

## Supportive Supervisor Leadership, Job Satisfaction, Work Engagement and Commitment of Young Social Workers in Hong Kong

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### ABSTRACT

Hong Kong is an international city where the East meets the West and has a unique culture, attitude and inclusion towards social work. This paper will bring out the integration of such diversity inscribed in her historical background and the research findings will be able to harness the “Best of both Worlds” for social workers in other countries and cities to learn and develop cross-fertilization. The retirement of many experienced social workers is a pressing issue. The grooming of young social workers is crucial to provide better social services in the future. This study, conducted a cross-section research on the effects of supportive supervisor leadership, job satisfaction, and work engagement on the commitment and turnover intention of young social workers in HK. A questionnaire was developed and validated by Confirmatory Factor Analysis. Structural Equation Modelling confirmed the proposed theoretical model of the relationships between the constructs. The findings, which supported the proposed model showed that supervisor supportive leadership has significant positive effects on all other variables. The findings underscore the need for further support to young social workers, particularly through enhancing supervisor supportive leadership and job satisfaction. This support is crucial to improving the social services provided in HK.

**Keywords:** Leadership, Job Satisfaction, Work Engagement, Commitment, Young Social Workers, Hong Kong.

### INTRODUCTION

HK is an international city where the East meets the West since becoming the British Colony in 1842. After 155 years, in 1997, the Colony was returned to the Mainland China. Inherited in this historical background, HK has a unique culture, attitude and inclusion towards social work. Therefore, this paper will bring out the integration of such diversity inscribed in her historical background. Moreover, the research findings will be able to harness the “Best of both Worlds” for social workers in other countries and cities to learn and develop cross-fertilization.

Social work, a field deeply committed to promoting the well-being of individuals, families, and communities, is rooted in a dedication to community service, social justice, human rights, and the empowerment of marginalized populations. Social workers, who play a crucial role in society, are the voice of vulnerable populations and provide essential services to individuals and communities. Their role is not just important, but indispensable. The value and respect for the social work profession are highly relevant.

With the aging population in HK, the retirement of many experienced social workers is imminent. The grooming of young social workers is not just a future need, but an urgent requirement to ensure the continuity of quality social service. However, HK is currently grappling with a surge in the wastage of social workers, a term used to describe the loss of social workers from the workforce due to factors such as resignation, retirement, or job dissatisfaction. According to the Social Work Manpower Requirements System Report 2023 (Joint Committee

on Social Work Manpower Requirements, 2024), the rates of departure, reinstatement, and natural wastage were 25.3%, 17.9%, and 7.4% respectively. It is estimated that the younger social workers may even have a higher intention to leave their careers. Failing to retain young talent from the new generation will pose a significant threat to the future development of quality social services. This study aims to identify factors that may enhance the commitment of young social workers to the profession, thereby contributing to the better development of the sector.

There are various factors that influence the organisation commitment and career retention of young social workers, such as supervisor supportive leadership, job satisfaction, compensation and benefits, and job engagement. This study, by investigating the effects of these factors on the organisation commitment of young social workers, has the potential to significantly enhance our understanding of the social work workforce dynamics and contribute to the development of effective retention strategies. The findings of this study could pave the way for a more sustainable and resilient social work sector.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **International Context of the HK Social Work**

HK's social work practices have been significantly influenced by the UK and the USA. Social work in HK emerged during the British colonial era (1842-1997). The profession was introduced as part of the colonial administration system. Western international relief organisations established offices in HK after World War II, further establishing social work as a profession. Professional social work education began in tertiary institutions in 1950 at the University of HK. The development of social work in HK has roots in Christian ideology and traditional Chinese family values (Lai and Chan, 2009).

### **Influence of UK and USA**

In 1960, the HK Government invited Dr. E.L. Young husband from Britain to advise on the development of social work training. Later, in 1963, North American experts were invited to make recommendations for strengthening social work training. The social work curriculum adopted the North American tradition, emphasizing liberal arts education and professional training. HK has adapted Western social work practices within a Chinese cultural context. Social workers in HK are conscious of practicing in a society with strong Chinese cultural traditions and differing views on welfare (Chow, 2008).

### **Definition of Young Social Workers**

The age group for young adults varies across different countries and regions. Higley (2019) defined young adulthood as the period from 18 to 25. Lowe et al. (2013) used the age group between 18 to 35 to define young adults. The United States Census Bureau, for instance, defines young adults as those between the ages of 18 and 34. This study defines young social workers as social workers aged between 18 and 35 years.

