

Workplace Gossip and Life Satisfaction: The Moderating Role of Family Supportive Supervision

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Abstract

Humans interact at work and influence each other through their behaviors. Humans often indulge in gossiping behaviors about others, which may influence the overall outcomes of individuals. One such outcome is one's life satisfaction. Using the stressor-detachment model theory as a baseline, this study also proposes the moderating role of family-supportive supervisory behavior. The data for the current study is collected from the public sector organizations where all 219 employees filled out the questionnaire. The data analysis revealed that gossip negatively influences life satisfaction, while the family's supportive supervision reduces the impact of gossip on life satisfaction. The study's findings are associated with the theoretical assumptions of the study, which are grounded in the stressor-detachment paradigm. The results of the present study are partially corroborated, indicating that negative gossip has a detrimental impact on life satisfaction. However, the moderator does not demonstrate itself as a factor that can alter the association. In addition, this study contributes to the current literature and knowledge base by suggesting and examining the correlation between bad workplace gossip and life happiness, with the moderating influence of family-supportive supervision. The findings demonstrate that the presence of negative workplace gossip is associated with a decreased degree of life satisfaction among employees.

Keywords: Gossip, Family supportive supervision, Life satisfaction, Public sector organizations.

Introduction

Gossip is an inherent aspect of organizational dynamics (Noon & Delbridge, 1993). Based on a recent survey conducted, it was found that the average amount of time spent engaging in conversations with colleagues among American white-collar professionals is 40 minutes per week, including various workplace settings (Vitukevich, 2019). Perceived bad office gossip can be defined as the extent to which employees view themselves as being the topic of unauthorized and derogatory discussions during their absence from the workplace (Brady et al., 2017; Kurland & Pelled, 2000). The dissemination of negative rumors inside the workplace is common, often lacking a specific individual as its intended recipient. Consequently, this provides a considerable barrier for the target of these gossips to identify their origin or limit their future proliferation (Foster, 2004; Kurland & Pelled, 2000). Nevertheless, negative workplace gossip is widespread, which may induce unhappiness among particular people (Babalola et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2020).

Despite major improvements, there is a scarcity of study exploring the influence of perceived negative workplace gossip on the general well-being of those targeted by such gossip, both inside and outside the work setting. The lack of such knowledge is surprising, given the current amount of research on work-life interventions (Powell et al., 2019) and workplace gossip (Dores Cruz et al., 2021; Sun et al., 2023). These studies suggest that workplace stressors, especially damaging workplace gossip, may damage both professional and personal elements of people's lives. The potential effectiveness of treatments to minimize the harmful consequences of perceived workplace gossip on general well-being may be restricted by a poor knowledge of these ramifications. This study intends to evaluate the link between perceived damaging workplace gossip and the life happiness of targeted workers, filling a gap in the current knowledge.

Gossip among colleagues is frequent throughout many organizations, including those in Pakistan. The consequences of gossip on professional relationships and morale in the workplace may vary from harmless remarks about colleagues to more malignant rumors. It is essential to consider how spreading rumors at work impacts workers' mental health and happiness. Fostering a healthy work environment and promoting employee well-being involves knowing the dynamics of workplace gossip and its probable repercussions on life satisfaction (Naeem et al., 2020). Given the possible influence of cultural norms and organizational practices on workplace dynamics in Pakistan, examining the relationship between office rumors and happiness takes on considerable weight. This problem statement seeks to fill in some of the voids in our knowledge of how workplace gossip impacts workers' satisfaction in Pakistan.

There is a considerable absence of research on the specific subtleties of workplace gossip in the context of Pakistan, despite its ubiquitous incidence and associated ramifications for the well-being of workers. There is a scarcity of research on how workplace gossip affects life happiness in the Pakistani environment, even if the available literature has given some insights into the general effect of workplace gossip on job satisfaction and interpersonal connections (Cheng et al., 2023). In addition, little study has been done on how helpful supervision at home affects the connection between workplace gossip and happiness. The phrase "family supportive supervision" explains how supervisors help their staff maintain a good work-life balance. Given the significance of family in Pakistani culture, it is crucial to explore how this variable interacts with workplace gossip to affect individual well-being. Therefore, the research gap is necessary for a detailed study that analyzes the relationship between workplace gossip and life satisfaction, considering Pakistan's particular cultural and organizational features. Additionally, measures to lessen the negative effects of workplace gossip and increase employee well-being in Pakistani workplaces can benefit from exploring the moderating role of family-supportive supervision.

