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# How to make the work-family balance a reality among frontline hotel employees? The effect of family supportive supervisor behaviors

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## ABSTRACT

This study explored strategies that can effectively support frontline hospitality employees in making work-family balance (WFB) a reality. Building on the conservation of resources theory, we empirically demonstrated the significance that family supportive supervisor behaviors (FSSB) exhibits in enhancing WFB among frontline hospitality employees. Consequently, this improvement in WFB positively impacts both family performance and service performance. Moreover, our findings provided confirmation that family centrality enhances both the direct influence that FSSB exhibits on WFB and its indirect influence on employee outcomes related to family and service.

## 1. Introduction

The challenge of work-family balance (WFB) is particularly acute for frontline employees in the hotel industry, driven by factors like extended working hours, unpredictable schedules, shift work, and the emotional demands of service delivery (Kim et al., 2023; Wong and Ko, 2009; Xiao and O'Neill, 2010; Xu et al., 2020). The evolving workforce demographics add complexity to this issue. An increase in female frontline employees, aimed at boosting customer satisfaction, has led to heightened vulnerability to work-family conflicts, given women's generally greater exposure to such tensions (Dashper, 2020; Kim et al., 2023). Furthermore, the workforce's composition, predominantly of Millennials and the older segment of Generation Z, who value life outside work highly, intensifies demands for WFB (Hertzman et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2023). Inadequate WFB among frontline hospitality employees incurs significant costs for both the employees and hotel organizations. Empirical and practical evidence shows that poor WFB can undermine employees' work commitment (Karatepe and Kilic, 2015), increase their job depression (Karatepe and Kilic, 2015; Vanderpool and Way, 2013) and leave intention (Choi et al., 2018; Vanderpool and Way, 2013). Such outcomes culminate in notable productivity losses and escalate expenses related to human resource management in hotels (Frye et al., 2020; Tracey and Hinkin, 2008).

Given the importance of WFB among frontline hospitality employees, it is important to identify what hotel organizations can do to make frontline hospitality employees' WFB a reality. To this end, we should first figure out the factors within organizations that promote employee WFB. Scholars have identified organizational characteristics and supervisor support as prerequisites for WFB. As for organizational factors, job complexity, work overload, job autonomy, working time arrangements, and supportive work-family culture are deemed as inducements of WFB (Lyness and Kropf, 2005; Monique and Valcour, 2007; Vaziri et al., 2022). Another significant factor is the support provided by supervisors, particularly immediate supervisors, as extensively documented in previous studies (Gross Spector and Cinamon, 2017; Jolly et al., 2021a,b; Karatepe and Uludag, 2008; Kong, 2013; Pan, 2018). Extant research has demonstrated that immediate supervisors are crucial in shaping employees' perceptions of their work experience, and their support in family-related matters strongly predicts employees' capability to successfully manage their work and family obligations (Jolly et al., 2021a,b; Kim et al., 2023; Warren and Johnson, 1995).

Despite the growing evidence on the importance of supervisor support, a notable gap persists in understanding its nuances, particularly in the context of behavioral support. Existing studies have largely concentrated on emotional aspects of supervisor support, often neglecting the behavioral aspects (García-Cabrera et al., 2018; Karatepe

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and Kilic, 2007, 2015). This oversight limits insights into specific actions supervisors can undertake to aid employees in effectively managing WFB challenges (Crain and Stevens, 2018; Hammer et al., 2009). Addressing this gap, this study concentrates on family supportive supervisor behavior (FSSB), an established leadership construct emphasizing “behaviors exhibited by supervisors that are supportive of families” (Hammer et al., 2009). FSSB encompasses a diverse array of family-related supportive behaviors by supervisors, including emotional support, instrumental support, role modeling, and facilitating creative work-family management (Crain and Stevens, 2018). By examining FSSB, our research enriches the existing body of knowledge on the role of supervisor support in enhancing employees’ WFB, offering actionable insights for both scholars and practitioners.

To effectively realize WFB for frontline hospitality employees, it’s also crucial to identify its positive impacts, thereby understanding where WFB leads. The beneficial effects of WFB have been widely acknowledged in both the realms of family (e.g., family satisfaction, quality of life) and work (e.g., job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover intentio) (Aryee et al., 2005; Carlson et al., 2009; Clark, 2000; Greenhaus et al., 2003; Hirschi et al., 2019). However, existing research has been somewhat limited, primarily focusing on attitudinal outcomes while neglecting performance outcomes, particularly within the hospitality sector. This gap is significant given that the ultimate goal of WFB is to optimize role performance in both family and work spheres (Carlson et al., 2009; Grzywacz and Carlson, 2007; Hirschi et al., 2019), which are manifested in family performance and service performance in the hotel context. Exploring the impact of WFB on both family and service performance is crucial for frontline hospitality employees, who play a crucial role at the customer-hotel interface (Liao and Chuang, 2004; Wu et al., 2021). Their ability to excel in service delivery while meeting family-role expectations can directly influence the success and stability of hotel organizations. In light of this, our study extends the examination to include both family and service performance outcomes related to WFB for these employees. Taken together, we propose a theoretical framework wherein FSSB acts as a catalyst for WFB, subsequently enhancing both family and service performance. This approach provides an thorough perspective on how supervisory support for family matters can actualize the dual advantages of WFB within both family and work domains for frontline hospitality employees.

This research further aims to deepen the understanding of FSSB by exploring its boundary condition. Conservation of resources (COR) theory states that the value assigned to supportive resources varies among individuals based on their unique characteristics (Hobfoll, 1989). Specifically, individuals who place a high value on a resource are likely to derive greater benefits from it (Hobfoll, 1989). We contend that employee family centrality, a persistent trait that captures the degree to which individuals prioritize family life (Carr et al., 2008), may determine the perceived value of FSSB. Those with high family centrality are more likely to appreciate and utilize family supportive resources from supervisors. As a result, they can experience enhanced WFB, leading to

improved performance in both family and service work settings. Our study introduces a comprehensive model that explicates the role of WFB as a mediating factor that connects FSSB with improved family and service performance, highlighting family centrality as a moderating variable that strengthens the positive impact of FSSB. Fig. 1 depicts the conceptual model.