### **Work Preference of Young Adults in HK**

The work preferences of young people in this era are different from the ideologies promoted in the 1970s and 1980s. According to Li (2015), young people grew up in the 1970s and 1980s, an era marked by economic hardship and a strong focus on material wealth. In contrast, young adults of HK growing up since the 1990s have experienced a period of stable-affluence and tend to be post-materialist, prioritising goals such as personal satisfaction, meaning in life, freedom of thought and expression.

According to a comprehensive survey conducted by the HK Federation of Youth Groups Youth Employment Network (YEN) in 2023, which involved young people aged 18-39 from 104 companies, it was found that work-life balance, joy, and a sense of belonging at work are of utmost importance to the current generation.

### **Supervisor's Supportive Leadership**

Social work is a profession concerned with promoting the well-being of individuals, families and communities. Young social workers joining the profession in HK have to go through professional education programmes, practicum training and formal registration. Their identity with social work professionalism and post-materialism will naturally lead to prioritising a goal of continuous development in professionalism. Young social workers usually work under a supervisor who gives directions, supports and professional advice to their subordinates to make sure the services provided are up to the professional requirements.

The leadership of a supervisor has a significant effect on the performance and professional development of their subordinates. For instance, a supervisor's support can enhance a young social worker's job performance by providing

constructive feedback and guidance, and can foster professional development by offering opportunities for learning and growth. Working under a supervisor with outstanding supportive leadership, a young social worker can perform better, seek help to overcome problems when needed, and experience professional development on the job.

Research studies have consistently shown that leadership is associated with job satisfaction and performance (Ahmed et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2021), engagement (Attigbo, 2024; Schaufeli, 2021), and organisation commitment (Sutrisno et al., 2023). The support from a supervisor has been found to enhance employees' self-confidence, job performance, and reduce their intention to leave (Zeb et al., 2023). Modaresnezhad et al. (2021) found that supervisor support can significantly reduce job dissatisfaction and turnover for nurses, offering hope for addressing these common issues. The empowerment leadership of a superior was found to have a significant correlation with the job satisfaction of Generation Y employees (Bilge et al., 2021).

For social workers, social support from superiors has been found to be positively related to their work performance, engagement, job satisfaction, and organization commitment (Geisler et al., 2019). Supervisor support in a medical contract research company was found to predict work engagement and reduce intentions to leave among staff (Heyns et al., 2022). Millennials' perception of supportive leadership has a significant correlation with their job satisfaction (Brand and Walker, 2021). Hence, this study proposes that a supervisor's supportive leadership can enhance young social workers' satisfaction, engagement, and organisation commitment.

## Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction, a complex and multifaceted construct, encompasses various dimensions of an employee's work experience. These dimensions include the nature of the work itself, relationships with colleagues, and the alignment of personal values with organisation goals. This complexity offers a rich field for exploration and understanding.

There are different definitions of job satisfaction proposed by various researchers. Job satisfaction is commonly conceptualized as an affective variable that results from an assessment of an individual's job experiences (Locke, 1976).

Definitions of job satisfaction may involve affective and cognitive dimensions (Fritzsche and Parrish, 2005). These dimensions are crucial as they provide a comprehensive understanding of an individual's job satisfaction. The measurement of job satisfaction uses either a global measure or different dimensions (Rutherford et al., 2009). Theories of job satisfaction provide additional insights into its definition. For instance, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory distinguishes between hygiene factors (such as salary and job security) that can cause dissatisfaction if inadequate, and motivators (such as recognition and opportunities for growth) that lead to satisfaction (Stello, 2011). Similarly, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs suggests that job satisfaction is linked to fulfilling various levels of needs, from basic physiological needs to self-actualization (Pardee, 1990).

## Job Satisfaction Dimensions relevant to Young Social Workers

In the context of changes in HK and the workplace, the job satisfaction of young people is strongly associated with postmodern materialism, a cultural and economic trend that emphasizes individualism, consumerism, and the pursuit of personal fulfillment. According to a survey conducted by the YEN in 2023, young people aged 18-39 from 104 companies considered work-life balance, joy and a sense of belonging at work can make them happier at work.

This study underscores the importance of two dimensions of job satisfaction that are particularly relevant to young social workers in HK: (1) Satisfaction with personal development and intrinsic rewards and (2) Satisfaction with extrinsic rewards. These dimensions are not only relevant but also highly applicable in understanding and improving job satisfaction among young social workers.

## Satisfaction with Intrinsic Rewards

Satisfaction can be divided into intrinsic satisfaction and extrinsic reward (Aljumah, 2023). Intrinsic rewards refer to the personal satisfaction and fulfilment that individuals derive from their work. In the context of social work, these rewards can include the sense of purpose and fulfilment that comes from helping others, the positive emotions that arise from making a difference, and the self-efficacy that comes from successfully implementing one's professional skills. These rewards are inherently linked to the individual's values and motivations. For contemporary young social workers, intrinsic rewards can be particularly salient. This study proposes that intrinsic satisfaction for young social workers should include opportunities to work with autonomy, according to their ideals and professional conscience, to serve others by trying their own methods professionally, and a sense of accomplishment.