Life satisfaction may be defined as an individual's evaluative appraisal of their overall life content (Diener et al., 1985). It is a comprehensive and inclusive measure of well-being instead of being limited to specific indicators (Goh et al., 2015). Historically, it has been widely regarded that a comprehensive measure of psychological health and subjective well-being surpasses the efficacy of any individual domain-specific well-being measure (Erdogan et al., 2012; Wolfram & Gratton, 2014). Understanding the correlation between bad workplace gossip and life satisfaction can provide valuable insights for individuals and organizations, enabling them to develop successful strategies for managing such talk. This study uses the stressor-detachment model (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015) as the primary theoretical framework while considering potential boundary conditions.

Negative workplace gossip involves disseminating information predominantly about an employee's work-related and non-work-related negative behaviors, traits, or subpar performance (Dores Cruz et al., 2021). This form of communication has been observed to generate an unfavorable perception or evaluation of the targeted individual, among others (Shani & Westphal, 2016), consequently harming their reputation and social status (Sun et al., 2023). Hence, when individuals perceive themselves as the subject of negative workplace gossip, they experience psychological strain. This threat challenges their core objective of preserving their social identity, resulting in a range of cognitive and emotional responses (Dickerson & Kemeny, 2004; Dickerson, 2008).

According to the stressor-detachment model, the harmful impacts of stressors in the workplace may be reduced by the availability of social support (Sonnetag & Fritz, 2015; Sonnetag et al., 2017). In this research, we studied the notion of FSSB, which refers to workers' impressions of their supervisors' supporting activities in integrating work and family obligations. We tested whether FSSB may possibly lessen the influence of perceived bad workplace gossip on psychological detachment. The adoption of the FSSB as two theoretical considerations drives the boundary condition. One interesting option for research is to analyze the idea of FSSB as a contextual contingency. This technique can potentially give useful insights into the situations in which workplace gossip, especially when regarded as unfavorable, could impair both work and non-work life satisfaction. The same is proposed in Figure 1, which is shown as a conceptual model.

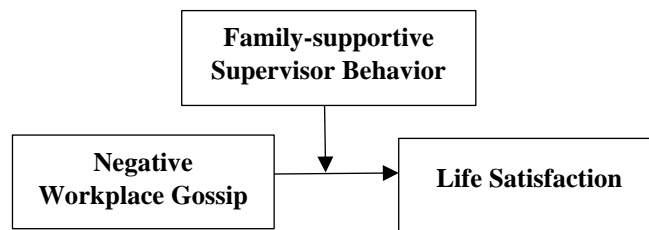


Figure 1. *Research Framework*

Hypotheses Development

Based on the existing body of research on the stressor-detachment model Xie et al. (2023), this study proposes that employees who are subjected to negative workplace gossip encounter difficulties at work. The presence of negative gossip leads to stress that influences physiological and psychological responses (Liu et al., 2020). The dissemination of negative workplace gossip can generate adverse social assessments and cultivate an unfavorable perception of the targeted individual. This results in a reduction of one's reputation, social status, and perceived value. In this analysis, we elucidate two primary factors contributing to the challenges associated with detachment when individuals are subjected to negative workplace gossip, which can be considered a form of social-evaluative stressor resulting in diminished psychological detachment (Cheng et al., 2023).

According to Dores Cruz et al. (2021), negative workplace gossip typically encompasses both work-related and non-work-related topics (Sun et al., 2023). When employees are faced with negative evaluations, it is probable that they will engage in rumination regarding gossip during their personal time and engage in repetitive thoughts on how to effectively manage the situation (Xie et al., 2019). Moreover, if employees sense the circulation of detrimental gossip directed at them, they may

exhibit heightened sensitivity and an increased propensity to see their actions as being scrutinized by their peers (Tan et al., 2021).

