

# Understanding the Link Between Destructive Leadership and Teacher Mental Health in the Public Educational Sector

Jin-Chuan Lee<sup>1</sup>, Yea-Wen Kung<sup>2</sup>, Juo-Ku Tseng<sup>3\*</sup>, Yen-Ping Yu<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Southern Taiwan University of Science and Technology, Tainan 710301, Taiwan (R.O.C.)

<sup>2</sup>Deputy Secretary-General, New Taipei City Government, New Taipei City 220242, Taiwan (R.O.C.)

<sup>3</sup>Department of Industrial Education, National Taiwan Normal University, Taipei 106010, Taiwan (R.O.C.);  
aj9402@gmail.com

<sup>4</sup>Graduate Institute of Educational Leadership and Evaluation, Southern Taiwan University of Science and Technology, Tainan 710301, Taiwan (R.O.C.)

\*Corresponding Author: aj9402@gmail.com

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between principals' destructive leadership, teachers' psychological distress, and work well-being in Taiwanese junior high schools. Drawing on 689 survey responses from Tainan and Kaohsiung (2016), the analysis combines correlational, regression, and mediation approaches. Conservation of Resources (COR) theory [1–3] and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) [4, 5] are used as interpretive lenses. Jointly, these frameworks generate two advance predictions: (a) OODL should exhibit stronger associations with teacher well-being than SODL, because OODL directly engages condition-resource channels that COR identifies as acutely sensitive to principal authority misuse; and (b) psychological distress should mediate more strongly for teaching efficacy than for school connectedness, because SDT identifies competence need-thwarting—rather than relatedness need-thwarting—as the psychological pathway most amplified by occupational strain. Harman's single-factor test (21.4%) is reported descriptively [6]. The results suggest that destructive leadership is associated with elevated distress and diminished well-being. Notably, organization-oriented destructive leadership (OODL) retains explanatory relevance, whereas subordinate-oriented forms do not. Mediation analysis [7] indicates that psychological distress accounts for part—though not all—of this relationship, with the strongest indirect effect observed for teaching efficacy (SM = 44.7%). The findings remain associational given the cross-sectional design.

Keywords: Destructive leadership, Psychological distress, Work well-being, COR theory, Self-determination theory

## 1. Introduction

Teachers' well-being at work has become a strategic concern in national education policy. Since the 1970s, Gross National Happiness (GNH) has gradually replaced Gross National Product (GNP) as a key development indicator [8], with the United Nations incorporating happiness into its National Development Index in 2011. Taiwan followed with its own National Happiness Index in 2012 [9]. Wu (2012) argued that 'educational happiness constitutes a sub-index of national happiness [10], with teachers as its key carriers. Teachers with low well-being are less confident in addressing students' emotional and behavioral needs [11], and their psychological distress directly impairs student learning outcomes [12].

Yet teachers are under increasing psychological pressure. The United Kingdom's Health and Safety Executive (HSE) reported work-related stress prevalence of 2.3% among teaching professionals during 2009–2012, compared to 1.2% across all occupations [13]. Among Taiwanese teachers, Ko and Chien (2011) found work stress at a moderate level [14], and Yu, Syu, and Chen (2010) documented a significant positive association between working hours and depressive symptoms [15]. Kidger et al. (2016) showed that distressed teachers are less capable of modeling the supportive social-emotional behaviors that students who need help most require — a pattern consistent with a COR loss-spiral dynamic [2, 16], whereby erosion of teaching capacity generates further performance decline.

Principals occupy a uniquely influential structural position: Johnson, Kraft, and Papay (2012) found that school leadership and culture affect teacher job satisfaction more than salary, facilities, or planning time [17]. Despite growing evidence that destructive leadership harms employee well-being across sectors [18–20], the associations between destructive principal behavior and teachers' psychological distress and work well-being have not been systematically examined in the Taiwanese context.

This study addresses that gap by testing three direct-effect hypotheses and one hypothesis about an indirect effect. COR theory [1–3] and SDT [4, 5] serve as interpretive lenses, with an explicit acknowledgment that neither framework's core mediating constructs were measured here. Three additional design constraints — cross-sectional structure, 2016 data, and single-source measurement — are acknowledged upfront and elaborated in the Limitations section.

The study contributes to the literature in ways that go beyond filling a Taiwanese context gap. In the Taiwanese educational system, principals hold formal authority over teacher evaluation, resource allocation, and institutional representation [14], creating conditions under which OODL behaviors — those that misuse authority, deny entitlements, or withhold institutional protection — may be associated with condition-resource depletion channels that differ in type from the interpersonal harm of SODL. Testing whether OODL and SODL carry differential predictive utility for teacher well-being in this setting therefore provides initial indirect evidence consistent with a proposed — though not yet directly tested — mapping of OODL onto COR's condition-resources construct, an interpretive extension of Hobfoll's (1989) taxonomy that requires verification through independent measurement of resource levels before it can be treated as an established claim[1].