Research has consistently shown that outstanding leadership significantly enhances satisfaction, engagement, and performance of staff. A young social worker usually works under the supervision of his or her supervisor in an NGO. In addition to overseeing the professional and administration work of their subordinates, a supervisor with supportive leadership behaviours will empower their subordinates to work with autonomy and professional judgements, provide necessary supports to enable them to complete their tasks successfully with a sense of accomplishment. This study

underscores the crucial role of supportive leadership in enhancing the intrinsic satisfaction of a young social worker, providing reassurance and confidence in the potential for positive change.

### **Satisfaction with Extrinsic Rewards**

Extrinsic rewards, such as salary, bonuses, benefits, promotions, and recognition, are not just tangible benefits provided by an employer. They are powerful tools that can significantly influence an employee's motivation and overall job satisfaction. This is particularly true for young social workers in HK, where the high cost of living and substantial job demands make extrinsic rewards a crucial aspect of their professional experience.

Recognition for hard work and accomplishments, often in the form of promotion to a senior post or an increase in salary, is a potent extrinsic motivator. In a competitive job market like HK, young social workers often seek acknowledgement and affirmation of their efforts through these avenues. The relative standard of pay and working compensations for social workers in HK means that opportunities for salary commensurate with performance and promotion are crucial extrinsic rewards expected by young social workers. These opportunities not only boost morale by increasing the salary but also enhance job satisfaction by providing a clear pathway for professional growth. This study emphasizes the importance of recognition and promotion as key aspects of extrinsic reward satisfaction, making the audience feel valued and appreciated.

Under the guidance of a supervisor with supportive leadership, a social worker's performance can be significantly enhanced, leading to better chances of salary increase or promotion. This study underscores the crucial role of supportive leadership in enhancing a young social worker's extrinsic job satisfaction.

### **Work Engagement**

Work engagement, a pivotal construct in organisation psychology, signifies the emotional, cognitive, and physical investment employees make in their work roles. This motivational variable, as highlighted by early researchers like Kahn (1990) and Schaufeli et al. (2002), significantly enhances job performance. Kahn's (1990) conceptualization of work engagement as the harnessing of organisation members' selves to their work roles. Engagement, as defined by Schaufeli et al. (2002), is a complex and multidimensional state of fulfillment. It encompasses three dimensions: vigor, dedication, and absorption.

Research has consistently shown the positive impacts of work engagement on various organisation outcomes. For instance, a meta-analysis by Christian et al. (2011) demonstrated that work engagement is positively correlated with job performance, organisation commitment, and job satisfaction. Studies have consistently shown that work engagement is significantly influenced by leadership styles (Breevaart et al., 2014).

This study defines work engagement as self-efficacy, which refers to an individual's belief in their ability to succeed in a particular situation or accomplish a specific task, and self-motivation to work, including positive emotion, positive attitude, concentration, and investing time in work to keep up with progress.

### **Satisfaction and Engagement**

There is a wealth of research demonstrating a significant correlation between job satisfaction and engagement (Bernales-Turpo et al., 2022; Sypniewska et al., 2023). These findings suggest that job satisfaction can be a powerful tool to enhance engagement. Therefore, this study proposes that job satisfaction of young social workers will enhance their engagement in work.

### **Organisation Commitment**

Organisation commitment is a pivotal aspect of workforce dynamics, particularly in the field of social work. Here, the success of interventions and the quality of services often depend on the dedication and engagement of practitioners. Meyer and Allen (1991) identified three components of organisation commitment: affective, continuance, and normative commitment. In this study, organisation commitment is defined as the psychological attachment an employee has to their organisation, which influences their willingness to remain with the organisation and contribute positively. This commitment, when enhanced among social workers, can be a powerful strategy to address the issue of staff wastage, providing reassurance to the field of social work. This study proposes that organisation commitment of young social workers will reduce their turnover intention.