Additionally, individuals may also experience emotional exhaustion (Liu et al., 2020) and a negative mood (Babalola et al., 2019) as a consequence of this stress, both of which can impede their ability to detach from the situation psychologically. The employees who find themselves ensnared in unfavorable assessments from colleagues and superiors display a notable lack of motivation or enthusiasm towards participating in physical activity or partaking in social interactions. According to Ng and Wang (2019), employees who are specifically targeted by negative workplace gossip encounter difficulties in achieving psychological detachment from work, even when they are no longer physically present in the workplace. In addition, a recent meta-analysis conducted by Jimenez et al. (2022) revealed a significant and robust negative association between negative work-related cognitions and emotions and psychological detachment.

If employees are unable to mentally disconnect from work, such as when they are preoccupied with gossip-related matters, they may struggle to focus on other areas of their lives, such as family, health, and leisure activities. As a result, individuals exhibit a lack of engagement in many activities, including the provision of care for family members and engagement in sports, both of which are integral aspects contributing to a fulfilling existence (Xie et al., 2021). Furthermore, the experience of psychological detachment problems, which depletes resources, has been found to hinder effective job recovery (Naeem et al., 2020). As a result, employees are less inclined to participate in additional possibilities and challenges in their personal lives. The inability to engage in meaningful activities and opportunities will likely decrease overall life satisfaction. Previous research has indicated a favorable correlation between employees' happiness and their ability to psychologically detach from their colleagues and partners (Hashmi et al., 2019).

The preceding theoretical framework posits an indirect influence that is intricately intertwined with the existing body of research on social evaluative threat and the stressor-detachment model. This framework suggests that individuals confronted with social-evaluative stressors, such as unfavorable workplace gossip, encounter challenges in establishing a distinct cognitive boundary between their professional and personal domains, resulting in diminished levels of psychological detachment. Consequently, this compromised detachment adversely impacts their overall life satisfaction. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Negative gossip and life satisfaction are negatively related.

Moderating Role of Family-supportive Supervision

According to Shehawy (2022), the stressor-detachment model proposes the negative impacts of workplace stressors on an individual's life satisfaction through moderation of family-supportive supervisor behavior (FSSB). It covers behaviors of supervisors encompassing role modelling, wherein individuals exhibit a balanced approach to work and personal life in order to effectively manage the demands of both domains. This may involve adjusting work schedules to accommodate employees' familial responsibilities. Additionally, emotional support is provided through expressions of concern and care, while instrumental support entails offering resources that enable employees to effectively navigate conflicts arising from the intersection of work and family obligations.

Implementing FSSB signals to employees signifies the supervisors' concern for the welfare and requirements of the designated employees, as well as their intention to assist in managing stresses associated with social evaluation, such as negative workplace gossip. These stressors can potentially contribute to work-family-related difficulties (Liu et al., 2022). The implementation of this strategy has the potential to augment the perceived self-worth, social standing, and emotional connection of the specific workforce members (Rofcanin et al., 2020), hence mitigating the adverse effects of the social-evaluative threat. Therefore, it can be inferred that employees with high levels of FSSB are less susceptible to experiencing detachment issues resulting from unfavorable workplace gossip.

Supervisors who exhibit a high level of FSSB demonstrate a genuine concern for subordinates who encounter obstacles connected to the intersection of work and family responsibilities. These supervisors actively offer support and assistance to employees to effectively manage and resolve work-family issues. Employees with high levels of FSSB tend to possess greater coping abilities when faced with negative workplace gossip. This is primarily due to the availability of additional resources provided by their supervisors, which aid in managing social-evaluative stressors. These resources include outlets for emotional release, as well as opportunities for listening and explaining, as highlighted by Tahir (2021). Consequently, individuals are expected to experience reduced levels of anxiety and rumination following their work-related activities, resulting in an increased sense of detachment. Moreover, it has been observed that employees who possess higher levels of FSSB tend to exhibit greater confidence and possess a wider range of strategies to effectively manage challenges arising from the intersection of work and home domains (Xiaolong et al., 2021). Consequently, individuals should be able to establish cognitive demarcations between their professional and personal lives in response to detrimental workplace rumors (Dores Cruz et al., 2021; Sun et al., 2023). This may involve redirecting their attention

away from persistent thoughts and brooding over negative workplace gossip towards alternative pursuits (such as tending to familial obligations and engaging in leisure activities), thereby fostering enhanced psychological disengagement.

