions required for a task [20]. Resilience is used to refer to adaptive functioning in the midst of hardship or significant challenge [21]. These dimensions are connected but should not be confused.

Psychological empowerment

Psychological empowerment is an active orientation to one's work, not passive compliance. Employees are more engaged in their roles when they perceive their work as meaningful, feel competent, have adequate discretion and perceive that they have some control over outcomes [22].

This orientation is jointly constructed by the individual and the organization. For example, agile work practices, structural empowerment, and leadership, and access to information and role clarity can

influence whether employees experience discretion and influence [23, 24]. In school counselling, these conditions may include administrative trust, access to referral resources, professional supervision and involvement in decisions about student support.

It is important not to see low psychological empowerment as a personal deficiency. It could be a symptom of limited decision-making authority, blurred roles, a lack of resources or management styles that inhibit participation. The empowering leadership literature has shown that the design of the work environment can impact empowerment and its subsequent effects [25].

The relationship between psychological capital and psychological empowerment

Few studies have dealt with psychological capital and psychological empowerment among school counsellors in Arab educational environments. This association is theoretically plausible, considering that self-efficacy overlaps with perceived competence, hope may sustain goal directed agency, and resilience and optimism may help counsellors continue to exercise judgement under strain. But conceptual proximity also means the need for discriminant validity and careful interpretation.

Empirical studies have revealed positive relationships between psychological capital and empowerment in Saudi and educational samples [26, 27]. Psychological capital has been linked to positive work attitudes and performance and lower burnout and turnover intentions in the broader meta-analytic literature, though effect sizes differ across national and organisational contexts [2, 28]. These results support testing the relationship among school counsellors without assuming that one construct causes the other.

The present study seeks to fill this gap using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. The quantitative phase estimates levels, group differences and structural association between the constructs, whereas the qualitative phase is used to contextualise how the model represents the way in which counsellors describe the resources and workplace experiences. The study addresses the following questions:

- What are the mean levels of psychological capital and psychological empowerment among school counsellors in Saudi Arabia?
- Do psychological capital and psychological empowerment differ by gender, years of professional experience, or their interaction?
- To what extent is psychological capital associated with psychological empowerment in the proposed structural model?

Methods

Research design

A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design was used. Quantitative data were collected and analysed first, followed by qualitative data intended to explain and contextualise the statistical patterns. Integration occurred through a joint display (Table 7) and narrative weaving in the interpretation; qualitative responses were not treated as an independent test of causation.

Participants

The quantitative sample comprised 400 school counsellors working in secondary schools in the Jazan educational region of Saudi Arabia. Participants represented six educational sub-directorates: Jazan City, Abu Arish, Al-Eidabi, Al-Mosarraha, Al-Arida, and Farasan. A stratified purposive approach was used to obtain representation across these locations. The sample included 243 male counsellors (60.75%) and 157 female counsellors (39.25%). Professional experience was grouped as 1–5, 6–10, 11–15, 16–20, and 21 years or more. Sixty-seven quantitative-phase participants subsequently completed the online open-ended questions, forming a purposive qualitative subsample that included different genders and experience levels.

Instruments

Psychological capital was assessed using an adapted 22-item Arabic-language questionnaire previously used in research involving educational counsellors in Karak Governorate [35]. The measure was not developed de novo for the present study. The adapted items covered self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism and were rated from 1 (never) to 5 (always), with higher mean scores indicating stronger self-reported psychological resources. Psychological empowerment was assessed using an adapted 28-item Arabic-language questionnaire originally developed by Hakmi (2020) for school counsellors in Saudi Arabia.[36] The instrument was informed by Spreitzer's established four-dimensional framework [12]: meaning of counselling work, professional competence, professional autonomy, and perceived impact. The 28-item version was adapted for the present counselling context and was not an unmodified administration of Spreitzer's original measure. Both adapted questionnaires were reviewed by university specialists in psychology and educational measurement for clarity and content relevance. Confirmatory factor analysis evaluated the proposed four-factor structures; standardised loadings are reported with the structural results. As both instruments were adapted, evidence from the earlier measures should not be assumed to establish full validity or cross-cultural equivalence for the present versions.