### **Factors Influencing Organisation Commitment amongst Young Social Workers**

Work engagement has been found to have a profoundly positive impact on organisation commitment (Borrego and Orgambidez, 2024). For young social workers with high work engagement, the future looks promising. They will find a sense of significance, enthusiasm, and meaning in their work, leading to a strong emotional attachment

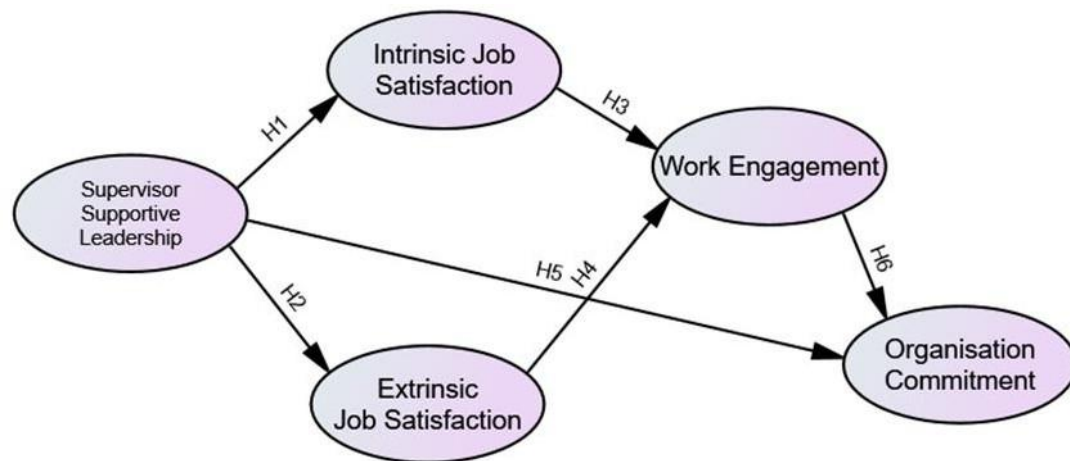
to the job and organisation. Therefore, this study proposes that work engagement will significantly enhance the organisation commitment of young social workers, fostering an optimistic outlook on the potential outcomes.

Young social workers, driven by a strong desire to develop their professional skills and knowledge, are eager to excel in their roles. The empowering leadership of a supportive supervisor can significantly enhance their job performance and provide avenues for professional growth and advancement. Research studies have consistently shown that a supportive supervisor can boost job satisfaction and organisation commitment (Hussain and Khayat, 2021). Therefore, this study proposes that the empowering role of supervisor support will directly and indirectly, through intrinsic and extrinsic job satisfaction, enhance the organisation commitment of young social workers.

Job satisfaction has been consistently linked to engagement (Sypniewska et al., 2023) and organisation commitment (Masale et al., 2021). These findings underscore the crucial role of job satisfaction in fostering organisation commitment, either directly or through engagement as the intervening variable. Therefore, this study proposes that both intrinsic and extrinsic job satisfaction play a significant role in enhancing organisation commitment, either directly or indirectly through engagement, thereby reassuring the audience about the importance of their satisfaction.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

With reference to the literature review, a theoretical model for this study is proposed in **Figure-1**.



**Figure 1:** Theoretical Model

### Hypotheses set for the above Theoretical Model

**Hypothesis 1:** Supervisor supportive leadership will enhance intrinsic job satisfaction of young social workers.

**Hypothesis 2:** Supervisor supportive leadership will enhance extrinsic job satisfaction of young social workers.

**Hypothesis 3:** Intrinsic job satisfaction of young social workers will enhance their work engagement.

**Hypothesis 4:** Extrinsic job satisfaction of young social workers will enhance their work engagement.

**Hypothesis 5:** Supervisor supportive leadership will enhance organisation commitment of young social workers.

**Hypothesis 6:** Work engagement will enhance organisation commitment of young social workers.

**Hypothesis 7:** Intrinsic job satisfaction of young social workers will enhance their organisation commitment through the intervening variable of work engagement.

**Hypothesis 8:** Extrinsic job satisfaction of young social workers will enhance their organisation commitment through the intervening variable of work engagement.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative methodology through a cross-sectional survey using a questionnaire developed. The sampling method was purposive sampling targeting social workers under the age of 35 working in HK. The survey was conducted via a convenient online questionnaire from February 2025 to May 2025. 121 responses were received and 103 responses from social workers with age 35 or below are used for analysis in this study.

## Research Design

A questionnaire developed to measure the five constructs of this study, namely, supervisor supportive leadership, intrinsic job satisfaction, extrinsic job satisfaction, work engagement and organisation commitment. The development of instruments went through the following stages: 1. Review of related literature and instruments already developed; 2. Proposing constructs related to this study and defining the constructs to be measured; 3. Developing instruments according to the proposed construct and situation of social workers in HK and with reference to instruments used by other studies; 4. Seeking comments from some focused groups and professionals with relevant experience and expertise to refine the proposed instruments; 5. Collection of data to validate the instruments; 6. Confirmatory Factor Analyses for validating the instruments; 7. Using the Structural Equation Model to investigate the relationship among variables according to the proposed theoretical framework.