## 2. Theory and hypotheses development

### 2.1. The definition of FSSB

FSSB refers to actions undertaken by supervisors that demonstrate support for their employees’ family needs and responsibilities (Hammer et al., 2009). This concept encompasses four dimensions. First, emotional support involves supervisors cultivating an environment that encourages employees to openly communicate their family life and expressing concerns about their family roles (Crain and Stevens, 2018). Second, instrumental support entails supervisors providing reactive resources and services, such as accommodating flexible scheduling requests and assisting with policy interpretation, to help employees achieve a harmonious WFB (Crain and Stevens, 2018). Third, role modeling behaviors pertain to supervisors exemplifying effective strategies and behaviors for integrating work and family responsibilities (Crain and Stevens, 2018). Finally, creative work-family management involves supervisors proactively restructuring work arrangements to enhance employees’ job performance while enabling them to effectively manage their family demands (Hammer et al., 2009).

FSSB stands apart from other constructs that relate to supporting employees’ family responsibilities, including supervisors’ emotional support behaviors and family-friendly programs. While previous research has largely concentrated on the emotional support supervisors offer regarding family matters (Bai et al., 2016), it has often neglected the tangible behaviors required to meet employees’ work-family needs effectively. FSSB enriches the discourse by emphasizing a spectrum of behavioral support. A comprehensive review by Crain and Stevens (2018) underscores FSSB’s encompassment of the widest array of supervisor behaviors supportive of family-related issues among employees. Moreover, although many organizations have adopted formal family-friendly programs, the success of these initiatives frequently hinges on the discretionary application by supervisors (Anderson et al., 2002). Alternative work arrangements, for instance, often result from direct negotiations between employees and their immediate supervisors, tailored to individual circumstances (Anderson et al., 2002). Despite the availability of formal programs, employees may hesitate to engage with these benefits if their direct supervisors do not exhibit supportive attitudes towards family needs (Thomas and Ganster, 1995).

### 2.2. Theoretical framework

This study develops a COR framework to understand the influence of

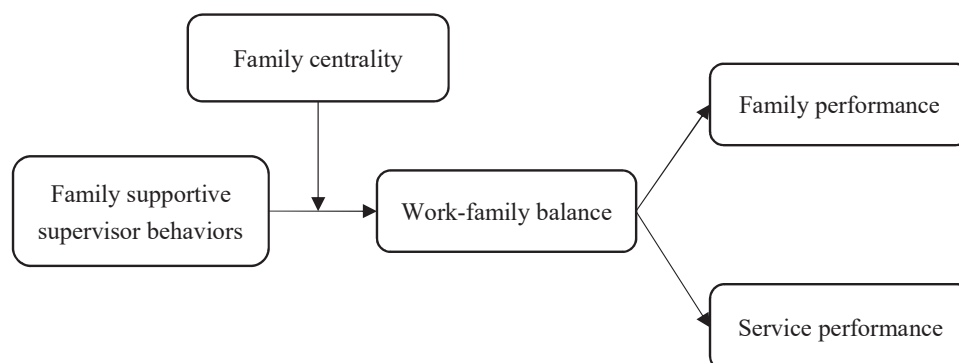


Fig. 1. The conceptual model of this study.

FSSB. [Hobfoll et al. \(1990\)](#) assert that individuals actively strive to pursue and safeguard valuable resources, which encompass personal resources (e.g., time, personal attributes, and energy) as well as social support resources defined as “interactions or relationships that provide individuals with tangible assistance and a sense of emotional attachment to caring or affectionate individuals or groups” (p. 467). Individuals who possess an adequate resource pool enjoy a favorable position to invest those resources for further gains and have increased opportunities to acquire supplementary resources ([Halbesleben et al., 2014](#)). This process, wherein initial resources foster the subsequent acquisition of further resources, is referred to as “gain spirals” ([Hobfoll, 1989](#); [Jolly et al., 2021a,b](#)). Anchored in COR theory, this study examines the impact of FSSB on employees’ family and service performance through the lens of WFB. Within this framework, FSSB is posited as a significant source of resources for employees to achieve balance between family and work lives, with family performance and service performance serving as an investment tactic employees adopt to pursue further gains.

Moreover, based on identity management literature which identifies the importance of role identity in influencing individuals’ preference for relative resources ([Kossek et al., 2012](#)) and COR theory which acknowledges individual differences in evaluating the value of resources ([Hobfoll et al., 1990](#)), this study further investigates employees’ family centrality as a boundary condition that amplifies the effect of FSSB on WFB and subsequent family performance and service performance. Through this exploration, the study aims to develop an in-depth understanding of the circumstances wherein FSSB can better enhance frontline hospitality employees’ performance in both family and work domains.

### 2.3. FSSB and WFB

COR theory is built on the foundation of the resource construct. [Hobfoll, \(1989\)](#) defined resources as things that people value, with an emphasis on objects, states, conditions, and other things. Resources are deemed essential because they enable individuals to achieve their goals and satisfy their needs ([Hobfoll, 2011](#)). Importantly, resources can be derived not only from oneself but also from the environment, including the workplace and its actors, such as supervisors ([Halbesleben et al., 2014](#); [Hobfoll et al., 1990](#)). Within the framework of COR theory, we hypothesize that FSSB acts as a critical source of valued resources, facilitating employees’ attainment of WFB. This hypothesis is rooted in the premise that FSSB provides employees with the necessary support and tools—considered valuable resources—to manage and harmonize their work and family commitments effectively.

WFB is operationally characterized as the fulfillment of role-related expectations which are mutually negotiated between individuals and their partners in both work and family spheres ([Grzywacz and Carlson, 2007](#)). From the perspective of role balance, individuals commonly engage in both family and work roles, and strive to attain equilibrium among these two roles ([Greenhaus et al., 2003](#)). Unlike work-family conflict and enrichment, which highlight the impact that specific roles have on one another, WFB is a comprehensive construct focusing on individuals’ capacity to effectively meet their work and family obligations ([Carlson et al., 2009](#)). Moreover, it is worth noting that WFB is a social construct which emphasizes interpersonal interactions within work and family contexts ([Carlson et al., 2009](#)).