Data collection

Permission to approach schools was obtained from the Regional General Directorate of Education in Jazan and the Faculty of Education at Jazan University. Survey materials were distributed to participating counsellors and retrieved after two weeks. Counsellors who agreed to the explanatory phase received the open-ended questions online and had three weeks to respond. Quantitative and qualitative responses were linked only for integration and were handled confidentially.

Statistical analysis

Quantitative analyses were conducted in SPSS version 26 and AMOS version 23. Descriptive statistics were calculated for all subscales and total scores. A two-way between-subjects MANOVA examined gender, professional experience, and their interaction across psychological capital and psychological empowerment; the manuscript reports the follow-up univariate tests for each outcome. Independent-samples t tests clarified significant gender effects, and Hedges' g with 95% confidence intervals was calculated from the reported group statistics. Unadjusted least significant difference (LSD) comparisons explored experience-group differences and are interpreted cautiously because they do not strongly control familywise error. Structural equation modelling with maximum-likelihood estimation tested the specified association between psychological capital and psychological empowerment. Model fit was evaluated using chi-square/df, GFI, AGFI, NFI, RFI, IFI, TLI, CFI, RMR, and RMSEA.

The open-ended responses were analysed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach [29]. Coding focused on recurrent explanations of coping, efficacy, autonomy, and influence. Quantitative and qualitative findings were then compared in a joint display to identify convergence, elaboration, and divergence.

Ethics

Participation was voluntary. Before responding, participants received information about the study, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw, and informed consent was obtained. Survey and qualitative responses were anonymised for analysis.

Use of generative AI in manuscript preparation

After the study and statistical analyses were completed, ChatGPT (OpenAI) was used to support English-language editing and manuscript organisation. It was not used to generate data, conduct analyses, or determine the findings. Final responsibility for the manuscript, including review and approval of all revisions, remains with the named author or authors.

Results

Levels of psychological capital and psychological empowerment

The score distributions are summarised in Table 1. Mean psychological-capital responses were at the upper end of the five-point scale (M = 3.854, SD = 1.009) with subscale means ranging between 3.812 for resilience and 3.883 for hope. Psychological empowerment showed a similar pattern (M = 3.820, SD = 1.003) with subscale means ranging from 3.775 for professional autonomy to 3.853 for professional competence. Skewness was within the interval [-0.845, -0.993] and kurtosis within the interval [-0.281, -0.764] showing no marked univariate departures from normality.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics for psychological capital and psychological empowerment subscales and total scores

Variable	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Self-efficacy	3.861	1.162	−0.981	−0.456
Hope	3.883	1.158	−0.936	−0.587
Resilience	3.812	1.117	−0.993	−0.570
Optimism	3.862	0.930	−0.845	−0.281
Psychological capital (total)	3.854	1.009	−0.977	−0.622
Meaning/importance of counselling work	3.809	1.110	−0.873	−0.565
Competence in counselling work	3.853	1.122	−0.906	−0.647
Autonomy in counselling work	3.775	1.140	−0.899	−0.611
Perceived impact	3.841	0.956	−0.838	−0.588
Psychological empowerment (total)	3.820	1.003	−0.922	−0.764

SD = standard deviation. Items were rated on a five-point scale (1 = never, 5 = always); higher scores indicate stronger endorsement.

Group differences by gender and years of experience

Psychological capital $F(9, 390) = 2.925$, $p = 0.002$, partial eta squared = 0.063 and psychological empowerment $F(9, 390) = 2.552$, $p = 0.007$, partial eta squared = 0.056 were significant for the follow-up univariate models reported. The effects of gender, experience and their interaction on each outcome are shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Follow-up univariate effects of gender and experience on both outcomes

