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Organizational support and faculty well-being: unlocking the dual mediating pathways of work-family conflict and organizational identification

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Abstract

Given the prominent issue of work-related stress among university teachers, enhancing their professional well-being has drawn significant attention. This study investigates the mechanisms by which organizational support, encompassing both resource-based and emotional dimensions, improves faculty's professional well-being. Drawing on survey data from Chinese university faculty, regression and mediation analyses reveal that high levels of organizational support are significantly associated with improved overall well-being, including higher levels of job satisfaction, life satisfaction, and psychological health. Notably, emotional support exhibits a more pronounced effect than resource support. Further analyses indicate that organizational support enhances well-being primarily by reducing work-family conflict and strengthening organizational identification. These findings offer important theoretical insights and practical implications for faculty development and higher education management.

Introduction

Professional well-being refers to the sense of happiness and fulfillment that university faculty experience in their academic careers (Zheng et al., 2015). It plays a crucial role in maintaining psychological health (Gregersen et al., 2023), enhancing teaching effectiveness (Hascher & Waber, 2021), fostering research innovation (Kumar, 2022), and promoting career development (Song et al., 2020). However, structural imbalances in the academic labor market, characterized by an oversupply of candidates, have intensified pressures on faculty members. The widespread adoption of the "up-or-out" tenure-track system, the increasing length of working hours, and mounting workplace stress have led to a marked decline in faculty well-being (Zábrodská et al., 2018). University faculty members are facing significant mental health challenges across the globe. A 2020 National Governance report surveying over 3,000 early-career faculty in China revealed that more than half work under a "996" schedule (working from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. six days a week) (Xu, 2021). Additionally, the first global survey on faculty stress, published by Times Higher Education in 2017, ranked Chinese university faculty as experiencing the highest levels of stress worldwide, scoring at level five on a stress index (Grove, 2017). Excessive work-related stress has been linked to heightened levels of anxiety and depression among faculty members (Tian & Lu, 2017), with well-being levels significantly lower than those of professionals in other fields (Grenville-Cleave & Boniwell, 2012). Against this backdrop, the question of how to enhance faculty professional well-being has become a critical issue in higher education worldwide.

Existing research has investigated factors influencing faculty well-being from two primary perspectives: individual characteristics and work environment. At the individual level, studies have shown that emotional intelligence is positively correlated with well-being, yet remains difficult to modify. In contrast, workplace factors, such as leadership style (Cann et al., 2021), institutional climate (Qu, 2024), and organizational identification (Vo et al., 2024), have a significant influence on faculty well-being. Organizational support theory posits that improving work environments can enhance employee well-being, making it a key approach within education management. Organizational support reflects an institution's recognition and concern for its employees, fulfilling their emotional needs (Eisenberger et al., 2001). It strengthens organizational identification, serving as both a form of social capital and psychological capital that can foster higher levels of faculty's

professional well-being (Li, 2018). Additionally, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model posits that job resources—organizational support mechanisms facilitating professional growth, such as performance feedback and participation in decision-making—fulfill employees' work-related needs (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), thereby enhancing job satisfaction (Grover et al., 2018). Furthermore, as work-family conflict increasingly undermines faculty well-being, organizational support—including childcare provisions, flexible scheduling, and workload adjustments—proves critical in mitigating such tensions (Kurtessis et al., 2017;Kim et al., 2023). However, critical questions remain, including: (1) What types of organizational support contribute to enhancing faculty professional well-being? and (2) Does organizational support improve faculty well-being by reducing work-family conflict and strengthening organizational identification? Empirical evidence addressing these questions remains scarce. To address this gap, this study utilizes survey data collected from faculty members at Chinese universities to empirically examine the impact of organizational support on professional well-being and its underlying mechanisms.

In the context of Chinese higher education, organizational support is profoundly shaped by governance structures and evolving leadership practices that differ markedly from Western institutions. Operating within a centralized, policy-driven system (e.g., 'Double First-Class' initiatives, 'up-or-out' tenure mechanisms), Chinese institutions exhibit stronger state control over resource allocation and performance expectations than Western counterparts characterized by greater institutional autonomy (Liu et al., 2024; Kwong et al., 2010). Chinese universities predominantly employ a dual leadership arrangement, where both the university president and the Communist Party secretary play critical roles in institutional governance. This model, unique to China, reflects broader political imperatives and historical evolution and stands in contrast to the typical separation between academic and administrative leadership in Western institutions (Cunningham et al., 2022; Ruan et al., 2024). While Western universities often emphasize faculty participation in governance and maintain clearer lines between management and academics, Chinese top-level leaders tend to assume managerial and administrative rather than purely academic or symbolic roles, limiting faculty input into major institutional policies (Ruan et al., 2024). Besides, China's organizational support manifests through administratively embedded welfare (e.g., state-subsidized childcare) and guanxi-mediated workload adjustments, distinct from Western individual entitlement models (Li et al., 2013). While danwei provisions enhance well-being, market-driven 'up-or-out' reforms concurrently intensify performance anxiety, rendering observed well-being gains precarious (Chen et al., 2020). Simultaneously, deep-rooted collectivist values and Confucian familial obligations exacerbate strain: 'work primacy' norms coupled with intergenerational care burdens under the '4-2-1' family structure (single-child couples supporting four parents plus children) create globally unparalleled occupational pressures(Liu et al., 2024; Tan, 2015; Huang, 2018). Consequently, organizational support's efficacy in fostering faculty well-being—currently challenged by excessive workloads, publication demands, and underdeveloped work-family policies—operates through culturally distinct pathways. This background necessitates context-specific investigations to design effective interventions and advance cross-cultural theoretical discourse.