## Measures

### *Supervisor supportive leadership (the variable is referred to as “supportive leadership” hereafter)*

**Supportive leadership** is defined as the perception of the social worker’s on supportive leadership behaviours provided by supervisor in decision making, and implementing policies which empower and support subordinates in providing quality professional services. Three items were developed in Chinese according to the definition, and literature reviewed. Two examples are “I am satisfied with the way my supervisor treating subordinates” and “I am satisfied with my supervisor’s decision making”.

### *Intrinsic Job Satisfaction (the variable is referred to as “intrinsic job satisfaction” hereafter)*

**Intrinsic Job Satisfaction** is defined as intrinsic satisfaction felt by young social workers in the following aspects: opportunities to work with autonomy, according to their ideals and professional conscience, to serve others by trying their own methods professionally, and a sense of accomplishment. Five items were developed in Chinese according to the definition, and literature reviewed. Two examples are “I am satisfied with the opportunities this job provides to utilise my abilities” and “I am satisfied with the sense of accomplishment I gain from my job”.

### *Extrinsic Job Satisfaction (the variable is referred to as “extrinsic job satisfaction” hereafter).*

**Extrinsic Job Satisfaction** is defined as intrinsic satisfaction felt by young social workers in salary, promotion opportunities and working environment. Three items were developed in Chinese according to the definition, and literature reviewed. Two examples are “I am satisfied with the promotion opportunities provided by my job” and “I am satisfied with the salary received”.

### *Work Engagement (the variable is referred to as “engagement” hereafter)*

**Work Engagement** is defined as self-efficacy and self-motivation to engage in work by young social workers, including positive emotion, positive attitude, concentration, and investing time in work to keep up with progress. Four items were developed in Chinese according to the definition, and literature reviewed. Two examples are “My work is an important part of my life” and “I have never thought about quitting my job”.

### *Organisation Commitment (the variable is referred to as “commitment” hereafter)*

Organisation Commitment is defined as the psychological attachment a young social worker has to their organisation, which influences their willingness to remain with the organisation and contribute positively to its success. Four items were developed in Chinese according to the definition, and literature reviewed. Two examples are “I feel like part of the family at my organisation” and “I am emotionally attached to this organisation”.

## RESULTS

More than 140 social workers in HK are chosen by a purposive sample. 121 responses were received from social workers with age 35 or below are used for analysis in this study. After cleaning data with incomplete responses, 103 cases were analyzed by SPSS version 28 for demographic data, confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation model by AMOS version 29.

### Demographic Data

There are 41 (39.8%) male and 62 (60.2%) female respondents. 24 (23.3%), 51 (49.5%), and 28 (27.2%) respondents have higher diploma, bachelor and masters’ degree, respectively. The average age, years of service in the sector and years of service in their present organisations are 30.95, 7.48 and 4.33, respectively. The distribution of the three sets of data does not deviate from normal distribution, which is significant as it indicates

a balanced and representative sample, with kurtosis and skewness all lying between -1 to 1. Table-1 provides the mean, standard deviation, and the percentiles of the three sets of data and the difference between respondents' experience in the industry with their years of working in their present organisation. The data shows that the average years of working in their present organisation of respondents is more than half of their working experience in the industry, indicating that in general, the respondents are having their majority of working years in their present company.

Table-2 provides a detailed breakdown of the working experience of social workers into different years of service. Notably, 21 novice social workers have joined the profession within the last two years, all of whom have gained practical working experience and professional skills from their current organisation. The data indicates that the majority of social workers have more than half of their working experience working in their present organisations, suggesting a positive and reassuring organisation commitment among the respondents.

**Table 1.** Age, Working Experience in organisation and in the service

	Age	Years of Working Experience in organisation (A)	Years of Working experience in Social Service (B)	B-A: difference between experience in working industry and the working organisation
<b>Mean</b>	30.95	4.33	7.48	3.15
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	3.86	3.56	4.55	3.79
<b>25 Percentile</b>	28	1	3	0
<b>50 Percentile</b>	32	3	8	2
<b>75 Percentile</b>	35	6	10	5
<b>Total Number</b>	103	103	103	103

**Table 2.** Breakdown of working experience by different years

Working experience in years	Number of social workers with experience in their working organisation	Number with working experience in industry	Industry experience minus years if working in their present organisation
<b>0-2</b>	44 (42.7%)	21 (20.3%)	58 (56.3%)
<b>03-Jun</b>	35 (34.0%)	23 (22.3%)	23 (22.3%)
<b>07-Oct</b>	16 (15.5%)	34 (33%)	16 (15.7%)
<b>Over 10 years</b>	8 (7.7%)	25 (24.3%)	6 (5.8%)

### Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

A measurement model of the five constructs was confirmed with excellent goodness of fit indices (CFI= 0.974; IFI=0.975; RMSEA=0.045; p for chi square=0.053).