Source	Dependent variable	SS (Type III)	df	MS	F	P	η²p
Corrected model	Psychological capital	25.695	9	2.855	2.925	.002	.063
	Psychological empowerment	22.317	9	2.480	2.552	.007	.056
Intercept	Psychological capital	4874.401	1	4874.401	4994.406	< .001	.928
	Psychological empowerment	4752.408	1	4752.408	4891.276	< .001	.926
Gender	Psychological capital	4.476	1	4.476	4.587	.033	.012
	Psychological empowerment	10.386	1	10.386	10.690	.001	.027
Years of experience	Psychological capital	18.806	4	4.701	4.817	.001	.047
	Psychological empowerment	8.527	4	2.132	2.194	.069	.022
Gender × Experience	Psychological capital	4.859	4	1.215	1.245	.291	.013
	Psychological empowerment	7.245	4	1.811	1.864	.116	.019
Error	Psychological capital	380.629	390	.976	—	—	—
	Psychological empowerment	378.927	390	.972	—	—	—

SS = sum of squares; MS = mean square; η²p = partial eta squared.

There were small main effects for gender on psychological capital, F (1, 390) = 4.587, p = 0.033, partial eta squared = 0.012, and psychological empowerment, F (1, 390) = 10.690, p = 0.001, partial eta squared = 0.027. Male counsellors scored higher on mean scores for psychological capital (Hedges' g = 0.22, 95% CI [0.02, 0.42]) and psychological empowerment (g = 0.31, 95% CI [0.11, 0.51]; Table 3) than female counsellors. Hence, the groups distributions overlapped to a large extent.

Table 3
Independent-samples t-test: gender differences in psychological capital and psychological empowerment

Construct	Gender	n	M	SD	t	p (2-tailed)
Psychological capital	Male	243	3.94	0.99	2.154	.032
	Female	157	3.72	1.03		
Psychological empowerment	Male	243	3.94	0.95	3.090	.002
	Female	157	3.63	1.06		

Positive Hedges' g values indicate higher male-group means; both standardised mean differences were small.

Professional experience had a main effect on psychological capital, $F(4, 390) = 4.817$, $p = 0.001$, partial eta squared = 0.047, but not on psychological empowerment, $F(4, 390) = 2.194$, $p = 0.069$, partial eta squared = 0.022. There was no significant interaction of gender by experience for psychological capital ($p = 0.291$) or psychological empowerment ($p = 0.116$). (Table 4) Unadjusted LSD comparisons indicated that those with 1–5 years of experience had higher psychological capital than those with 6–10, 16–20, and 21 years or more. The group with 11–15 years of experience scored higher than the 16–20 and 21 or more groups. These pairwise results are exploratory because many unadjusted comparisons were made.

Table 4
LSD post-hoc comparisons: experience group differences in psychological capital

Group (I)	Group (J)	Mean difference (I − J)	SE	p	Decision
1–5 years	6–10 years	0.366*	0.159	.022	Significant
1–5 years	11–15 years	0.209	0.169	.219	Not significant
1–5 years	16–20 years	0.569*	0.182	.002	Significant
1–5 years	21 + years	0.625*	0.183	.001	Significant
6–10 years	11–15 years	−0.157	0.137	.251	Not significant
6–10 years	16–20 years	0.203	0.153	.184	Not significant
6–10 years	21 + years	0.259	0.153	.092	Not significant
11–15 years	16–20 years	0.360*	0.164	.028	Significant
11–15 years	21 + years	0.416*	0.164	.012	Significant
16–20 years	21 + years	0.056	0.178	.753	Not significant

* $p < .05$.

Structural equation modelling

The structural model specified psychological capital as a latent factor indicated by self-efficacy, hope, resilience and optimism and psychological empowerment as a latent factor indicated by meaning of counselling work, professional competence, professional autonomy and perceived impact. For theoretical reasons, we estimated one directional path from psychological capital to psychological empowerment. Because of the cross-sectional nature of the data, the direction of this path should not be interpreted as causal.

The unstandardised and standardised estimates are shown in Table 5. Psychological capital was positively and significantly related to psychological empowerment (beta = 0.774, B = 0.565, SE = 0.054, CR = 10.488, $p < 0.001$). The indicator loadings were standardised at 0.813 to 0.926 for psychological capital and 0.872 to 0.921 for psychological empowerment. All the freely estimated loadings were statistically significant (CR > 23.00, $p < 0.001$).