This study makes four significant contributions to the literature. First, it introduces a comprehensive framework for measuring faculty professional well-being, extending beyond overall well-being to include its three distinct dimensions—life well-being, work well-being, and psychological well-being

(Zheng et al., 2015). This multidimensional approach advances prior research, which predominantly focused on aggregate well-being measures (Song et al., 2020). Second, the study provides a nuanced analysis of organizational support by differentiating between resource-based support and emotional support, comparing their unique impacts on faculty well-being. Third, it investigates the mediating mechanisms of work-family conflict reduction and organizational identification enhancement, shedding light on how organizational support influences faculty well-being. Fourth, despite growing recognition of organizational support's importance, most existing research is concentrated in Western higher education or among K-12 educators. This leaves a gap in understanding how unique governance features, work conditions, and support structures in Chinese universities shape faculty well-being. Thus, the current study addresses this gap by examining both the direct and mediating effects of organizational support among Chinese university faculty. By expanding the understanding of organizational support theory and its application to faculty well-being within the unique context of China's rapidly evolving higher education system, the findings offer practical implications for higher education administrators aiming to design evidence-based policies that foster a supportive academic environment, but also provide valuable insights for understanding faculty well-being challenges in diverse higher education contexts globally.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Professional well-being reflects an individual's holistic satisfaction and psychological fulfillment in both professional and personal spheres (Zheng et al., 2015), comprising the three dimensions of life well-being (work-life harmony), workplace well-being (job satisfaction), and psychological well-being (emotional stability). Increasing workloads and pervasive work-family conflict have increasingly diminished faculty well-being (Tian & Lu, 2017;Pu et al., 2017). Grounded in organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 2001), this study posits that institutions can enhance faculty well-being by addressing socio-emotional needs through material and psychological support, thereby reducing burnout and mitigating work-family tensions. Prior research on organizational support and faculty well-being has centered on three key themes:

Organizational Support and Faculty's Professional Well-being

Since the 1980s, organizational support has emerged as a cornerstone of management strategy to enhance employee efficiency and satisfaction (Eisenberger et al., 2001). Extensive research has confirmed the correlation between organizational support and employee well-being (Kurtessis et al., 2017; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Organizational support theory posits that employees' perception of support influences their belief in their legitimacy as organizational members (Ashforth et al., 2008). When employees feel legitimate, they develop stronger psychological and emotional attachments, exhibit higher organizational identification, and demonstrate greater workplace motivation (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Simultaneously, organizational support helps mitigate work stress and burnout, enhancing overall well-being (Gillman et al., 2024). In educational management, organizational support is recognized as critical for boosting teacher well-being (Bogler & Nir, 2012). For example, studies involving 102 university lecturers from United Kingdom identified organizational support as a significant predictor of well-being (Holliman et al., 2022).

Organizational support is categorized into resource support, such as work-related resources, and emotional support, such as leadership encouragement, and peer camaraderie. School leaders often employ strategies like respect, rewards, and improved compensation to address teachers' personal and professional needs, thereby enhancing their well-being (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). The survey involving 516 questionnaires from universities in Bangladesh holds that favorable working conditions which contain work-related resources and emotional support, constitute a crucial factor in reducing employees' turnover intentions. Essentially, such support represents the organization's response to employees' needs, which is conducive to enhancing employees' psychological sense of security and satisfaction, and is related to well-being (Ashraf, 2019).

Scholars have explored the differential impacts of resource versus emotional support (Johnson et al., 2012). The Massachusetts Teachers and Leaders Survey (Mass TeLLS) revealed that collegial support, principal leadership, and trust and respect cultures nearly doubled the impact on teacher job satisfaction compared to material resources (Johnson et al., 2012). Studies even suggest limited efficacy of material incentives, on faculty well-being, like wages and benefits (Goodman & Turner, 2013). While existing research has shed light on the differences between emotional support and resource support in influencing teachers' well-being and pointed out the limitations of material incentives, the specific mechanisms through which organizational support operates on teachers' well-being in the context of higher education remain to be further clarified. To address this gap, we propose:

Hypothesis 1

Organizational support significantly increases faculty professional well-being in higher education.

Hypothesis 2

Emotional support has a stronger positive effect on enhancing faculty well-being than resource support in higher education.

Organizational Support, Organizational Identification, and Well-being

Organizational support theory emphasizes the critical role of organizational identification among employees (Ashforth et al., 2008). As a psychological bond between individuals and their organization, organizational identification reflects the alignment of personal values with institutional goals and a sense of emotional belonging, while also serving as a prerequisite for job satisfaction (Edwards & Peccei, 2010). Positive organizational support enables employees to feel recognized and respected, fulfilling their socio-emotional needs and thereby strengthening their organizational identification. Empirical evidence confirms that resource-based support and emotional support from school administrators significantly enhance teachers' organizational identification (Vo et al., 2024). Strong organizational identification enables teachers to align closely with their institutions, embracing institutional values and culture. Conversely, inadequate organizational support exacerbates turnover risks. For instance, U.S. data reveal that insufficient support and weak organizational identification drive many teachers to leave high-poverty, minority-dominated schools for wealthier, predominantly white institutions (Johnson et al., 2012).

Social identity theory explains the relationship between organizational identification and faculty well-being, arguing that individuals construct their self-concept through social categorization, social comparison, and positive distinctiveness (Turner et al., 1979). Stronger social identification correlates with higher levels of well-being (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). Through social categorization, teachers perceive themselves as integral members of their school, fostering deep identification and belonging that provide psychological stability, reduce negative emotions, and enhance well-being (Steffens et al., 2017). Furthermore, social comparison motivates teachers to improve teaching quality and take pride in their institution, boosting job satisfaction. Positive distinctiveness encourages teachers to internalize the school's positive image as a source of self-esteem, guided by self-actualization, which ultimately elevates individual well-being. Research also demonstrates a significant positive relationship between organizational identification and teacher job satisfaction (Fan et al., 2024). Employees with stronger organizational identification exhibit lower burnout and turnover rates and higher job satisfaction (Avanzi et al., 2018müş et al., 2012). Studies in Italian higher education confirm that organizational identification enhances faculty job satisfaction (Signore et al., 2024), while an analysis of 238 Turkish teachers reveals that organizational identification positively influences job satisfaction (Gümüş et al., 2012). However, whether organizational support improves university faculty's professional well-being by strengthening organizational identification remains under-explored. Thus, this study proposes:

Hypothesis 3

Organizational support enhances faculty's professional well-being by bolstering their organizational identification.