H2: FSSB moderates the relationship between negative workplace gossip and life satisfaction.

Methodology

The data were collected from public sector organizations. All in all, 300 questionnaires were distributed to employees of public sector banks and hospitals. Only 248 filled questionnaires were received. The researcher included reverse-coded questions to see the response quality. Upon evaluation, it was found that 29 questionnaires were not carefully filled in and were therefore removed from the analysis sheet. In the end, 219 useful questionnaires were used for data analysis. The measures for the study were adopted from the existing body of knowledge where negative workplace gossip was operationalized using Wu et al. (2018). This scale consisted of three items. It included items like "In the past six months, others communicated damaging information about me in the workplace. Family supportive supervision was operationalized using the Hammer et al. (2009) scale covering items like "My supervisor takes the time to learn about my personal needs". It consisted of 14 items. Life satisfaction was measured using the Diener et al. (1985) scale. It covered items like "I am satisfied with my life".

Analysis and Findings

The data was analyzed using the frequency distribution, descriptive statistics, correlation and regression analysis techniques. The results of all these types of analysis are provided in the forthcoming section. The foremost analysis was frequency distribution, the results of which are provided in Table 1. The table highlights that the majority of the respondents are male (57%) and belong to 21 – 30 years of age (51.60%) with a bachelor's degree (46.58%).

Table 1
Frequency Distribution

	Distribution	Percentage	Number
Gender	Male	57	125
	Female	43	94
Age	<20	12.33	27
	21 – 30	51.60	113
	31 – 40	17.81	39
	>40	18.26	40
Qualification	Bachelors	46.58	102
	Masters	36.99	81
	Above	16.43	36

Table 2 covers the results of descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation). The mean score highlights that the variables of interest are prevalent in the workplace. The mean scores are ranked on a five-point scale.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Standard deviation
Negative workplace gossips	3.98	0.521
Life satisfaction	4.02	0.803
Family supportive supervision	3.87	0.530

Table 3 covers the reliability scores and correlation results. The reliability score highlights that the measures are reliable. The correlation analysis highlights that negative workplace gossip is negatively related to life satisfaction ($r=-0.29$, $p<.05$). It is also evident that family-supportive supervision is not related to negative workplace gossip ($r=0.10$, ns) but positively related to life satisfaction ($r=0.08$, $p<0.08$). These results reveal that the variables are associated, so we can move with further analysis.

Table 3
Reliability and Correlation Analysis

	Reliability	NWG	LS	FSS
Negative workplace gossips	0.91	--		
Life satisfaction	0.87	-0.29*	--	
Family supportive supervision	0.81	0.10	0.08*	--

* $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.001$

Table 4 highlights the hypotheses testing results. The table reveals that both negative workplace gossip and family-supportive supervision are negatively related to life satisfaction ($\beta = -.34$, $p<0.01$, and $\beta = .12$, $p<0.01$). Moderation analysis results reveal that the interaction does not affect life satisfaction ($\beta = .32$, p , ns), showing that including family supportive supervision does not change the relationship between negative workplace gossip and life satisfaction.

Table 4
Hypotheses Testing

Relationships	B	SE	t-value	Bootstraps @ 95%		P
				LLCI	ULCI	
NWG \rightarrow LS	-0.34	0.051	4.95	0.401	0.632	0.001
FSS \rightarrow LS	0.12	0.060	4.07	0.357	0.705	0.012
<i>Interactional effects</i>						
NWG \times FSS \rightarrow LS	0.32	0.074	6.05	0.425	-0.526	--

Discussion and Conclusion

The current study assumes that negative workplace gossip negatively influences life satisfaction. The study also assumes that family-supportive supervision moderates the said association. The same has been proposed with the help of two hypotheses. The first hypothesis assumes that workplace gossip negatively influences life satisfaction. The same has been statistically supported. Therefore, H1 is supported. The study also highlights that the presence of family-supportive supervision reduces the influence of negative workplace gossip on life satisfaction. The analysis proved that inclusion of a moderator did not influence the life satisfaction. Therefore, the hypothesis (H2) assuming the moderator relationship is not supported.