Factor loadings range from 0.592 to 0.951, which is a good initial indicator of convergent validity. The regression weights also show that all paths are statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ), further supporting the reliability of the indicators.

The Cronbach's Alpha reliabilities range from 0.735 to 0.920 (Supportive leadership: 0.920; Intrinsic job satisfaction: 0.862; Extrinsic job satisfaction: 0.736; Engagement: 0.815; Commitment:0.859). All constructs meet the Fornell-Larcker criterion, as the square root of each construct's AVE is greater than its correlations with other constructs. The correlations between constructs are relatively low (ranging from 0.384 to 0.522), further supporting discriminant validity. The analyses above show that the five constructs are distinct and have discriminant validity and reliability.

### Means and t-test of the Five Constructs

The means of the five constructs and their deviation from the theoretical mean of 3 are reported in Table-3. All constructs are significantly higher than the theoretical mean of 3, ranging from 3.197 to 3.911, showing that young social workers in HK have positive perception on all five variables. Intrinsic job satisfaction received the highest rating of 3.911 and extrinsic job satisfaction has the lowest rating of 3.197. The mean value of organisation

commitment is 3.352, significantly higher than the theoretical mean, showing that young social workers have high organisation commitment.

**Table 3.** Means and t-test of the five constructs

Construct	Mean	Standard error	T-value for comparison with the theoretical mean of “3”	Significance
				Two-sided p
Supportive leadership	3.295	0.104	2.837	0.005
Intrinsic job satisfaction	3.911	0.06	15.13	<0.001
Extrinsic job satisfaction	3.197	0.089	1.851	0.029
Engagement	3.439	0.076	5.811	<0.001
Commitment	3.352	0.092	3.817	<0.001

**Effects of Gender, Age and Years of Service**

T-tests are used to examine whether there is any significant difference due to gender on the five constructs. The results show that there is no significant difference between gender. The age of social workers and the years of service experience are divided into two groups by the median value. T-tests show that there is also no significant difference between the two groups.

**Structural Equation Model (SEM)**

In order to test the validity of Hypotheses 1 to 7 of this study, structural equation model is put forward according to the theoretical model for analysis by Amos Version 29. The goodness of fit indices of the SEM Model is excellent (CFI=0.977; IFI=0.977; RMSEA= 0.042; p=0.070), providing excellent support for the theoretical model. Table-2 shows the standardised direct effects among the variables. The total variances of intrinsic job satisfaction, extrinsic job satisfaction, engagement and commitment explained by the model are 23.1%, 38.4%, 44.2% and 25%, respectively.

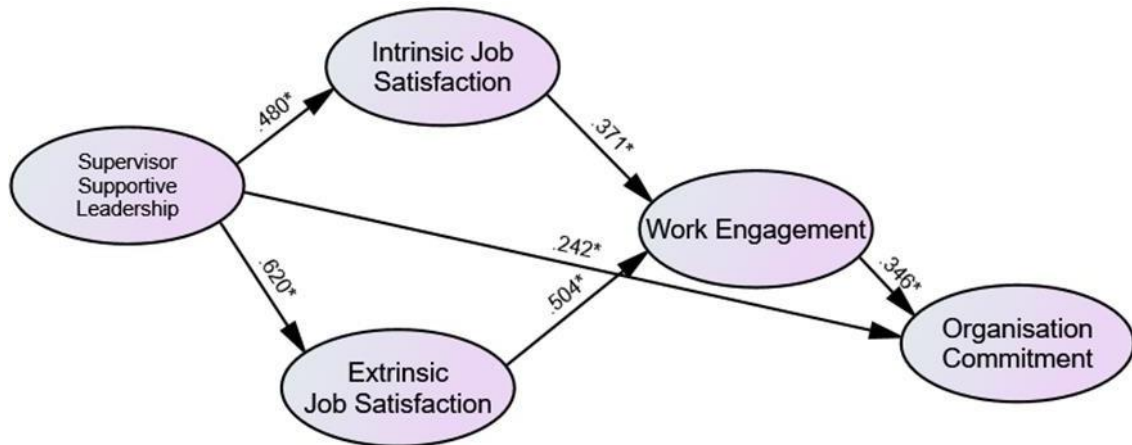
**Table 4.** Standardised Direct Effect (DE) and Total Effect (TE) between Constructs

	Supportive leadership		Intrinsic job satisfaction (IST)		Extrinsic job satisfaction (EST)		Engagement (ENG)	
	DE	TE	DE	TE	DE	TE	DE	TE
<b>IST</b>	.480*	.480*						
<b>EST</b>	.620*	.620*						
<b>ENG</b>	ns	.242*	.371*	.371*	.504*	.504*		
<b>Commitment</b>	.242*	.389*		.128*		.174*	.346*	.346*

\*p<0.001, ns=not significant

## Relationships between Variables

Figure 2 shows the significant direct effects of the variables



**Figure 2.** Significant Direct Effects between Variables

Table-2 shows that supportive leadership of supervisor has significant direct and total effects of .480 on intrinsic job satisfaction. Hence, Hypothesis-1, which states that Supervisor supportive leadership will enhance intrinsic job satisfaction of young social workers, is supported.