Organizational Support, Work-Family Conflict, and Well-being

Since the 1970s, work-family conflict has gained growing attention in the fields of organizational behavior and human resource management (Beigi et al., 2017). Work-family conflict is defined as "a form of inter-role conflict in which the role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respect," (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985: 77). As work and family demands compete across temporal and spatial boundaries, conflicts arising from role pressures, time constraints, and energy depletion can significantly impair workplace performance, leading to job dissatisfaction, diminished life satisfaction, and psychological strain (Spector et al., 2004). Empirical evidence from studies of 357 university faculty in China's Henan Province, confirms a positive correlation between work-family conflict and burnout (Pu et al., 2017). Furthermore, research on 280 academic people who work at private universities in Malaysia highlights work-family conflict's significant negative impact on job satisfaction (Rahman et al., 2020). Consequently, schools prioritize organizational support to mitigate work-family conflict, often combining emotional and resource-based strategies to help teachers navigate these challenges (Zhou et al., 2020).

Organizational support theory argues that robust organizational support acts as both social and psychological capital, enabling individuals to balance professional and personal demands and reduce work-family conflict (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Aligned with the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989), instrumental support (e.g., flexible scheduling, childcare services) and affective support (e.g., supervisory caring, colleague understanding) replenish teachers' psychological and

temporal resources, attenuating resource depletion induced by role demand conflicts. Such support directly diminishes bidirectional interference—work interfering with family and family interfering with work—reducing role stress and emotional exhaustion. Complementing this, the Job Demands-Resources Theory (Bakker et al., 2004) conceptualizes organizational support (e.g., flexible work arrangements, participative decision-making) as pivotal job resources that not only replenish psychological capital and temporal reserves but also fulfill work-family balance needs, substantially curbing work-family conflict. Empirical evidence from 197 professionals in higher education found that organizational support effectively alleviated faculty's work-family conflict (Shreffler et al., 2019),. However, a study involving 94 participants from a Malaysian Open Distance Learning (ODL) university yielded contrasting empirical results, demonstrating that organizational support did not significantly moderate the relationship between work-life balance and well-being (Rahim et al., 2020). Therefore, further investigation is required to determine whether organizational support can enhance teachers' well-being by moderating work-family conflict. Critically, work-family conflict exhibits a significant negative correlation with personal well-being (Zábrodská et al., 2018). The reduction of work-family conflict enhances sustainable occupational well-being not only by restoring personal resource reservoirs to augment work meaningfulness (Pu et al., 2017), but also by attenuating psychological resource depletion and fostering positive affective experiences (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Nevertheless, whether organizational support bolsters university teachers' occupational well-being through mitigating work-family conflict remains insufficiently explored, particularly within higher education contexts. Consequently, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4

Organizational support promotes faculty's professional well-being by reducing work-family conflict.

Research Methods

This study employs a quantitative research design to examine the relationship between organizational support and faculty professional well-being in higher education. The analysis is based on survey data collected from university faculty members in China, utilizing validated measurement scales to assess key variables. Regression analysis and mediation models are applied to explore the direct and indirect effects of organizational support on faculty well-being, with a particular focus on the role of work-family conflict and organizational identification.

Data Collection

This study's data is derived from the "University Faculty Career Development Survey Database." The survey was administered in May 2024 via Wenjuanxing, an online questionnaire platform, following principles of anonymity and voluntary participation. This study received ethical approval from the X University Ethics Review Committee, and informed consent was explicitly incorporated into the questionnaire design to ensure participants' voluntary and informed participation. Faculty members from "Double First-Class" universities[1] in Beijing were invited to complete the questionnaire, which collected demographic information, well-being metrics, and organizational support levels, providing robust data for analysis. A total of 1000 questionnaires were distributed, after three months of data collection, with small cash rewards and gifts as incentives, 615 questionnaires were

successfully recovered, resulting in a recovery rate of 61.5%. Their average age is 45.2 years old., including 283 male respondents (46.02%) and 332 female respondents (53.98%).

The dependent variable, faculty professional well-being, is measured using the Employee Well-being Scale (Zheng et al., 2015), which assesses life well-being (LWB), workplace well-being (WWB), and psychological well-being (PWB) across 18 items. The scale captures faculty satisfaction with work and life, as well as psychological experiences in professional and personal contexts. Items (e.g., “My life is very interesting” for LWB; “My work is very interesting” for WWB; “I handle daily life well” for PWB) are rated on a 1–7 Likert scale (from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”). The scale demonstrates strong reliability (KMO = 0.966; Cronbach’s α = 0.970). Four indicators—overall well-being, LWB, WWB, and PWB—are computed using the sum-to-average method.

The independent variable, organizational support, includes two dimensions. The first dimension, emotional support is measured via the Perceived Organizational Support Scale (Shen & Benson, 2016), comprising eight items (e.g., “My institution cares about my opinion”) rated on a 5-point Likert scale (KMO = 0.902; Cronbach’s α = 0.919). The second dimension, resource support, is assessed with the Attainment of Resources Scale, which includes five items (e.g., access to professional development funding) rated on a 4-point difficulty scale (1 = “difficult” to 4 = “easy”; KMO = 0.867; Cronbach’s α = 0.885). Both dimensions are calculated using the sum-to-average method.

The mediating variables are work-family conflict and organizational identification. Work-family conflict is measured using the Scale of Work-Family Conflict (Zhao et al., 2011), featuring six items (e.g., “My work leaves no family time” and “I am too exhausted to do housework after work.”) on a 7-point Likert scale (KMO = 0.905; Cronbach’s α = 0.952). Organizational identification is evaluated via the Organizational Identification Scale (Mael & Ashforth, 1992), with six items (e.g., “I am interested in how others view our institution”, “The institution’s success is my success”) on a 5-point Likert scale (KMO = 0.903; Cronbach’s α = 0.897). Both variables are computed using the sum-to-average method.The specific questions of the measurement are as shown in the Appendix.

Control variables, Gender (male = 0, female = 1), Age, Teaching years in this school, Academic Rank (Position Type, 1 = lecturer, 2 = associate professor, 3 = professor), Average Annual Income, Marital Status (YES = 1, NO = 0), and Number of Children (0 = none, 1 = one child, 2 = two or more) all have significant impacts on faculty well-being (Chen & Deng, 2009; Zhang & Jin, 2013; Sabagh et al., 2018; Uristemova et al., 2024). In addition, Institutional Affiliation (YES = 1, NO = 0), as a formal status in public institutions, comes with stability and welfare guarantees. Studies have indicated that individuals without institutional affiliation have lower sense of security and are more prone to burnout (Sabagh et al., 2018; Zhang & Jin, 2013). Meanwhile, One-way Commute Time indirectly affects well-being by influencing time allocation and stress levels. Therefore, all the aforementioned factors are included as control variables.