Table 5
Structural equation model: standardised and unstandardised regression coefficients

Path	β (std.)	B (unstd.)	SE	CR	p
Psychological capital → Psychological empowerment	0.774	0.565	0.054	10.488	< .001
Psychological capital → Self-efficacy	0.926	1.422	0.061	23.395	< .001
Psychological capital → Hope	0.922	1.412	0.061	23.261	< .001
Psychological capital → Resilience	0.917	1.355	0.059	23.059	< .001
Psychological capital → Optimism (ref.)	0.813	1.000	—	—	—
Psychological empowerment → Importance of work (ref.)	0.872	1.000	—	—	—
Psychological empowerment → Autonomy	0.913	1.076	0.040	26.680	< .001
Psychological empowerment → Competence	0.921	1.067	0.039	27.138	< .001
Psychological empowerment → Perceived impact	0.898	0.887	0.034	25.750	< .001

beta = standardised regression weight; B = unstandardised regression weight; SE = standard error; CR = critical ratio; ref. = fixed reference indicator.

The fit indices reported were within the conventional criteria: chi-square/df = 1.572, CFI = 0.997, TLI = 0.995, RMSEA = 0.038, and RMR = 0.016; the other incremental indices were also above 0.95 (Table 6). These values indicate that the specified model matches the observed covariance matrix well, but fit does not establish causal direction or rule out an equivalent alternative model.

Table 6
Structural equation model fit indices

Index	Value	Acceptable threshold	Judgment
χ^2/df	1.572	< 3.0	Excellent fit
GFI	0.983	≥ 0.90	Excellent fit
AGFI	0.967	≥ 0.90	Excellent fit
NFI	0.991	≥ 0.90	Excellent fit
RFI	0.987	≥ 0.90	Excellent fit
IFI	0.997	≥ 0.90	Excellent fit
TLI	0.995	≥ 0.90	Excellent fit
CFI	0.997	≥ 0.95	Excellent fit
RMR	0.016	< 0.08	Excellent fit
RMSEA	0.038	< 0.08	Excellent fit

GFI = Goodness-of-Fit Index; AGFI = Adjusted GFI; NFI = Normed Fit Index; RFI = Relative Fit Index; IFI = Incremental Fit Index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis Index; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; RMR = Root Mean Square Residual; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation.

Qualitative findings

Thematic analysis of the open-ended responses produced six themes. Table 7 integrates each theme with the corresponding quantitative pattern. Because the qualitative material consisted of online written responses rather than in-depth interviews, the themes are used to contextualise meaning and possible mechanisms, not to estimate prevalence.

Table 7
Summary of qualitative themes and their alignment with quantitative findings

Theme	Description	Alignment with quantitative findings
Positive coping and cognitive reframing	Deliberate reinterpretation of work stressors as developmental opportunities; faith-based equanimity sustaining optimism under pressure	Maps onto the resilience and optimism dimensions of psychological capital; consistent with high PsyCap subscale means
Intentional professional development	Active pursuit of training, peer mentorship, and self-study to reinforce professional competence and authority	Reflects the self-efficacy dimension of PsyCap; consistent with high competence scores in psychological empowerment
Emotional regulation and resource preservation	Structured use of task prioritisation, physical activity, and peer support to preserve psychological equilibrium under counselling demands	Consistent with Conservation of Resources Theory; underpins sustained engagement and high total scores
Self-confidence enhancement	Self-affirmation, recognition of past successes, and positive feedback from students and administrators as sources of professional confidence	Directly instantiates the self-efficacy–competence linkage; consistent with high self-efficacy subscale scores (M = 3.861)
Perceived decisional autonomy	Moderate-to-high perceived latitude in selecting interventions and adapting programmes to individual student needs	Directly captures the self-determination dimension of psychological empowerment; contextualises autonomy subscale scores
Collaborative professional influence	Perceived impact derived from sharing knowledge, proposing improvements to administrators, and contributing to school-wide pastoral programmes	Corresponds to the impact dimension of psychological empowerment (M = 3.841); relational rather than formal authority

Theme 1

Cognitive reframing and positive coping. Participants described reframing work pressures as opportunities for learning and using faith-informed composure to remain steady under difficult conditions. These accounts illuminate the optimism and resilience components of psychological capital.