FSSB offers crucial and rare resources to frontline hospitality employees aiming to achieve WFB. According to COR theory, because personal resources, such as time and energy, are inherently limited, their effective allocation across different life domains poses a significant challenge ([Hobfoll et al., 1990](#)). This challenge is particularly acute for frontline hospitality workers, who often face demanding and unpredictable schedules ([Kim et al., 2023](#); [Wong and Ko, 2009](#)). In this context, the resources provided by FSSB are exceptionally valuable. First, FSSB’s reactive instrumental support enables employees to flexibly manage their time, providing a tangible means to meet both family and

work demands. Second, supervisors who acknowledge and respect their employees’ family commitments supply vital psychological resources. This form of support strengthens employees’ mental and emotional resilience, helping them to maintain a healthier balance between work and family life. Third, by offering advice and sharing strategies for managing work and family responsibilities, supervisors furnish employees with invaluable intangible learning resources. This knowledge transfer, emphasizing observational learning as highlighted by [Bandura \(1977\)](#), equips employees with strategies and insights that may not be readily gained through direct experience. In summary, FSSB equips frontline hospitality employees with resources necessary to effectively fulfill their roles in both family and work spheres, facilitating a more harmonious WFB.

**Hypothesis 1.** FSSB enhances employee WFB.

### 2.4. WFB and performances in both family and service domains

In the framework of COR theory, the significance of possessing a substantial initial resource pool is emphasized ([Hobfoll, 1989](#)). This theory posits that individuals who start with a considerable amount of resources are not only more inclined but also possess enhanced opportunities to allocate these resources towards the acquisition of new resources ([Hobfoll, 1989](#); [Hobfoll et al., 1990](#)). This allocation can trigger a resource gain spiral - a positive feedback loop where initial investments lead to incremental resource accumulation ([Grandey and Cropanzano, 1999](#); [Halbesleben et al., 2014](#)). Moreover, the COR theory emphasizes the interplay of resources within family and work domains, recognizing that resources from one domain can permeate and impact experiences in the other domain ([Bai et al., 2016](#)). This is attributed to the fluidity of the work-family boundary ([Lim and Tai, 2014](#); [Ye et al., 2021](#)). Indeed, effectively managing both work and family roles can contribute to the amplification of resource gain and its subsequent positive outcomes ([Grandey and Cropanzano, 1999](#)).

Drawing on COR theory, we posit that the improved WFB achieved through FSSB can motivate frontline hospitality employees to excel in both family and work domains, aiming to secure additional valuable resources. Family performance evaluates the degree to which individuals effectively fulfill the mutually agreed-upon family responsibilities ([Carlson et al., 2010](#); [Frone et al., 1992](#)). High WFB involves effective resource management—like time and positive mood—to fulfill obligations across both family and work spheres ([Grzywacz and Carlson, 2007](#)). In such circumstances, employees tend to experience enhanced performance in their family life. Moreover, literature suggests that individuals with balanced role systems are more likely to engage actively in their roles, as resources gained in one area (e.g., family) positively influence performance in another (e.g., work) ([Choi et al., 2018](#); [Edwards and Rothbard, 2000](#)). Thus, employees achieving WFB are inclined to devote more to family roles, acquiring resources that bolster their work life. This observation aligns with the principles of the COR theory, which states that resource-rich individuals are prone to invest further to amplify their resource pool ([Halbesleben et al., 2014](#); [Hobfoll et al., 1990](#)).

**Hypothesis 2.** WFB promotes employee family performance.

In addition to family performance, WFB is proposed to substantially improve the service performance of frontline hospitality employees. Service performance pertains to the prescribed behaviors of employees in serving and assisting customers ([Liao and Chuang, 2004](#)). Frontline hospitality employees, positioned at the critical interface between customers and hotels, hold significant sway over customer satisfaction and, ultimately, the performance of hotel organizations ([Ye et al., 2019](#); [Zhu et al., 2017](#)). In light of the evolving and diverse customer needs, these employees are expected to excel in their designated roles to enhance customer satisfaction ([Wu et al., 2021](#); [Ye et al., 2019](#)).

When work and family roles are effectively balanced, employees are

more incline to and have greater opportunity to allocate adequate resources to customer service, thereby enhancing their service performance. In addition, a balanced work-family dynamic equips frontline hospitality employees with ample resources such as time, energy, positive emotions, and positive psychological states, that are essential across both work and family domains (Choi et al., 2018; Grzywacz and Carlson, 2007; Hirschi et al., 2019). Motivated by a desire to preserve existing resources, prevent resource loss, and accumulate additional resources, as suggested by the COR theory (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll et al., 1990), frontline hospitality employees are likely to exert effort to sustain WFB by excelling in service delivery. As a result, frontline hospitality employees who achieve WFB tend to perform superior service performance in their work roles.

**Hypothesis 3.** WFB promotes employee service performance.

### 2.5. The mediating role of WFB

COR theory states that individuals actively strive to acquire valuable resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Once they secure an initial pool of resources, they are further motivated to leverage these gains to obtain more (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Applying this principle, we argue that frontline hospitality employees derive significant benefits from the comprehensive resources offered by FSSB, which in turn aids in effectively managing their work and family obligations. This improved WFB subsequently boosts their performance in both the family and service domains. Therefore, it is logical to posit that WFB serves as a critical mechanism through which FSSB's impact on employees' family and service performance is channeled.

**Hypothesis 4.** WFB mediates FSSB's effect on employee family performance.

**Hypothesis 5.** WFB mediates FSSB's effect on employee service performance.

### 2.6. The moderating role of family centrality

Family centrality emerges as a pivotal concept within the domain of identity management scholarship. Identity is defined as the individual's subjective perception of themselves, addressing the fundamental inquiry of "who am I" (Bagger et al., 2008). It serves to imbue life with meaning and enables individuals to categorize themselves according to the varied social roles they embody. Although the complete self comprises multiple identities, they are not all of equal significance (Bagger et al., 2008). Individuals vary in the degree of importance they ascribe to these roles, with certain identities assuming a more dominant role in self-definition (Thoits, 1992). Such centrality denotes the level of importance attributed to a specific role within one's life. Consequently, individuals who accord higher priority to their family identity, in comparison to other roles, are deemed family-centric. Essentially, family centrality is a characteristic that captures the value individuals place on their familial life (Carr et al., 2008).