Supportive leadership of supervisor has significant direct and total effects of .620 on extrinsic job satisfaction. Hence, Hypothesis-2, which states that Supervisor supportive leadership will enhance extrinsic job satisfaction of young social workers, is supported.

Intrinsic job satisfaction has significant direct and total effect of 0.371 on work engagement. Hence Hypothesis-3, which states intrinsic job satisfaction of young social workers, will enhance their work engagement. Extrinsic job satisfaction has significant direct and total effect of 0.504 on work engagement. Hence, Hypothesis-4, which states extrinsic job satisfaction of young social workers, will enhance their work engagement.

Supervisor supportive leadership has significant direct effect of 0.242 and total effect of 0.389 on commitment. Hence, Hypothesis-5, which states that supervisor supportive leadership will enhance organisation commitment of young social workers, is supported. The positive effect of supervisor supportive leadership is through its direct influence on commitment as well as through the intervening variables of job satisfactions on commitment.

Work engagement has a significant direct and total effect of .346 on commitment. Hence, Hypothesis-6, which states that Work engagement will enhance organisation commitment of young social workers, is supported.

Although intrinsic job satisfaction has no significant effect on organisation commitment, it has a significant total effect of .128 on engagement through the intervening variable engagement. Hence, Hypothesis-7, which states that intrinsic job satisfaction of young social workers will enhance their organisation commitment through the intervening variable of work engagement, is supported.

Although extrinsic job satisfaction has no significant effect on organisation commitment, it has a significant total effect of .174 on commitment through the intervening variable engagement. Hence, Hypothesis-8, which states that extrinsic job satisfaction of young social workers will enhance their organisation commitment through the intervening variable of work engagement, is supported.

## DISCUSSION

The young social workers in our study have shown a remarkably positive commitment to their work, as evidenced by their high scores across all five constructs. Their highest score of 3.91 for intrinsic job satisfaction is a testament to their dedication. The score for commitment, at 3.35, further supports the notion that young social workers are steadfastly committed to their current organisation.

An analysis of demographic data also gives support to the interpretation that the respondents have relatively high commitment to their working organisation. Demographic data shows that the respondents stay on their present organisation with an average of 4.33 years as compared to the average working experience of 7.48 years in their profession. The result shows that most of the respondents have their longest professional experience of service in their present organisation. Furthermore 35% of the respondents are working in their present organisation since they join the profession. Another 21% of respondents have two years or less working experience in other organisation before they join the present organisation.

Our findings, which reveal a relatively high commitment of social workers, align with a research conducted in 2022 by Dai et al. This previous study, which used organisation-level data to study social worker turnover in HK,

found that social workers demonstrated solidarity as a professional group. Among the 101 service organisations, 45(44.6%) reported no social worker resignations during the fiscal year, thereby reinforcing our findings.

The relatively high commitment of social workers can also be explained by the validation of the theoretical framework in this study and the good ratings of social workers on all four constructs, namely, positive supervisor support, intrinsic job satisfaction, extrinsic satisfaction and engagement. Since the framework proposes that the four constructs can enhance or correlate with the commitment of social workers, the relatively high rating of the four constructs will naturally lead to high rating of commitment.

The relatively high wastage rate of social workers in the past few years due to emigration seems to be not in line with the results of this study on the positive commitment of young social workers in HK. One explanation is that those social workers having no job satisfaction and commitment had already left the profession. Those remaining in the profession should have more positive perception of their profession and work. Hence their commitment in the profession is more positive as found in this study.

The departure of experienced social workers from the profession presents a unique opportunity for young social workers to advance in their careers. As a substantial number of experienced social workers emigrate or retire, young social workers can look forward to a clearer career path and better prospects, leading to a more optimistic outlook and higher job satisfaction, engagement, and organisation commitment.

Supportive supervisor leadership emerges as a pivotal factor in young social workers' commitment, explaining 15% of the variance. This leadership also significantly influences intrinsic job satisfaction, extrinsic job satisfaction, and engagement, accounting for 23%, 38.4%, and 18% of their variance respectively. With supportive supervisor leadership, young social workers can achieve better performance, develop professionally, and have a more positive view of their job and organisation, leading to enhanced job satisfaction, engagement, and commitment. Therefore, NGOs should prioritize improving the supportive leadership of supervisors to retain staff and deliver quality service.