Theme 2

Intentional professional development. Counsellors across experience groups described training, peer mentorship, and self-directed study as routes to stronger professional efficacy. Their accounts connected the acquisition of skills with greater confidence to exercise professional judgement and propose new counselling responses.

Theme 3

Resource conservation and emotional regulation. Participants described prioritising tasks, regulating emotional reactions, engaging in physical activity, and seeking peer support to manage the emotional demands of counselling. These strategies are consistent with the resource-preservation logic of Conservation of Resources Theory.

Theme 4

Strengthening professional confidence. Participants linked confidence to recalling previous successes, affirming their capabilities, and receiving constructive feedback from students and administrators. These accounts contextualise the relatively high self-efficacy and competence means without establishing that feedback caused those scores.

Theme 5

Perceived decisional autonomy. Several counsellors described latitude to select interventions and adapt programmes to students' needs, particularly when administrators expressed trust. These accounts map directly onto the self-determination dimension of psychological empowerment.

Theme 6

Professional influence through collaboration. Participants described influence through knowledge sharing, mentoring less-experienced colleagues, contributing to school-wide pastoral programmes, and proposing procedural improvements. Their sense of impact appeared relational as well as formal.

Discussion

Levels of psychological capital and psychological empowerment

The study produced three core findings. First, the mean scores for psychological capital and psychological empowerment were toward the high end of their response scales. Secondly, the gender differences were statistically significant but small and the experience differences were limited to psychological capital and were not linear in nature. Third, the structural model showed a strong association between psychological capital and psychological empowerment, and the qualitative themes provided contextual descriptions of how the resources and work experiences signposted by that association were understood by the counsellors.

These relatively high mean scores are not surprising for a professional group required to exhibit persistence, emotional regulation, and confidence in their work. Similar educational research [30, 31] has shown psychological capital to be associated with job satisfaction and psychological empowerment to work engagement. However, a high sample mean is not a clinical or normative classification. It suggests

a strong endorsement of these specific self-report measures and could also reflect professional self-selection, social desirability, or the supportive characteristics of the sampled schools.

The parallel score patterns should therefore be interpreted as convergence and not as proof of the interchangeability of the constructs. Psychological capital is defined as positive personal resources, and empowerment as motivational judgements about the work role. The association is theoretically coherent but the common self-report method and conceptual proximity of self-efficacy and competence may have contributed to the observed relationship.

Differences by gender

Male counsellors reported higher psychological capital and psychological empowerment with small standardised differences (g = 0.22 and 0.31). Considerable overlap between groups. The results do not support the claims of an inherent male advantage. Or they may reflect unequal access to leadership opportunities, decision authority, informal influence, or professional support. Such a conservative interpretation is consistent with the gender-similarities view, which emphasises that most psychological gender differences are small and context-dependent [32]. Future work should measure organisational opportunity directly rather than as a proxy through gender.

The non-significant gender-by-experience interactions suggest that the observed gender gap did not vary significantly across the five experience bands. This null finding should not be taken as evidence that career paths are similar: some cells may have had relatively few participants, and the analysis did not examine promotion, workload, type of school, access to leadership, or family-care demands. Those variables may be more explanatory than gender or tenure alone.

Differences in psychological capital by experience

Experience was related to psychological capital, but not in a monotonic way. The 1–5 year and 11–15-year groups scored higher than some longer-serving groups but the unadjusted LSD comparisons should be interpreted with caution. A recent meta-analysis of psychological empowerment found a small association with organisational tenure, and suggested a stronger role for leadership, support, work design and culture [33]. The current pattern may be caused by cohort composition, job demands or changing career opportunities rather than psychological decline with age or service. It is thus interesting to note that the experience effect for psychological empowerment was not statistically significant. The feeling of meaningfulness, autonomy, competence and influence in one's work may be more dependent on current organisational conditions than on years served. Longitudinal data following counsellors through career transitions would be required to disentangle development from cohort and workplace effects.