Individuals' valuation of their identities directly influences their preference for specific resources (Kossek et al., 2012). Those with heightened family centrality are predisposed to prioritize resources that bolster familial involvement, as they find greater satisfaction in achieving success in roles of significant personal importance (Bagger et al., 2008; Day and Chamberlain, 2006; Nuttbrock and Freudiger, 1991). This perspective in identity management literature is congruent with COR theory, which advocates for the acknowledgment of individual differences in resource valuation (Hobfoll, 1989).

Our study integrates insights from identity management literature and COR theory to examine the moderating effect of family centrality on the relationship between FSSB and WFB. We propose that FSSB offers beneficial resources universally to frontline hospitality employees. However, the extent of FSSB's positive influence on WFB may vary based

on an individual's level of family centrality. Specifically, employees who deeply value family life are hypothesized to achieve greater WFB from access to FSSB than those who place a lesser emphasis on family life. This is attributed to the higher value these employees assign to the resources provided by FSSB due to their strong focus on family responsibilities and their desire for excellence in the family domain (Ye et al., 2019). Such employees are likely to more effectively and more frequently leverage the supportive resources offered by FSSB. Consequently, FSSB empowers these individuals to more efficiently manage both work and family roles, culminating in an enhanced WFB.

In contrast, employees characterized by low family centrality attribute diminished importance to their familial roles (Bagger and Li, 2012). This attenuated focus on family matters results in a reduced valuation of the supportive resources that FSSB provides. Consequently, such employees demonstrate a lower receptivity to FSSB and are less likely to avail themselves of such support, ultimately affecting their capability to achieve an optimal WFB. Therefore, we infer that the effectiveness of FSSB in facilitating WFB is more pronounced for frontline hospitality employees with a heightened sense of family centrality. This conclusion underscores the critical role of individual differences in family centrality in moderating the relationship between FSSB and WFB, highlighting the nuanced dynamics at play in the attainment of WFB.

**Hypothesis 6.** Family centrality strengthens the association of FSSB with WFB. Specifically, the association is stronger among employees holding higher family centrality.

The aforementioned arguments present a comprehensive conceptual framework that highlights WFB's mediation in the relation between FSSB and frontline hospitality employees' family performance and service performance. Additionally, this framework recognizes the moderating effect that family centrality exhibits on the FSSB-WFB relation. Considering the premise that family centrality strengthens the impact that FSSB exerts on WFB and that the balance positively influences both family and service performance, it is reasonable to propose that family centrality also strengthens the conditional effect that FSSB has on employee family performance and service performance via its impact on WFB. This proposed model can be described as a moderated mediation model.

**Hypothesis 7.** Family centrality augments the indirect effect that FSSB exhibits on family performance through WFB. Specifically, the indirect effect is stronger among employees holding higher family centrality.

**Hypothesis 8.** Family centrality augments the indirect effect that FSSB exhibits on service performance through WFB. Specifically, the indirect effect is stronger among employees holding higher family centrality.

## 3. Methods

### 3.1. Data description

Data were gathered from five four-star hotels in Zhejiang province, China, each with over 2000 reviews on Ctrip, China's largest online travel platform offering services such as accommodation reservation and transportation ticketing. Zhejiang's status as a highly favored tourist destination in China, hosting numerous renowned hotels, significantly contributes to the province's GDP. This prominence underscores the hospitality industry's pivotal role in Zhejiang, rendering it a fitting subject for extensive research. Consequently, we posit that our selected hotels provide a reasonable representation of the average standard of star-rated hotels in China, meriting in-depth research attention.

Our study sample comprised frontline hospitality employees and their immediate supervisors, with all participating employees engaged in customer-facing roles such as housekeeping, guest service, room service, and food service. Data collection occurred over three distinct time points, spaced three months apart. This temporal spacing, recommended by prior research in hospitality management (Wu et al., 2020;

Ye et al., 2019), was chosen to mitigate common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003) and has been proven effective in elucidating causal relationships among variables (e.g., Ji et al., 2022; Liao et al., 2018; Lyu et al., 2022; Ye et al., 2023). At the first time point (Time 1), frontline employees provided information on their demographics, perceived FSSB, and family centrality. At the second time point (Time 2), three months later, these employees assessed their WFB. At the final time point (Time 3), another three months subsequently, employees self-reported their family performance, and their supervisors provided evaluations of their service performance.

To ensure the representativeness of our sample, respondents were selected through a random process. In collaboration with the human resources managers of the participating hotels, we obtained a comprehensive list of all frontline employees and their corresponding immediate supervisors. Utilizing this list, we initially randomly selected 130 supervisors. Subsequently, for each selected supervisor, we randomly chose 2–5 employees under their supervision. This random selection was executed using the RAND function in Microsoft Excel, resulting in a final sample of 330 employees and 130 supervisors for our survey. Participants were assured that their participation was entirely voluntary and that the information they provided would be used exclusively for academic research purposes. To maintain the consistency of employee and supervisor responses across the three phases of data collection, we assigned a unique identification code to each respondent. This code was pre-marked on both their questionnaires and envelopes to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. We instructed participants to complete their questionnaires, seal them in the provided envelopes, and deposit them into a designated black box located within the human resources department, safeguarding the integrity and confidentiality of their responses.

At Time 1, we received 287 employee responses from the five hotels, resulting in a response rate of 86.97%. At Time 2, 248 employees returned their questionnaires, yielding a response rate of 86.41%. At Time 3, we received 219 responses from 101 supervisors, corresponding to a response rate of 88.31%. Finally, we gained a sample of 202 employee-supervisor dyads, comprising 202 employees and 100 supervisors. Among the employees, 58.90% were female, and 54.50% had completed high school. The participants had an average age of 31.19 years ( $SD = 11.86$ ), and an average tenure of 3.24 years ( $SD = 3.88$ ). Moreover, the mean of the number of children under 18 was .53, with a  $SD$  of .70. Among the 83 supervisors, 60.24% were female, and 79.52% had completed high school education. In addition, these supervisors had an average age of 37.41 years ( $SD = 5.72$ ), and an average tenure of 9.00 years ( $SD = 3.14$ ).