Data Analysis

This study employs regression analysis to examine the relationship between organizational support and faculty professional well-being. To ensure estimation accuracy, we control for faculty members’

personal characteristics and family background variables. The baseline regression model is specified as:

$$\mathrm{Y} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \mathrm{OS} + \beta_2 \mathrm{X} + \mu$$

1

In Eq. (1), “Y” represents faculty‘s professional well-being, encompassing both overall well-being and its three sub-dimensions: life well-being (LWB), workplace well-being (WWB), and psychological well-being (PWB). “OS” denotes organizational support, operationalized as two dimensions: resource support (RS) and emotional support (ES). “X” represents control variables, including Gender, Age, Teaching years in this school, Position Type, Academic Rank, Institutional Affiliation, Average Annual Income, One-way Commute Time, Complete Marriage, and Number of Children. “ μ ” is the error term.

To compare the differential effects of resource support and emotional support, we introduce Eq. (2):

$$\mathrm{Y} = \gamma_0 + \gamma_1 \mathrm{ORS} + \gamma_2 \mathrm{OMS} + \gamma_3 \mathrm{X} + \rho$$

2

Here, “ORS” (organizational resource support) and “OMS” (organizational emotional support) replace the composite “OS”. All other variables align with Eq. (1). By comparing coefficients γ_1 and γ_2, we assess the relative efficacy of resource versus emotional support in enhancing faculty well-being.

To investigate mediating mechanisms, we adopt a mediation analysis framework. Drawing on organizational support theory, we hypothesize that organizational support strengthens organizational identification and reduces work-family conflict, both critical pathways influencing faculty well-being. The following mediation models are tested:

$$\mathrm{M} = \beta_{01} + \beta_{11} \mathrm{OS} + \beta_{21} \mathrm{X} + \epsilon$$

3

$$\mathrm{Y} = \beta_{02} + \beta_{12} \mathrm{OS} + \beta_{22} \mathrm{M} + \beta_3 \mathrm{X} + \theta$$

4

In these models, “M” represents the mediating variables (organizational identification or work-family conflict). The coefficients β_{11} (effect of organizational support on mediators) and β_{22} (effect of mediators on well-being) jointly determine the presence of mediation.

Results

By employing correlation analysis, regression modeling, and mediation pathways, this study investigates the multifaceted relationship between organizational support and faculty professional well-being. The findings reveal robust positive associations for both resource-based and emotional support, with emotional support demonstrating a notably stronger impact.

Correlation Analysis of Core Variables

Table 1 presents the correlation coefficients for core variables, revealing a significant positive correlation between organizational support and faculty professional well-being. Specifically, organizational resource support correlates positively with overall well-being ($r = 0.318$, $p < 0.01$), life well-being ($r = 0.295$, $p < 0.01$), workplace well-being ($r = 0.328$, $p < 0.01$), and psychological well-being ($r = 0.253$, $p < 0.01$). Organizational emotional support shows stronger positive correlations with overall well-being ($r = 0.501$, $p < 0.01$) life well-being ($r = 0.459$, $p < 0.01$), workplace well-being ($r = 0.503$, $p < 0.01$), and psychological well-being ($r = 0.421$, $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, work-family conflict exhibits a significant negative correlation with faculty well-being, while organizational identification demonstrates a significant positive correlation. Organizational support is negatively associated with work-family conflict and positively linked to organizational identification.

Table 1
Correlation Analysis of Core Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Well-being	1.000***						
2. Life well-being	0.911***						
3. Workplace well-being	0.944***	0.784***					
4. Psychological well-being	0.912***	0.712***	0.833***				
5. Organizational resource support	0.318***	0.295***	0.328***	0.253***			
6. Organizational emotional support	0.501***	0.459***	0.503***	0.421***	0.520***		
7. Work-Family Conflict	-0.226***	-0.239***	-0.188***	-0.194***	-0.210***	-0.183***	
8. Organizational Identification	0.518***	0.421***	0.545***	0.471***	0.474***	0.294***	-0.078*

Comparative Effects of Resource Support and Emotional Support

After controlling for faculty members' personal characteristics and family background information, the impact of organizational support on professional well-being was estimated. Results in Table 1 demonstrate that both resource support and emotional support significantly enhance faculty professional well-being. Specifically, in Table 2, Model (1) shows that resource support has a

coefficient of 0.419 ($p < 0.01$) on overall professional well-being, and Model (5) indicates that emotional support has a coefficient of 0.688 ($p < 0.01$) on overall professional well-being. Further analysis across the three dimensions, life well-being, workplace well-being, and psychological well-being, confirms the positive predictive role of organizational support. Models (2), (3), and (4) reveal that resource support significantly impacts life well-being ($\beta = 0.484$, $p < 0.01$), workplace well-being ($\beta = 0.451$, $p < 0.01$), and psychological well-being ($\beta = 0.323$, $p < 0.01$). Models (6), (7), and (8) show that emotional support significantly influences life well-being ($\beta = 0.767$, $p < 0.01$), workplace well-being ($\beta = 0.729$, $p < 0.01$), and psychological well-being ($\beta = 0.568$, $p < 0.01$).

Table 2
Regression of Organizational Support on Faculty Professional Well-being

	Well-being	Life well-being	Workplace well-being	Psychological well-being
	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)	Model (4)
Panel A				
Organizational resource support	0.419***	0.484***	0.451***	0.323***
	(0.061)	(0.072)	(0.064)	(0.062)
Control variables	YES	YES	YES	YES
Observations	615	615	615	615
R-squared	0.133	0.111	0.142	0.101
Panel B				
	Model (5)	Model (6)	Model (7)	Model (8)
Organizational emotional support	0.688***	0.767***	0.729***	0.568***
	(0.057)	(0.067)	(0.065)	(0.058)
Control variables	YES	YES	YES	YES
Observations	615	615	615	615
R-squared	0.273	0.231	0.276	0.204
*Notes: *** p < 0.01, ** p < 0.05, * p < 0.10; standard errors in parentheses.*				

To compare the relative importance of resource support and emotional support, both variables were included in the regression model. The results in Table 3 indicate that emotional support exerts a stronger effect on teachers' professional well-being. Specifically, for overall professional well-being, the coefficient for emotional support is 0.633 ($p < 0.01$), while that for resource support is 0.115 ($p < 0.1$). In terms of life well-being, workplace well-being, and psychological well-being, the coefficients for emotional support are 0.695 ($p < 0.01$), 0.667 ($p < 0.01$), and 0.538 ($p < 0.01$), respectively, whereas those for resource support are 0.150 ($p < 0.05$), 0.130 ($p < 0.05$), and 0.064 (non-significant).