Psychological Capital and Psychological Empowerment: A Structural Analysis

The structural coefficient between psychological capital and psychological empowerment was high (beta = 0.774) indicating a large shared variance in the specified one-path model. More hopeful, efficacious, resilient and optimistic counsellors also tended to describe their work as more meaningful, autonomous, competent and influential. This is consistent with psychological-capital theory [1, 3] and with evidence that positive personal resources and empowering contexts are embedded in broader systems of work motivation [13, 28].

However, the direction of the estimated path should be considered a theoretical specification rather than a temporal finding. Empowering work could help to build up psychological resources, psychological resources could help counsellors to see and take opportunities for influence, or both could be influenced by leadership and school climate. Good fit does not differentiate between these alternatives. A more powerful next test than another cross-sectional one-way path would be reciprocal or longitudinal models.

The value of the model is not so much in the specification of a particular causal mechanism as in the identification of a coherent resource system. Interventions that increase hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism may be promising, but changes to the organization that improve supervision, decision latitude, role clarity and access to resources are equally important. The current findings call for testing of these multilevel approaches, but do not yet provide evidence of their efficacy.

Qualitative contextualisation

The qualitative themes add texture to the statistical association. Accounts of professional learning and constructive criticism linked competence to self-efficacy; accounts of emotional regulation and cognitive reframing provided an illustration of resilience and optimism; accounts of administrative trust and collaboration clarified the experience of autonomy and impact in schools. This combination is explanatory rather than confirmatory because the same participants provided both forms of data and the qualitative responses were brief.

Practical implications

The findings support a combined individual-and-organisational approach to practice. Goal-pathway planning, reflective supervision, peer consultation and structured opportunities to rehearse difficult counselling decisions are potential professional-development activities. At the organisational level, school leaders can clarify the roles of counsellors, involve them in student support decisions, protect time for professional learning, and ensure access to resources for referral. These strategies should be assessed rather than assumed to work.

Future research should recruit counsellors across different regions of Saudi Arabia, report sample sizes and sampling frames transparently, and include school-level variables such as workload, leadership support, decision-making authority, and access to resources. Longitudinal or cross-lagged designs could

test reciprocal relations and intervention studies could test whether changes in psychological capital precede changes in empowerment or vice versa.

Strengths and limitations

This study combines structural modelling with qualitative contextualisation in a poorly researched professional group, but several limitations constrain interpretation. The cross-sectional design precludes determination of temporal or causal direction. All focal variables were self-reported at one time point, which presents common-method and social-desirability risks. Generalisability is limited by the single-region, nonprobability sample and unequal gender and experience group sizes may have reduced power for interactions. The adapted Arabic language questionnaires need fuller reporting of reliability, convergent and discriminant validity, and cross-group measurement invariance; without invariance testing, observed group differences may partly reflect measurement rather than construct differences [34]. The unadjusted LSD comparisons are subject to multiplicity effects and the short qualitative online responses did not have the depth of interviews or focus groups. These limitations suggest tentative, associative conclusions.

Conclusions

School counsellors in this Saudi regional sample reported high levels of psychological capital and psychological empowerment and the two constructs were highly correlated. Gender differences were small, experience differences selective, and the qualitative accounts situated empowerment in both personal resources and workplace relationships. The findings provide support for testing developmentally informed professional learning within organisational practices that extend the support, discretion and influence of the counsellors. However, they do not show that psychological capital leads to empowerment; such an assertion would require longitudinal or experimental evidence.