### 3.2. Measures

The measurements utilized in this study were derived from prior high-quality research and have been proven effective in Chinese contexts. Given that the original scales were in English, we employed translation and back-translation procedures to ensure accuracy and cultural relevance in the Chinese translation of the items (Brislin, 1980). This process involved an initial translation into Chinese by a bilingual management professor, followed by a reverse translation into English by another bilingual professor. A third bilingual management scholar reviewed the translations to reconcile any discrepancies. Furthermore, we conducted interviews with several employees from the targeted hotels, thus ensuring the measures' applicability and relevance to the Chinese hospitality context. Responses were captured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). This methodological approach, as highlighted by Holden (2010) and Nevo (1985), is instrumental in enhancing the face validity of the measures, ensuring that the instruments are not only linguistically accurate but also contextually resonant with the respondents' experiences and perceptions.

#### 3.2.1. FSSB

14 items from Hammer et al. (2009) were adopted. This scale has been verified as reliable in Chinese settings (Cheng et al., 2022). A sample item was "My supervisor is willing to listen to my support problems in juggling work and nonwork life." The reliabilities for the four dimensions were .91, .85, .90, and .90, respectively, while the overall construct exhibited a reliability coefficient of .94. The second-order factor model demonstrated a strong fit to the data ( $\chi^2(73) = 166.16$ ,  $CFI = .96$ ,  $TLI = .95$ ;  $RMSEA = .08$ ).

#### 3.2.2. Family centrality

8 items from Hirschfeld and Field, (2000) were used. This scale has been verified as reliable in Chinese settings (Ye et al., 2021). A representative item was "In my view, an individual's personal life goals should be family oriented." The reliability was .92.

#### 3.2.3. WFB

6 items of Carlson et al. (2009) were employed. This scale has been verified as reliable in Chinese settings (Zhang et al., 2020). A representative item was "I am able to negotiate and accomplish what is expected of me at work and in my family." The reliability was .91.

#### 3.2.4. Family performance

5 items from Carlson et al. (2010) were adopted. This scale has been verified as reliable in Chinese settings (Liao et al., 2016). An example item was "I can fulfill my family responsibilities." The reliability was .81.

#### 3.2.5. Service performance

7 items of Liao and Chuang (2004) were employed. All of the items have been verified as reliable in Chinese settings (Wu et al., 2021). We guided supervisors to evaluate the service performance of the target frontline hospitality employees. A representative item was "This employee is able to help customers when needed." The reliability was .92.

#### 3.2.6. Control variables

This study included employees' demographics and the number of children as control variables to mitigate their potential effect on service outcomes and family outcomes (Carlson et al., 2009; Ye et al., 2021). Age and tenure were reported in years. Gender was represented as a categorical variable, with 1 denoting male and 2 denoting female. Education level was coded using a categorical variable, with 1 for high school or below, 2 for an associate degree, 3 for a bachelor's degree, and 4 for a master's degree or above. As we collected data from five different hotels, we also developed five dummy variables and entered four in our analysis. All of the items of key constructs were presented in Table 1.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs)

We performed CFAs to examine the measurement model with seven constructs included (FSSB, family centrality, WFB, family performance, and service performance). As the subject-to-item ratio is less than 10, we employed item parceling by creating three parcels for the constructs with more than three items and four parcels for FSSB with four dimensions (Bandalos, 2002). This approach has been extensively utilized in prior studies (e.g., Li et al., 2014; Wu et al., 2013). As Table 2 presents, the five-factor model demonstrated a better fit ( $\chi^2(94) = 137.18$ ,  $CFI = .98$ ,  $TLI = .97$ ;  $RMSEA = .05$ ) than the alternatives, and all factor loadings were significant. The average variance extracted values for FSSB, family centrality, WFB, family performance, and service performance were .78, .89, .88, .77, and .88 respectively. Therefore, the discriminant validity and construct validity of these constructs were confirmed.

**Table 1**  
Scale items and validation.

Constructs	Items
FSSB (Cronbach's alpha =.94)	<i>Emotional support</i>
	1. My supervisor is willing to listen to my support problems in juggling work and nonwork life.
	2. My supervisor takes the time to learn about my personal needs.
	3. My supervisor makes me feel comfortable talking to him or her about my conflicts between work and nonwork.
	4. My supervisor and I can talk effectively nonwork issues.
	<i>Instrumental support</i>
	5. I can depend on my supervisor to help me support with scheduling conflicts if I need it.
	6. I can rely on my supervisor to make sure my work responsibilities are handled when I have unanticipated nonwork demands.
	7. My supervisor works effectively with workers to creatively solve conflicts between work and nonwork.
	<i>Role model</i>
	8. My supervisor is a good role model for work and nonwork balance.
	9. My supervisor demonstrates effective behaviors in how to juggle work and nonwork balance.
	10. My supervisor demonstrates how a person can jointly be successful on and off the job.
	<i>Creative work-family management</i>
11. My supervisor thinks about how the work-family work in my department can be organized management to jointly benefit employees and the company.	
12. My supervisor asks for suggestions to make it easier for employees to balance work and nonwork demands.	
13. My supervisor is creative in reallocating job duties to help my department work better as a team.	
14. My supervisor is able to manage the department as a whole team to enable everyone's needs to be met.	
WFB (Cronbach's alpha =.91)	1. I am able to negotiate and accomplish what is expected of me at work and in my family.
	2. I do a good job of meeting the role expectations of critical people in my work and family life.
	3. People who are close to me would say that I do a good job of balancing work and family.
	4. I am able to accomplish the expectations that my supervisors and my family have for me.
	5. My co-workers and members of my family would say that I am meeting their expectations.
	6. It is clear to me, based on feedback from co-workers and family members, that I am accomplishing both my work and family responsibilities.
Family centrality (Cronbach's alpha =.92)	1. Family should only be a small part of one's life (reverse scored).
	2. In my view, an individual's personal life goals should be family oriented.
	3. Life is worth living only when people get absorbed in family.
	4. The major satisfaction in my life comes from my family.
	5. The most important things that happen to me involve my family.
	6. I have other activities more important than my family (reverse scored).
	7. Family should be considered central to life.
	8. Overall, I consider work to be very central to my existence.
Family performance (Cronbach's alpha =.81)	1. I adequately complete the assigned duties in my family.
	2. I fulfill all responsibilities required by my family.
	3. I meet all formal performance requirements of my family.

**Table 1 (continued)**

Constructs	Items
Service performance (Cronbach's alpha =.92)	4. I never neglect aspects of the family that I am obligated to perform.
	5. I perform all essential family duties.
	1. This employee is friendly and helpful to customers.
	2. This employee can approach customers quickly.
	3. This employee asks good questions and listens to find out what a customer wants.
	4. This employee is able to help customers when needed.
	5. This employee points out and relates item features to a customer's needs.
6. This employee suggests items customers might like but did not think of.	
7. This employee explains an item's features and benefits to overcome a customer's objections.	