Engagement has the second largest effect on commitment, accounting for 12% of the variance of commitment. To improve engagement of social worker is another important strategy for retaining social workers in their organisation. Extrinsic job satisfaction has the largest effect on engagement, accounting for 25.4% of the variance. Extrinsic job satisfaction in this study is a measure of the satisfaction with salary and promotion opportunities. The result can be interpreted as satisfying with the pay and promotion opportunity has the largest effect on young social workers' engagement. Under the context of HK with very high cost of living, the most pressing problem faced by young workers in general is sufficient income to pay for a decent accommodation. So, the result of extrinsic satisfaction having the highest effect on engagement is not difficult to understand.

Intrinsic job satisfaction, which accounts for 13.8% of the variance of engagement and has a significant effect on commitment, is a crucial factor that needs immediate attention. In this study, intrinsic satisfaction is a measure of the satisfaction with professional autonomy and the quality service provided by the social worker. Professionalism is a key identity of and a reason for a social worker joining the profession. Satisfaction with performing their job with autonomy, professionalism and quality service will give incentive for young social workers to engage in their work and commit to the organisation. Hence, importance should be attached to enhancing young social workers' intrinsic job satisfaction.

The total variances of intrinsic job satisfaction, extrinsic job satisfaction, engagement and commitment explained by the model are 23.1%, 38.4%, 44.2% and 25% respectively, which are quite significant. Hence, the model may cast light on measures to improve the job satisfaction, engagement and commitment of young social workers.

## CONCLUSION

The questionnaire developed in this study, which measures supervisor supportive leadership, intrinsic job satisfaction, extrinsic job satisfaction, engagement, and commitment, has been validated and proven reliable through confirmatory factor analysis. This tool not only serves as a valuable resource for measuring these constructs but also paves the way for future studies related to social workers.

The proposed theoretical framework, supported by structural equation data, underscores the potential impact of supportive leaderships of supervisors on the satisfaction, engagement and commitment of young social workers. This highlights the importance of organising more education and training programmes for improving the supportive leadership of supervisors, which can significantly enhance the quality of social service and make HK a better place to live for the public in general and the underprivileged in particular.

The insights into the relations between variables can guide the government, policy makers, and organisations providing social service in their efforts to improve the sector and retain young social workers in the profession. These research findings provide valuable guidance for the future of the social work sector.

Extrinsic job satisfaction is found to be a very important factor for enhancing the engagement and commitment of young social workers. The government is advised to enhance or re-visit the financial support given to the social service sectors, particularly in terms of specific financial support related to paying the salary of social workers, from time to time with a view to improving the commitment of social workers and quality of social services.

As expressed in the Introduction, HK has a unique culture, attitude and inclusion towards social work. Therefore, this paper has brought out the integration of such diversity inscribed in her historical background. Moreover, the above research findings will be able to harness the “Best of both Worlds” for social workers in other countries and cities to learn and develop cross-fertilization.

## LIMITATIONS

The proposed causal relations, supported by literature review, were found to align with the data analysis results. However, the validation of causal relationships is not within the scope of a cross-sectional study. This highlights the need for further research to establish these proposed causal relationships, offering a hopeful outlook for the future of this study.

Responses from young social workers from the age group of 22 to 35 are analysed. Hence the results cannot be generalized to all social workers in HK. Further studies are needed to see if the relationships and effects among various variables are the same for all age groups of social workers.

## Research Ethics Approval

The investigations were conducted in accordance with the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki (1975, revised in 2013). According to point 23 of this declaration, approval must be obtained from the local Ethical Committee prior to conducting the research, ensuring that the study adheres to both national and international guidelines. More information can be found at: [https://www.mdpi.com/ethics#\\_bookmark9](https://www.mdpi.com/ethics#_bookmark9)

## Ethical Approval Statement

Ethical approval was granted by the Research and Ethics Committee of the Gratia Christian College in accordance to the Declaration of Helsinki above with the details listed below. Written informed consents were obtained and recorded via audio recording and subsequent transcription into text by our Research Officer.

**Ethic Committee Name:** Gratia Christian College Research and Ethical Committee

Approval Code: ESP-20250003

Approval Date: 4 Mar 2025

## Consent for Publication

The Authors hereby provide consent for publication by the Publisher.

## Availability of Data and Material

The Data and Raw Materials deployed in this research are available for access (under copyright) by the Corresponding Author.

## Disclosure Statement -- Competing Interests

The authors declare NO conflict of interest. There are no other third parties in the design of the study, in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data, in the writing of the manuscript, or in the decision to publish the results.

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