Abbreviations

AGFI, adjusted goodness-of-fit index; AMOS, Analysis of Moment Structures; CFI, comparative fit index; CR, critical ratio; GFI, goodness-of-fit index; IFI, incremental fit index; LSD, least significant difference; MANOVA, multivariate analysis of variance; NFI, normed fit index; RFI, relative fit index; RMR, root mean square residual; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; SEM, structural equation modelling; SPSS, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences; TLI, Tucker-Lewis index.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of King Faisal University (Reference: KFU-REC-2025-MAY-ETHICS3455). Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from

all participants prior to data collection. Participant confidentiality and anonymity were maintained, and all data were securely stored in accordance with the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Availability of data and materials

The datasets used and/or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Competing interests

No competing interests are declared.

Funding

This project was funded through the Annual Funding track by the Deanship of Scientific Research, Vice Presidency for Graduate Studies and Scientific Research, King Faisal University, Saudi Arabia [KFU266070]

Authors' contributions

A.M.A: Conceptualization, Data Curation, Funding Acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project Administration, Validation, Writing – Original Draft, Writing – Review & Editing.

A.R.A: Conceptualization, Data Curation, Investigation, Methodology, Project Administration, Resources, Validation, Visualization, Writing – Original Draft, Writing – Review & Editing.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the support of King Faisal University for this research (Support ID: KFU266070).

References

1. Luthans F, Youssef CM, Avolio BJ. Psychological capital: Developing the human competitive edge. Oxford University Press; 2007. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195187526.001.0001.

2. Avey JB, Reichard RJ, Luthans F, Mhatre KH. Meta-analysis of the impact of positive psychological capital on employee attitudes, behaviors, and performance. Hum Resour Dev Q. 2011;22(2):127–52. https://doi.org/10.1002/hrdq.20070.
3. Newman A, Ucbasaran D, Zhu F, Hirst G. Psychological capital: A review and synthesis. J Organ Behav. 2014;35(S1):S120–38. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.1916.
4. Luthans F, Avey JB, Avolio BJ, Peterson SJ. The development and resulting performance impact of positive psychological capital. Hum Resour Dev Q. 2010;21(1):41–67. https://doi.org/10.1002/hrdq.20034.
5. Gooty J, Gavin M, Johnson PD, Frazier ML, Snow DB. In the eyes of the beholder: Transformational leadership, positive psychological capital, and performance. J Leadersh Organ Stud. 2009;15(4):353–67. https://doi.org/10.1177/1548051809332021.
6. Youssef-Morgan CM, Luthans F. Psychological capital and well-being. Stress Health. 2015;31(3):180–8. https://doi.org/10.1002/smi.2623.
7. Gohel K. Psychological capital as a determinant of employee satisfaction. Int Referred Res J. 2012;3(36):34–7.
8. Hobfoll SE. Social and psychological resources and adaptation. Rev Gen Psychol. 2002;6(4):307–24. https://doi.org/10.1037//1089-2680.6.4.307.
9. Thomas KW, Velthouse BA. Cognitive elements of empowerment: An 'interpretive' model of intrinsic task motivation. Acad Manage Rev. 1990;15(4):666–81. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1990.4310926.
10. Al-Khatib A, Maayah AS. Modern management: Theories, strategies and contemporary models. Amman: World of Modern Books; 2009.
11. Soudani A, Kharkhache S. Empowerment and its impact on employee loyalty: An exploratory study at the University of Mohamed Boudiaf. Rev Sci Hum Soc. 2023;9(1):1026–43. https://www.asjp.cerist.dz/en/article/221709.
12. Spreitzer GM. Psychological empowerment in the workplace: Dimensions, measurement, and validation. Acad Manage J. 1995;38(5):1442–65. https://doi.org/10.2307/256865.
13. Seibert SE, Wang G, Courtright SH. Antecedents and consequences of psychological empowerment in the workplace: a meta-analytic review. J Appl Psychol. 2011;96(5):981–1003. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022676.
14. Spreitzer GM. Social structural characteristics of psychological empowerment. Acad Manage J. 1996;39(2):483–504. https://doi.org/10.2307/256598.
15. Deci EL, Ryan RM. The 'what' and 'why' of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. Psychol Inq. 2000;11(4):227–68. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01.
16. Al-Hassani KK. Psychological capital and its effect on job engagement. J Al-Muthanna Adm Econ Sci. 2013;3(6):4–40.