**Table 2**  
CFA results.

Model	$\chi^2$	df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
<b>Five-factor model</b>	137.18	94	.98	.97	.05
<b>Four-factor model 1:</b> Combining FSSB and WFB	546.58	98	.77	.72	.15
<b>Four-factor model 2:</b> Combining WFB and family performance	275.15	98	.91	.89	.10
<b>Four-factor model 3:</b> Combining WFB and service performance	523.54	98	.78	.74	.15
<b>Four-factor model 4:</b> Combining family performance and service performance	378.13	98	.86	.83	.12
<b>One-factor model:</b> Combining all variables	1416.06	104	.34	.23	.25

Notes: N = 202; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation.

4.2. Common method issues

To mitigate common method bias, we employed strategies suggested by prior research (Kock et al., 2021; Podsakoff et al., 2003). We assured participants of the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses to lessen their evaluation concerns. To minimize response biases linked to question order or phrasing, we used varied instructions, interspersed filler items, and arranged measures of different variables in separate survey sections. Additionally, we collected data from two sources (employees and supervisors) at three distinct times to further diminish bias. We further evaluated common method bias using statistical techniques alongside procedural controls. Harman's single-factor test revealed that the primary factor accounted for only 16.23% of the variance, suggesting minimal impact from common method bias. CFAs of a single-factor model confirmed this, showing a poor fit ( $\chi^2(104) = 1416.06$ , CFI = .34, TLI = .23, RMSEA = .25), which indicates that our data's variance is not sufficiently explained by a single factor. These results collectively reinforce the robustness of our findings against common method bias.

4.3. Descriptive statistics

Table 3 indicated that FSSB displayed positive correlations with WFB ( $r = .26$ ,  $p < .01$ ), family performance ( $r = .24$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and service performance ( $r = .29$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Similarly, WFB exhibited positive correlations with family performance ( $r = .48$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and service performance ( $r = .34$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The square root of the average variance surpassed the values of their respective correlations with other variables, thus further confirming distinctiveness among these constructs.

**Table 3**  
Descriptive statistics and correlations.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1.Gender	1.00														
2.Age	-.01	1.00													
3.Education	-.09	-.23**	1.00												
4.Tenure	-.02	.51**	-.02	1.00											
5. Number of children	.01	.53**	-.05	.47**	1.00										
6.Hotel 1	.11	-.11	-.17*	-.31**	-.14	1.00									
7.Hotel 2	.00	-.08	.28**	-.11	-.04	-.27**	1.00								
8.Hotel 3	-.03	.06	.02	.41**	.10	-.42**	-.19**	1.00							
9.Hotel 4	.04	.34**	-.14*	.12	.22**	-.26**	-.12	-.18*	1.00						
10. Hotel 5	-.14*	-.12	.08	-.06	-.07	-.37**	-.17*	-.26**	-.16*	1.00					
11.FSSB	.08	.00	-.05	.02	.14*	.18*	-.06	-.01	-.05	-.12	(.78)				
12.Family centrality	-.06	.05	.06	.09	.08	-.15*	-.03	.07	.06	.09	.17*	(.89)			
13.WFB	-.08	.00	.13	.01	.11	-.07	.03	.16*	-.02	-.09	.26**	.15*	(.88)		
14.Family performance	-.01	.12	-.06	.08	.12	.01	.04	.10	-.12	-.07	.24**	.17*	.48**	(.77)	
15.Service performance	-.02	.12	-.07	.15*	.22**	-.15*	-.22**	.18*	.15*	.05	.29**	.05	.34**	.17*	(.88)
Mean	-	31.19	-	3.24	-	-	-	-	-	-	3.56	3.77	3.82	3.71	3.97
SD	-	11.86	-	3.88	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.66	0.74	0.63	0.66	0.66

Notes: N = 202; \*\*  $p < .01$  (two-tailed), \*  $p < .05$  (two-tailed); bracketed value on the diagonal are the square root of the average variance extracted value of each scale.

4.4. Hypothesis testing

We adopted “TYPE = COMPLEX” in Mplus 8 to deal with the nested data (Wu et al., 2016; Wu and Kwok, 2012). This procedure is commonly used to handle nonindependence data in prior work (Eva et al., 2019). We first tested the full mediation model that specifies the mediation of WFB linking FSSB and employee outcomes. In support of Hypotheses 1–3, results in Table 4 demonstrated that FSSB could predict the increased WFB ( $B = .21, SE = .06, p < .01$ ), which in turn promoted family performance ( $B = .49, SE = .07, p < .01$ ) and service performance ( $B = .28, SE = .08, p < .01$ ). Hypotheses 4 and 5 also received support based on the results in Table 4 as well as the results of mediation testing. As shown in Table 4, when WFB was added into analysis, the effects of FSSB on family performance ( $B = .11, SE = .07, n.s.$ ) were not significant, while its effects on service performance ( $B = .23, SE = .08, p < .01$ ) remained significant. To better uncover the indirect effects of WFB, we also ran Mplus to calculate the confidence intervals (CI) of each mediation. The results indicated that FSSB’s indirect influence on family performance ( $\beta = .13, SE = .03, 95\% CI = [.061, .191]$ ) and service performance ( $\beta = .07, SE = .03, 95\% CI = [.020, .122]$ ) were all

**Table 4**  
Path analysis.

	WFB	Family performance	Service performance
<b>Control variables</b>			
Gender	-.12(.09)	.02(.08)	.00(.09)
Age	.00(.01)	.01(.00)	.00(.01)
Education	.08(.06)	-.10(.05)	-.05(.05)
Tenure	-.03*(.01)	.00(.02)	.00(.01)
Number of children	.11(.07)	.00(.05)	.11(.08)
Hotel 1	.04(.14)	.00(.12)	-.29*(.11)
Hotel 2	.15(.15)	.14(.17)	-.51**(.16)
Hotel 3	.32(.12)	.00(.11)	.02(.13)
Hotel 4	.10(.21)	-.36*(.13)	.13(.16)
<b>Independent variable</b>			
FSSB	.21**(.06)	.11(.07)	.23**(.08)
<b>Mediator</b>			
WFB		.49**(.07)	.28**(.08)
<b>Moderator</b>			
Family centrality	.07(.06)		
<b>Interaction</b>			
FSSB × Family centrality	.23**(.08)		
R <sup>2</sup>	.17	.30	.27

Notes: N = 202; \*\*  $p < .01$  (two-tailed), \*  $p < .05$  (two-tailed). Unstandardized estimates (standard error) were reported.

significant. Accordingly, we could conclude that WFB serves as a significant mediator in the influence of FSSB on both frontline hospitality employees’ family performance and service performance.