Table 3
Comparison of Two Types of Organizational Support on Faculty Professional Well-being

	Well-being	Life well-being	Workplace well-being	Psychological well-being
	Model (1)	Model (2)	Model (3)	Model (4)
Organizational emotional support	0.633***	0.695***	0.667***	0.538***
	(0.062)	(0.076)	(0.070)	(0.063)
Organizational resource support	0.115*	0.150**	0.130**	0.064
	(0.059)	(0.072)	(0.061)	(0.062)
Control variables	YES	YES	YES	YES
Observations	615	615	615	615
R-squared	0.277	0.236	0.281	0.205

*Notes: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$; standard errors in parentheses.*

Mechanism Analysis: Reducing Work-Family Conflict and Enhancing Organizational Identification

Using Equations (3) and (4), this study examines the mechanisms through which organizational support influences faculty well-being. Figure 1 illustrates that work-family conflict significantly diminishes faculty members' overall professional well-being, including their life well-being, workplace well-being, and psychological well-being. Conversely, organizational emotional support effectively mitigates work-family conflict. Meanwhile, organizational identification substantially enhances faculty professional well-being across all three dimensions, while emotional support from the institution strengthens this identification. These results demonstrate that organizational emotional support fosters faculty well-being through two mediating pathways: (1) alleviating work-family conflict and (2) reinforcing organizational identification, thereby cultivating faculty's stronger psychological attachment to the institution and improving their holistic well-being.

Figure 2 delineates the mechanism through which organizational resource support enhances faculty professional well-being. The results demonstrate that resource support significantly reduces work-family conflict ($\beta = -0.395$, $p < 0.01$) and strengthens organizational identification ($\beta = 0.269$, $p < 0.01$). Work-family conflict, in turn, exerts a detrimental effect on faculty well-being, negatively impacting life, workplace, and psychological well-being. Conversely, organizational identification positively influences all three sub-dimensions of well-being. These findings underscore that organizational resource support improves faculty professional well-being via dual mediating pathways: (1) mitigating work-family conflicts and (2) fostering a stronger sense of organizational identification, thereby creating a more supportive environment for faculty's holistic professional well-being.

To validate results, we apply the Bootstrap method with 1000 resamples to estimate confidence intervals for indirect effects, examining the mediating effects of organizational support on faculty professional well-being. As presented in Table 4, the mediation path of organizational emotional support → work-family conflict → well-being demonstrated a significant effect size of 0.043 ($p <$

0.01), with the 95% confidence interval [0.012, 0.074] excluding zero, indicating that work-family conflict significantly mediates the relationship between organizational emotional support and faculty well-being. Similarly, work-family conflict was found to mediate the association between organizational resource support and teacher well-being, with an effect size of 0.055 ($p < 0.10$) and a 95% confidence interval of [0.018, 0.092]. Notably, work-family conflict exhibited significant mediating effects across all three sub-dimensions of faculty well-being, including life well-being, workplace well-being, and psychological well-being, in both organizational emotional support and resource support models. Additionally, organizational identification emerged as a significant mediator between organizational emotional support and faculty well-being (effect size $= 0.228$, $p < 0.10$; 95% CI [0.159, 0.296]) as well as between organizational resource support and well-being (effect size $= 0.186$, $p < 0.10$; 95% CI [0.119, 0.254]). The mediating role of organizational identification remained statistically significant across all three sub-dimensions of teacher well-being in both organizational support models.

Table 4
Bootstrap mediation effect test

	Y	Coefficient	Std.err	95% conf. interval
Organizational emotional support→Work-family conflict→Y	Well-being	0.043***	(0.016)	[0.012 0.074]
	Life Well-being	0.061***	(0.022)	[0.018 0.105]
	Workplace Well-being	0.031*	(0.017)	[-0.002 0.064]
	Psychological Well-being	0.037**	(0.017)	[0.004 0.070]
Organizational resource support→Work-family conflict→Y	Well-being	0.055***	(0.019)	[0.018 0.092]
	Life Well-being	0.072***	(0.024)	[0.025 0.119]
	Workplace Well-being	0.045**	(0.018)	[0.009 0.081]
	Psychological Well-being	0.048***	(0.018)	[0.014 0.082]
Organizational emotional support→Organizational identification→Y	Well-being	0.228***	(0.035)	[0.159 0.296]
	Life Well-being	0.199***	(0.037)	[0.127 0.271]
	Workplace Well-being	0.264***	(0.040)	[0.186 0.341]
	Psychological Well-being	0.220***	(0.036)	[0.150 0.291]
Organizational resource support→Organizational identification→Y	Well-being	0.186***	(0.034)	[0.119 0.254]
	Life Well-being	0.176***	(0.035)	[0.107 0.245]
	Workplace Well-being	0.208***	(0.038)	[0.134 0.283]
	Psychological Well-being	0.174***	(0.033)	[0.108 0.240]

*Notes: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$; standard errors in parentheses.*

To sum up, regression analyses confirm that both support types enhance well-being across its sub-dimensions, life, workplace, and psychological, although emotional support consistently surpasses resource support in magnitude and significance. Mediation analyses further identify two critical mechanisms by which organizational support bolsters well-being: mitigating work-family conflict and strengthening organizational identification, with emotional support again exhibiting a more pronounced influence. Collectively, these results highlight the dual pathways through which

organizational support fosters faculty well-being and offer both theoretical and practical insights for academic institutions.

Discussion

Amid growing concerns over work-related stress among university faculty, enhancing their professional well-being has become a pressing issue in both academic research and educational practice. This study explores the mechanisms through which organizational support contributes to faculty well-being, utilizing survey data from university faculty in China. Grounded in an organizational support perspective, the research seeks to offer theoretical insights and practical recommendations for improving faculty work environments and promoting greater professional well-being. This results of this study reveal the critical role of organizational support, resource and emotional support, in enhancing faculty well-being through strengthening organizational identification, and mitigating work-family conflict. These findings contribute to the theoretical understanding of organizational support theory and offer practical recommendations for university administrators seeking to improve faculty well-being.