The findings could be linked to the theoretical assumptions of the study based on the stressor-detachment model (Sonnetag & Fritz, 2015). The model proposes that various stressful situations influence the employees' feelings and responses. When an individual feels that they are stressed, they consider it an unfavorable assessment of the environment. The theory also proposes that when there are positive factors present in the surroundings, such factors may reduce stress. Therefore, the inclusion of positive factors like family supportive supervision can be considered as a resource that may reduce stress. The findings of the current study are partially supported, where the negative gossips affect life satisfaction negatively. On the other hand, the moderator does not prove to be a variable that may change the relationship. Here, the results are not supported.

In conclusion, this study intended to shed light on the complicated interaction between workplace gossip, life happiness, and the moderating impact of family-supportive supervision in the setting of Pakistani enterprises. This study's results provide important insights for researchers and practitioners alike, and they highlight the need to develop a comprehensive grasp of workplace dynamics in this cultural context. Among workers in Pakistan, we found a statistically significant inverse correlation between workplace gossip and happiness. Given its negative effects on individuals' quality of life, organizations would do well to include strategies to combat gossip as part of broader initiatives to boost morale and productivity. The results are in line with current study trends throughout the world, which highlight the widespread nature of office gossip and its possible personal life consequences.

The moderating effect of family-supportive supervision in workplace gossip was a novel finding we uncovered in our research. Workplaces that are encouraging and flexible with employees' personal lives, particularly in regard to family obligations, were shown to reduce the detrimental impact of rumors on employees' overall happiness. In the cultural setting of Pakistan, where family connections are highly valued, it underscores the significance of organizational strategies that establish a

balance between work and home life. In practice, this knowledge may help organizations in Pakistan create family-friendly policies and encourage supervisory practices. Organizations may foster a more resilient workforce that can better negotiate the issues presented by workplace gossip by recognizing the importance of family in workers' lives and establishing a culture of understanding and support.

Despite the useful insights gained from this study, its limits must be recognized. Limitations in causal inference are inevitable given the study's cross-sectional methodology; prospective studies would do well to use longitudinal approaches. Furthermore, the research left the possibility for investigation of other possible moderating variables since it focused largely on the moderating function of family supportive supervision. In conclusion, the findings of this research stress the need for Pakistani businesses to acknowledge and address the negative effect that office gossip has on employees' well-being. Organizations in Pakistan may improve their workers' well-being and job satisfaction by creating a welcoming workplace that respects the importance of family.

Implications

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge in many ways. For instance, from a theoretical perspective, this study adds value to the existing literature and body of knowledge by proposing and testing the relationship of negative workplace gossip and life satisfaction through moderation of family-supportive supervision. The findings prove that when there is negative workplace gossip, employees tend to feel a low level of life satisfaction. The findings leave important message for the management as well, as the managers can use the working environment as a predictor of one's feelings about life. The management of the firms should, therefore, work on improving their environment. This can be done through indulging management and support of supervisors in the work. There should be a culture where everyone is valued and cherished, as the negative environment can bring negative changes both at work and overall life of an individual.

The study also proposes that including family-supportive supervision can work as support and influence the relationship of negative gossip and life satisfaction. The statistical results, however, reveal that family-supportive supervision does not influence the relationship, so its inclusion may not have an influence. The results are interesting and against expectations. This could be attributed to the fact that the family supportive supervision cannot influence the outcomes. This is not against the assumptions, but it can be attributed to the small sample size.

Limitations and Future Directions

The study is prone to some limitations; the foremost is the use of a cross-sectional design, which limits the test of causality. This study is also conditioned to the limitation of a small sample size. Another important aspect is the inclusion of only the public sector, where the working set-up and environment may be different due to different cultures and working environments. Future studies should, therefore, try to overcome these limitations. For instance, the longitudinal or lags approach can be used to overcome the limitations of cross-sectional design. Similarly, private and semi-government sectors may also be covered for study purposes. The increase in sample size should be another important point to consider.

The results of the study also leave a valuable message. For instance, the non-supportive results of the moderator also require future consideration. Future studies should highlight the reasons and causes of ineffective family-supportive supervision results. These results require future consideration, and the researchers should dig deep or include other factors in research. Managerial support (Irfan et al., 2021) is now considered extremely important for job-related flexibility and sustainably employability; how it spills over to life satisfaction would be interesting to investigate.

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