It is noteworthy that our analysis revealed a significant and negative correlation between employment at Hotel 4 and family performance ( $B = -.36, SE = .13, p < .01$ ). This correlation may be attributable to the excessive workload borne by frontline employees at Hotel 4, primarily due to a shortage of staff, as they reported in our interviews. The considerable demands on their time and energy in the workplace meant that employees with such heavy workloads were less likely to excel in their familial roles, thereby diminishing overall family performance. Importantly, this finding underscores the critical importance of accounting for variability among different hotels when testing our hypotheses, thereby affirming the methodological robustness of our study.

Supporting Hypothesis 6, the results showed that the interaction of FSSB and family centrality could predict the increased WFB ( $B = .23, SE = .08, p < .01$ ). As illustrated in Fig. 2, FSSB was more positively related to WFB for employees with high levels ( $B = .38, p < .01$ ) than low levels of family centrality ( $B = .05, n.s.$ ).

In support of Hypotheses 7–8, the results in Table 5 present that FSSB’s indirect effect on family performance and service performance was stronger for employees high (for family performance,  $\beta = .19, SE = .04, 95\% CI = [.102, .274]$ ; for service performance,  $\beta = .11, SE = .04, 95\% CI = [.032, .179]$ ) than low in family centrality (for family performance,  $\beta = .02, SE = .05, 95\% CI = [-.071, .117]$ ; for service performance,  $\beta = .01, SE = .03, 95\% CI = [-.040, .065]$ ). The differences were all significant for family performance (difference = .17,  $SE = .07, 95\% CI = [.037, .294]$ ) and service performance (difference = .10,  $SE = .05, 95\% CI = [.004, .181]$ ).

5. Discussion

The evolving dynamics and distinct challenges of frontline service roles in the hospitality sector increasingly compel employees to navigate the delicate balance between work and family responsibilities (Dashper, 2020; Kim et al., 2023). This research aims to identify strategies that effectively assist frontline hospitality employees in making WFB a reality. Utilizing insights from COR theory, our findings underscore the critical influence of FSSB in promoting WFB among these employees. Through achieving WFB, employees can enhance their performance across both family and work domains. Essentially, our study demonstrates that WFB acts as a vital mechanism through which FSSB exerts a positive effect on both family and service performance outcomes. Moreover, the analysis indicates that the benefits of FSSB on WFB, and its subsequent positive repercussions on family and service performance, are especially significant for employees who prioritize family life. This

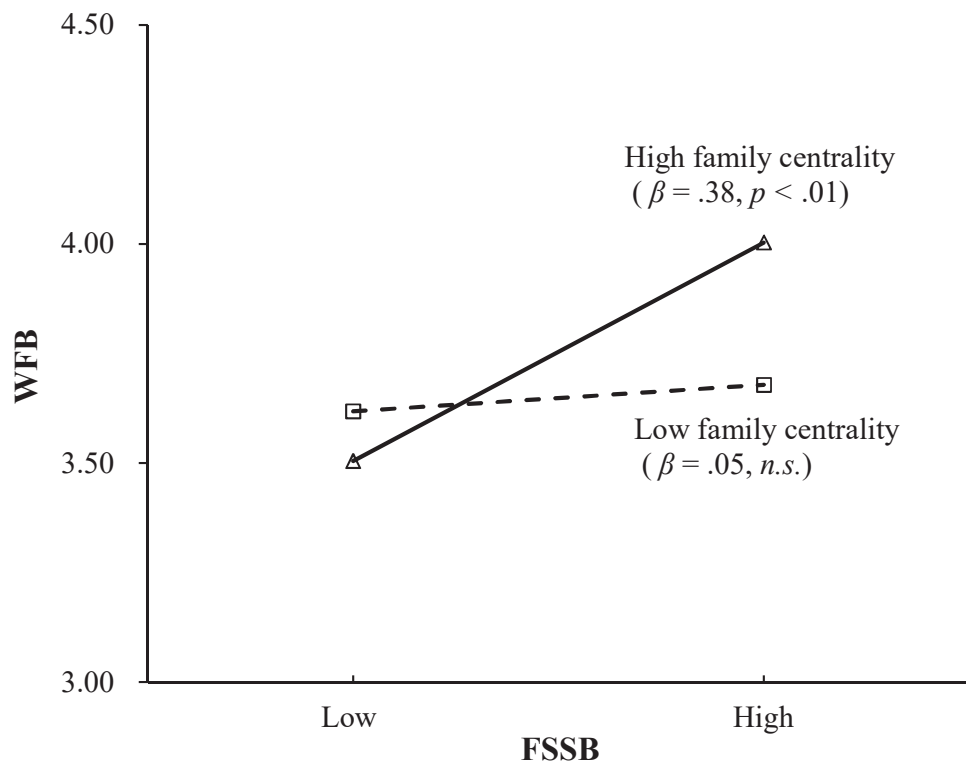


Fig. 2. The interactive effect of FSSB and family centrality on WFB.

Table 5

Conditional indirect effects of FSSB on family and service performance via WFB at ±1 SD of family centrality.

	Effect (SE)	Boot LL 95% CI	Boot UL 95% CI
<b>Family performance</b>			
High family centrality (+1 SD)	.19** (.04)	.102	.274
Low family centrality (-1 SD)	.02 (.05)	-.071	.117
Difference	.17* (.07)	.037	.294
<b>Service performance</b>			
High family centrality (+1 SD)	.11** (.04)	.032	.179
Low family centrality (-1 SD)	.01 (.03)	-.040	.065
Difference	.10* (.05)	.004	.181

Notes: N = 202; Standard errors are shown in parentheses; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; CI = confidence interval.

delineates the nuanced role of FSSB in facilitating work-family integration and underscores its differential impact based on individual values regarding family centrality.