Firstly, organizational support is strongly linked to faculty well-being. Faculty members who receive greater organizational resource support report significantly higher levels of life well-being, work well-being, and psychological well-being. Similarly, higher levels of emotional support from the organization are strongly associated with enhanced faculty well-being. Drawing on the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, resources are essential for helping individuals manage job demands, while resource depletion can lead to burnout (Bakker et al., 2004). The more resources individuals have, the better they can cope with stress, underscoring the importance of adequate organizational resource support as a key strategy for improving faculty well-being (Zheng et al., 2015). Chinese university faculty benefit from a government-led support system that encompass financial security, healthcare and pension benefits, as well as structured career progression pathways. This system provides a sense of occupational security and clear professional development expectations, distinguishing it from Western models(Kwong et al., 2010;Li et al., 2013). Meanwhile, university administrators can enhance faculty well-being by providing robust support for teaching and research development, ensuring faculty have the resources needed to advance their academic careers. Additionally, given the nature of faculty work, which requires them to spend a significant portion of their time within the university campus, emotional support from the organization plays an equally critical role. Previous research has emphasized the importance of a positive institutional climate and humane management practices in fostering faculty well-being (Cann et al., 2021). Universities can further promote faculty’s well-being by cultivating a culture of care, actively listening to faculty concerns, and recognizing their contributions. These measures not only improve individual well-being but also contribute to a more supportive and productive academic environment.

Secondly, emotional support exerts a stronger influence on faculty well-being compared to resource support. While resource support enables faculty to fulfill their teaching and research responsibilities, material resources alone are insufficient to fully unlock their potential (Li, 2018). In contrast, emotional support plays a more pivotal role in fostering faculty well-being. This support manifests not only in institutional respect and care from leadership but, more importantly, in faculty members' sense of recognition and appreciation. According to Social Exchange Theory, when faculty

perceive that their institution values and respects them, they experience heightened job satisfaction and greater engagement in their teaching and research activities (Eisenberger et al., 2001). Research also indicates that trust and respect within an institution's culture can have nearly twice the impact on faculty well-being as material resources alone (Johnson et al., 2012). Rooted in Confucian cultural traditions, Chinese faculty receive substantial organizational emotional support. This manifests as high levels of social respect, professional honor, a strong sense of professional responsibility, and mission (Tan, 2015; Huang, 2018). Concurrently, the collectivist orientation prevalent in the school environment fosters a strong sense of belonging and emotional fulfillment among faculty (Kwong et al., 2010; Tan, 2015). Therefore, in addition to providing adequate material resources, university administrators are recommended to prioritize human-centered management strategies that enhance emotional support, thereby fostering faculty professional well-being.

Thirdly, organizational support enhances faculty well-being by strengthening organizational identification. Social Exchange Theory posits that when faculty receive both material and emotional support from their institution, they develop a stronger sense of organizational identification (Eisenberger et al., 2001). This identification fosters greater commitment to their work, aligns personal and institutional goals, and cultivates a stronger sense of achievement and fulfillment, ultimately improving professional well-being (Vo et al., 2024). Given the rapid transformations in academia, faculty face increasing challenges in teaching, research, and interpersonal relationships, often leading to uncertainty and stress. Universities should proactively address faculty career development concerns by offering tangible resources and emotional support. When faculty feel valued and cared for by their institution, they gain a stronger sense of belonging and psychological security, reinforcing their organizational identification and encouraging deeper engagement in their academic roles.

Last but not least, organizational support improves faculty well-being by reducing work-family conflict. The study reveals that although work-family conflict significantly undermines faculty well-being, organizational support can effectively mitigate this conflict. Under the current "up-or-out" tenure-track system, faculty face immense pressure from teaching and research responsibilities. Such burden is particularly pronounced for faculty with care-giving responsibilities, as excessive workloads exacerbate work-family conflict (Meng & Wang, 2018). Since the 1970s, the detrimental effects of work-family conflict have been widely recognized (Beigi et al., 2017) and are now established as a key factor in diminishing faculty well-being. Organizational support theory suggests that universities can serve as both social and psychological capital by providing faculty with resource and emotional support, helping them alleviate work-family conflict (Bragger et al., 2005). This finding highlights the importance of fostering a supportive work-family culture within universities. Institutional leaders should acknowledge the adverse effects of work-family conflict and offer proactive organizational support, such as establishing specialized counseling services to help faculty manage the psychological pressures of balancing work and family responsibilities. Additionally, universities should provide targeted support for faculty with care-giving obligations, such as adjusting workloads for pregnant and nursing faculty members, thereby enhancing their professional well-being.

These governance characteristics have significant implications for support structures and faculty work conditions. Chinese universities remain highly centralized in decision-making, with human

resource and support policies tending toward standardization and formalization, heavily influenced by government policies and performance metrics (Mok & Han, 2017). Faculty members often face substantial administrative workloads, frequent evaluations, and strong performance pressures, with top-down approaches prevailing in human resource management (Sha & Chang, 2025). Although reforms have introduced elements of decentralization and responsiveness, the reach of state and bureaucratic mechanisms remains substantial. In this environment, organizational support is frequently oriented toward meeting institutional goals rather than accommodating diverse, individualized faculty needs as seen more often in Western contexts. Notably, recent research highlights that such pressures and administrative dominance can be linked to faculty burnout and reduced occupational health, calling for the critical importance of context-sensitive, health-promoting leadership in fostering well-being in Chinese universities (Sha & Chang, 2025; Zheng et al., 2024).

Implications

This study offers an in-depth exploration of the intrinsic relationship between organizational support and faculty professional well-being, investigating the mediating roles of work-family conflict and organizational identification, providing both theoretical insights and practical implications.