17. Kirrane M, Lennon M, Connor C, Fu N. Linking perceived management support with employees' readiness for change: the mediating role of psychological capital. J Change Manag. 2017;17(1):47–66. https://doi.org/10.1080/14697017.2016.1214615.
18. Snyder CR, Harris C, Anderson JR, Holleran SA, Irving LM, Sigmon ST, et al. The will and the ways: development and validation of an individual-differences measure of hope. J Pers Soc Psychol. 1991;60(4):570–85. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.60.4.570.
19. Scheier MF, Carver CS. Optimism, coping, and health: assessment and implications of generalized outcome expectancies. Health Psychol. 1985;4(3):219–47. https://doi.org/10.1037/0278-6133.4.3.219.
20. Bandura A. Self-efficacy: The exercise of control. New York: W. H. Freeman; 1997.
21. Masten AS. Ordinary magic: resilience processes in development. Am Psychol. 2001;56(3):227–38. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.56.3.227.
22. Alotaibi S, Amin M, Winterton J. Does emotional intelligence and empowering leadership affect psychological empowerment and work engagement? Leadersh Organ Dev J. 2020;41(8):971–91. https://doi.org/10.1108/LODJ-07-2019-0300.
23. Malik M, Sarwar S, Orr S. Agile practices and performance: Examining the role of psychological empowerment. Int J Proj Manag. 2021;39(1):10–20. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2020.10.002.
24. Monje-Amor A, Vázquez JPA, Faíña JA. Transformational leadership and work engagement: Exploring the mediating role of structural empowerment. Eur Manag J. 2020;38(1):169–78. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2019.06.007.
25. Fong KH, Snape E. Empowering leadership, psychological empowerment and employee outcomes: Testing a multi-level mediating model. Br J Manag. 2015;26(1):126–38. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.12048.
26. Al-Dossari AM. Psychological capital and its effect on promoting psychological empowerment among working women in Makkah. J Educ Al-Azhar. 2024;43(203):387–425.
27. Kaya Ç, Altınkurt Y. Role of psychological and structural empowerment in the relationship between teachers' psychological capital and burnout. Educ Sci. 2018;43(193):63–78. https://doi.org/10.15390/EB.2018.6961.
28. Loghman S, Quinn M, Dawkins S, Woods M, Sharma SO, Scott J. A comprehensive meta-analyses of the nomological network of psychological capital (PsyCap). J Leadersh Organ Stud. 2023;30(1):108–28. https://doi.org/10.1177/15480518221107998.
29. Braun V, Clarke V. Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qual Res Psychol. 2006;3(2):77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.
30. Abu Al-Ma'ati WM, Ahmed MM. Psychological capital and its relationship with professional commitment among general education teachers. Educ Sci. 2018;2(3):410–41. https://doi.org/10.33095/m7vznr66.

31. Meng Q, Sun F. The impact of psychological empowerment on work engagement among university faculty members in China. Psychol Res Behav Manag. 2019;12:983–90. https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S215170.
32. Hyde JS. The gender similarities hypothesis. Am Psychol. 2005;60(6):581–92. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.60.6.581.
33. Llorente-Alonso M, Garcia-Ael C, Topa G. A meta-analysis of psychological empowerment: antecedents, organizational outcomes, and moderating variables. Curr Psychol. 2024;43:1759–84. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-023-04369-8.
34. Putnick DL, Bornstein MH. Measurement invariance conventions and reporting: the state of the art and future directions for psychological research. Dev Rev. 2016;41:71–90. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dr.2016.06.004.
35. Al-Mahamid ASA. The relationship of psychological capital to emotional balance and professional motivation for the educational counsellors of Karak Governorate [doctoral dissertation]. Mu'tah: Mu'tah University; 2022. Available from: http://search.mandumah.com/Record/1404980
36. Hakmi ABNA. (2020). The factorial structure of psychological empowerment and its relationship with counseling creativity among student counselors in the Jazan Education Department [Master's thesis, Jazan University]. Dar Almandumah. http://search.mandumah.com/Record/1327539