5.1. Theoretical implications

This study makes significant contributions to the existing literature in several ways. First, it expands upon the research on WFB in the hotel industry by examining a novel antecedent, namely FSSB. While previous studies have evidenced the importance of emotional support from supervisors in promoting employee WFB (Karatepe and Bekteshi, 2008; Karatepe and Kilic, 2007), the role of supervisor behaviors has been largely overlooked. By investigating FSSB, a well-established construct encompassing various dimensions of supervisors’ family-related support behaviors (Crain and Stevens, 2018), we contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the specific actions supervisors can take to foster employees’ attainment of WFB in the hotel industry.

Second, our study extends the scope of outcomes examined in relation to WFB. While the favorable impacts that WFB exhibits on both the family and work life have been well-documented (Greenhaus and Allen,

2011; Hirschi et al., 2019), prior research has predominantly emphasized attitudinal outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover intention, and family satisfaction (Aryee et al., 2005; Carlson et al., 2009; Greenhaus et al., 2003). Consequently, the scope of our knowledge regarding the impact that WFB exhibits on performance outcomes in the hospitality industry remains limited. To address this research gap, our conceptual model incorporates both family performance and service performance. By investigating the influence that FSSB exhibits on WFB among frontline hospitality employees and subsequently examining its effects on both family performance and service performance, we develop an integrate model that enhances our understanding of how FSSB promotes WFB and ultimately contributes to employees’ family life and work life.

Finally, our research adds value to the existing literature by demonstrating the moderating role of employee family centrality. We find that the impact FSSB exhibits on WFB, as well as its indirect effects on family performance and service performance, are stronger among frontline hospitality employees possessing higher family centrality. These findings illuminate the boundary condition under which FSSB operates within the service sector, offering crucial insights into the mechanisms through which the positive outcomes of FSSB can be enhanced. Furthermore, this study corroborates the applicability of COR theory and identity management theory in delineating the contextual determinants that modulate the effectiveness of FSSB in the service industry, thereby advancing our understanding of how supervisor support functions within this context.

5.2. Practical implications

Given the importance of achieving WFB for frontline hospitality employees and the role of FSSB in facilitating this balance, it is crucial for hotel organizations to take proactive measures to promote FSSB, particularly among frontline supervisors. Hotel organizations can prioritize the recruitment and promotion of supervisors who demonstrate support for employees’ family-related issues. In addition, instituting



training programs to enhance frontline supervisors' abilities in providing effective emotional support, instrumental support, role modeling behaviors, and creative work-family management can be highly beneficial. It is also important to incorporate the skills and beliefs associated with FSSB into the performance appraisal system for frontline supervisors. This approach incentivizes supervisors to value and prioritize employees' WFB, encouraging them to consistently exhibit supportive behaviors.

Besides providing support to supervisors, hospitality organizations could establish strategies that do favor to FSSB. For instance, hospitality organizations should enact regulations of telecommuting or flexible working hours as a way to support employees who needs to address family affairs during working time. The opening of nursery might work as an effective way to support subordinates as well. Additionally, hospitality organizations should address obstacles that hinder FSSB, particularly by assisting supervisors who face high job demands. Supervisors with heavy workloads are less likely to attend to employees' family demands or engage in positive role modeling behaviors, so relieve supervisors from their heavy workloads can enable them to attend to and focus on providing FSSB.

Furthermore, considering that FSSB is most advantageous for frontline hospitality employees who place a strong value on family roles, supervisors should allocate focused attention to these employees. By actively engaging with frontline employees and assessing their values regarding family roles, supervisors can tailor their support accordingly. For employees who place strong emphasis on family life, supervisors should offer supplementary resources to aid them in balancing their work and family obligations. This may involve providing flexible scheduling options to address family-related challenges or proactively restructuring the work assignments of employees with a strong focus on family. By doing so, frontline employees who prioritize family roles tend to experience WFB, leading to higher family performance and enhanced service performance.

### 5.3. Limitations and future research directions

Firstly, although we accounted for the number of children under 18 in our target employees when testing hypotheses, it would be advantageous to include additional family-related variables, such as marital status, as these factors could significantly impact employees' WFB and family performance. Therefore, we strongly recommend that future research incorporate a broader range of family-related information as control variables to more accurately ascertain the influence of FSSB. Moreover, while our analysis suggests that common method bias did not significantly affect our findings, future research should aim to further validate these results by utilizing data from multiple sources or by adopting experimental or longitudinal designs to enhance result robustness. Additionally, despite our efforts to ensure sample representativeness, the generalizability of our findings to different contextual settings, particularly to Western countries with distinct cultural backgrounds, remains uncertain. Therefore, it is highly recommended that future studies replicate this research in diverse contexts to ascertain the applicability of our findings across various cultural landscapes.

Secondly, while our findings demonstrate the significance of FSSB in enhancing employees' WFB, family performance, and service performance, it crucial to acknowledge that the influence of FSSB may differ when considering additional forms of family-related support, such as formal support from organizations or coworker support. Thus, future research should consider controlling for these factors to better understand the unique effects of FSSB.

Lastly, our focus on service-related outcomes of WFB was limited to service performance. While these findings add to the literature on WFB outcomes, there are other service-related outcomes that warrant further investigation, such as customer-oriented voice, service creativity, and customer-oriented organizational citizenship behaviors. Exploring a broader range of service outcomes is essential for both practitioners and

researchers to acquire a comprehensive grasp of the significance of WFB within the context of the hospitality industry.

## 6. Conclusion

We address the questions of how and when FSSB has stronger or weaker effects on hospitality employees by applying COR theory. The results of our study reveal that FSSB can promote hospitality employees' WFB and lead them to exhibit higher family performance and service performance, and that these effects are aggravated if employees are high on family centrality. The findings extend the emerging research on FSSB through exploring its underlying mechanism, and we also offer constructive directions that could be pursued in future research.

### CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Long-Zeng Wu:** Conceptualization, Project administration, Resources, Supervision. **Yijing Lyu:** Funding acquisition, Validation, Writing – review & editing. **Yijiao Ye:** Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Methodology, Writing – original draft. **Xinyu Liu:** Data curation, Investigation, Validation.

### Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest and this article does not contain any studies with animals performed by any of the authors.

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