From a theoretical perspective, this study adopts a comprehensive framework for assessing professional well-being, encompassing three dimensions: life well-being, work well-being, and psychological well-being. By moving beyond the traditional single-dimensional approach to faculty well-being (Song et al., 2020), this research enriches the academic discourse on faculty professional well-being. Additionally, it examines strategies to enhance well-being through the lens of organizational support, distinguishing between the effects of resource-based support and emotional support. The findings reveal that emotional support has a stronger impact on faculty well-being, highlighting the critical role of psychological capital in organizational management (Li, 2018). Compared to traditional resource-based incentives (Zhao et al., 2024), emotional support (Kumar, 2022) plays a more significant role in improving employee job satisfaction. This insight advances the application of organizational support theory in faculty management. Furthermore, by investigating the mechanisms through which organizational support influences well-being, specifically by reducing work-family conflict and enhancing organizational identification, this study deepens our understanding of the factors shaping faculty well-being and enriches organizational support theory.

From a practical standpoint, this study highlights the substantial role of both resource-based and emotional support in enhancing faculty well-being, offering valuable evidence for policies aimed at promoting faculty well-being. In 2021, China’s Ministry of Education, in collaboration with five other government agencies, issued the Guidelines on Strengthening the Reform of University Faculty Development in the New Era, emphasizing the need to prioritize faculty physical and psychological well-being and advocating for diverse measures to improve faculty treatment and care. University administrators should fully recognize the pivotal role of organizational support in fostering faculty well-being by ensuring adequate working conditions and career development opportunities (Cann et al., 2021). Previous research has established that organizational support is a key determinant of faculty well-being (Bogler & Nir, 2012). This study further reveals that, compared to resource-based support, emotional support has a more profound effect on faculty professional well-being. Thus, in

addition to providing teaching and research resources, universities should focus on strengthening emotional support systems, fostering a positive, harmonious, and inclusive campus culture (Qu, 2024). Chinese universities have developed diverse practices in improving emotional support systems and fostering a positive campus culture, covering multiple dimensions such as mental health services, cultural education, academic community building, and family-friendly policies. For instance, they have launched 24-hour psychological hotlines, incorporated mental health assessments into annual physical examinations, and some universities have implemented policies that allow female faculty and staff to extend their maternity leave if it coincides with winter or summer vacations. Additionally, full-day care and temporary care services for the children of faculty and staff are provided. To sum up, more can be achieved by institutionalizing faculty representation mechanisms, such as establishing regular faculty assemblies to solicit feedback, prioritizing faculty mental health, and developing multi-channel strategies to alleviate professional stress. Meanwhile, universities should provide robust academic career development support, including the establishment of academic communities (Zábrodská et al., 2018) and family-friendly policies, such as parental support programs. By helping faculty achieve a better work-life balance (Jiang et al., 2017), universities can effectively empower faculty to release burdens and create an academic environment conducive to sustainable professional growth.

In conclusion, this study not only advances theoretical understanding of organizational support and faculty well-being but also provides actionable recommendations for university administrators. By integrating resource-based and emotional support, institutions can foster a more supportive and productive academic environment, ultimately enhancing faculty well-being and institutional performance.

Conclusion

Drawing on survey data from Chinese university faculty, this study demonstrates a significant positive correlation between high levels of organizational support and faculty professional well-being. Both resource-based and emotional support enhance well-being across dimensions, improving work-related satisfaction, life contentment, and psychological health. Though emotional support exerts a notably stronger influence. Furthermore, organizational support bolsters well-being by mitigating work-family conflict and strengthening organizational identification. These findings hold critical implications for faculty career development and institutional decision-making, offering actionable strategies for universities to cultivate supportive environments. By highlighting the differential impacts of resource and emotional support, the study also provides a framework for cross-national research on faculty well-being, advancing theoretical understanding and practical applications in higher education management.

This study offers valuable directions for future research while acknowledging several limitations. First, as the analysis relies on cross-sectional data to examine the relationship between organizational support and faculty well-being, causal inferences between variables cannot be definitively established. Future studies could employ longitudinal designs to better capture the dynamic interplay among organizational support, work-family conflict, organizational identification, and professional well-being over time. Second, due to funding constraints, the sample is limited to faculty from China’s “Double First-Class” universities, potentially restricting the generalizability of

the findings. To enhance external validity, subsequent research could expand the scope to include faculty from diverse institutional types (e.g., regional universities, vocational colleges) and international contexts, enabling cross-cultural comparisons.

In an era where faculty well-being is increasingly strained by escalating academic demands, this study highlights organizational support as a cornerstone for building resilient, equitable, and thriving academic communities. By demonstrating how targeted support systems mitigate work-family conflict and cultivate organizational identification, which are key drivers of professional fulfillment, our findings call for a paradigm shift in higher education policy. Institutions must transcend transactional resource allocation and prioritize emotionally intelligent frameworks that empower faculty holistically. This approach is not merely beneficial but imperative: sustainable educational excellence hinges on recognizing faculty well-being as both a moral imperative and a strategic investment in institutional resilience.

Declarations

Competing interests:

The authors declare no competing interests.

Data availability:

The data that support the findings of this study are available from ** but restrictions apply to the availability of these data, which were used under licence for the current study, and so are not publicly available. Data are however available from the authors upon reasonable request and with permission of **.

Ethical approval :

This study was performed in line with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee. All procedures were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards.The research protocol ensured anonymity and confidentiality of responses. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Central University of Finance and Economics’s Research Ethics Committee (Approval ID: IRB20250311004, Date: 11/03/2025).

Informed consent:

Informed consent was obtained in writing from all participants on 10 April 2025. Each participant was provided with a written consent form that clearly outlined the study’s objectives, the types of personal data to be collected in Beijing,China. All participants were fully informed about the study’s research objectives, data collection methods, potential risks, and the use of data for publication purposes.

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Authors Contributions:

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XYJ: Writing - review & editing (supporting), Validation (equal).

ZJY(Corresponding author Correspondence to::zhenming2024@126.com): Writing - original draft(lead), Project administration (lead).

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Footnotes

1. “Double First-Class” universities refer to top-tier Chinese institutions selected for their academic excellence, research output, and high-quality disciplines, often characterized by strong global rankings, cutting-edge innovation, and leadership in prioritized fields such as STEM, social sciences, or humanities

Figures

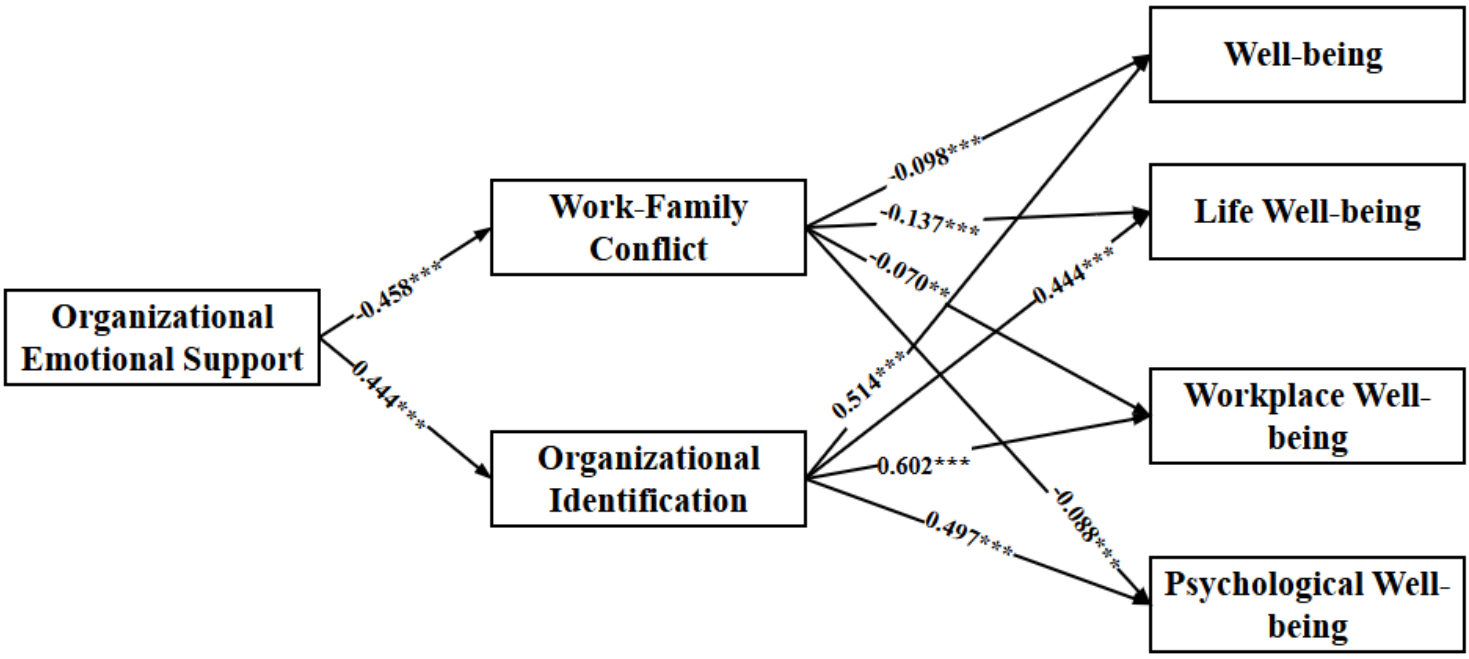


Figure 1

Mechanism of Emotional Support’s Impact on Faculty Well-being

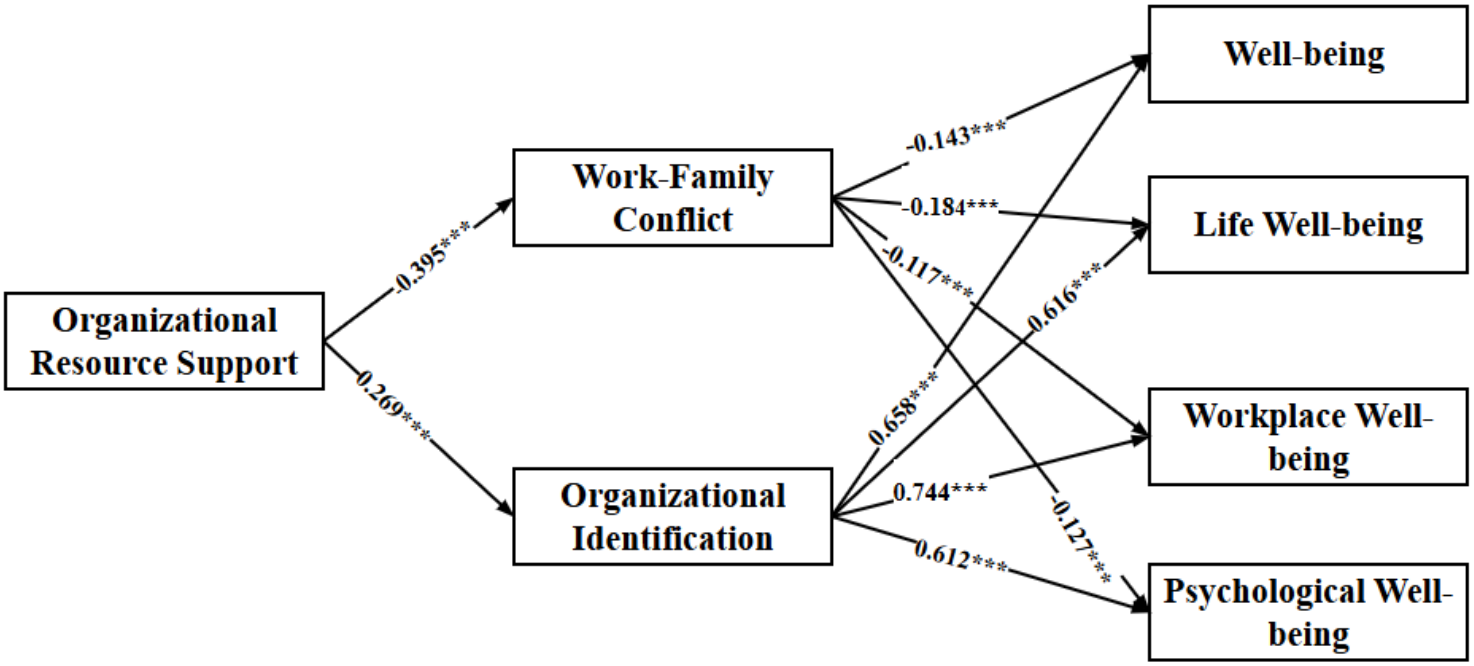


Figure 2

Mechanism of Resource Support’s Impact on Faculty Well-being

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