Beyond this, the study examines the COR-predicted resource-depletion pathway operating through psychological distress and provides a theoretically grounded account of why indirect effect strength differs across well-being dimensions — a pattern that prior studies such as Woestman and Wasonga (2015) and Santos et al. (2023) have reported but not systematically explained [20,21]. Three specific theoretical insights motivate this study and distinguish its contribution from a straightforward contextual replication. First, applying COR and SDT jointly — rather than singly — generates a prediction about differential mediation strength across well-being dimensions that neither theory produces in isolation: COR identifies loss-spiral dynamics and condition-resource channels, while SDT specifies which psychological needs are most vulnerable, and their joint application points to teaching efficacy as the dimension where distress mediation should be strongest. Second, the separate analysis of OODL and SODL provides an empirical test of whether institutional and interpersonal forms of destructive leadership are analytically equivalent — a question that single-construct treatments cannot address. Third, framing the study within a governance system where principals hold concentrated formal authority over evaluation and resource allocation enables a theoretically specified contextual hypothesis: that OODL may be differentially salient precisely because it engages the principal's unique institutional position. Whether this pattern generalizes beyond the Taiwanese public school context requires replication across governance systems with distributed evaluation authority.

What remains less clearly understood, however, is whether different forms of destructive leadership operate through the same underlying mechanism, or whether they exert distinct types of influence that are not fully captured by existing models. The distinction has analytical consequences: treating destructive leadership as a unified construct risks obscuring variation across its subdimensions that may help account for the inconsistency of prior findings.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Theoretical Frameworks**

#### *2.1.1 Conservation of resources theory*

COR theory holds that individuals strive to protect what they value most [1]. Resources take many forms — including what Hobfoll (1989) classified as personal characteristic resources (e.g., a teacher's professional self-efficacy and sense of competence), condition resources (e.g., institutional standing and supervisory support), object resources (e.g., adequate teaching materials and facilities), and energetic resources (e.g., time and cognitive bandwidth) — and their loss carries disproportionately heavier psychological weight than equivalent gains. Hobfoll (2001) identified this asymmetry as a core principle [2]: chronic exposure to resource-depleting conditions generates loss spirals in which initial depletion erodes the capacity to resist further losses. Hobfoll, Halbesleben, Neveu, and Westman (2018) [3], in a comprehensive organizational review, confirmed that these resource loss dynamics — including the asymmetric salience of losses over gains — operate across a wide range of occupational stress contexts and underpin major organizational stress theories including the Job Demands–Resources model. Applying COR principles, principals' destructive

leadership can be theorized as a chronic resource-depleting condition [22] — an interpretive inference grounded in the theory's general principles rather than a direct empirical test of its resource-change mechanism. Confirming this account requires research that independently measures resource levels before and after exposure to destructive leadership, which the present cross-sectional design does not permit. From this theoretical base, three a priori propositions are derived that guide the present study rather than merely interpret it post hoc. First, COR predicts that chronic exposure to resource-depleting conditions will generate psychological strain; this provides the theoretical rationale for H1 (destructive leadership → distress) and H4's mediation pathway (distress as a proximal resource-loss indicator). Second, because principals in Taiwan's public junior high schools hold formal authority over condition resources—teacher evaluation, institutional protection, and resource allocation—COR's distinction between condition resources and interpersonal resources generates a directional prediction: OODL, which directly engages these condition-resource channels, should exhibit stronger and more persistent associations with well-being than SODL, which operates primarily at the interpersonal level. This is not a post hoc observation but a prediction that COR's resource taxonomy generates prior to data analysis. Third, the loss-asymmetry principle predicts that the indirect effect of destructive leadership on well-being through distress should be stronger for outcomes tied to personal-competence resources (teaching efficacy) than for relatedness-anchored outcomes (school connectedness), because competence resources are more directly implicated in the loss spiral initiated by occupational strain. These propositions are stated in advance of the findings; whether they receive empirical support is addressed in Sections 5 and 6.

### 2.1.2 *Self-determination theory*

SDT [4, 5] proposes that three innate psychological needs — autonomy, competence, and relatedness — must be met for sustained well-being and effective functioning. Their chronic frustration produces ill-being and disengagement. Ryan and Deci (2017) synthesized decades of SDT research across motivational and clinical contexts [5], confirming that chronic frustration of these needs is reliably associated with burnout, disengagement, and diminished occupational functioning. Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, Cuevas, and Lonsdale (2014) showed among physical education teachers (N = 364) that perceived job pressure predicted thwarting of all three needs [23], which in turn predicted burnout and somatic complaints; competence need-thwarting specifically predicted somatic complaints, while autonomy need-thwarting predicted emotional exhaustion. Whether these patterns extend to subject-matter teachers in general secondary education remains an open empirical question.

SDT provides conceptual specificity about which psychological needs are most vulnerable under destructive leadership. Withholding recognition from teachers erodes their sense of professional competence; when principals ignore or discount staff feedback, teachers receive the implicit message that their voices carry no weight, thwarting autonomy; withdrawing institutional protection cuts at the relational fabric of the school, threatening relatedness. This need-level analysis offers a plausible reason why psychological distress mediates the path to teaching efficacy — a personal competence resource — more strongly than to school connectedness, which reflects relatedness and may be more immediately responsive to the broader organizational climate of destructive leadership. As with COR,

this account is interpretive: SDT need-thwarting was not directly measured here.

### *2.1.3 Integrating COR and SDT: a joint advance prediction*

One question the dual-framework approach raises is whether COR and SDT generate distinct predictions in this study. In their basic directional form, they do not: both predict that destructive leadership → resource/need depletion → distress → diminished well-being. What the frameworks contribute jointly, however, is a richer specification of mechanism that neither provides alone. COR identifies the motivational logic of resource loss salience and loss spirals [2]; SDT identifies the psychological-need content of what is being lost, and specifically identifies competence need-thwarting as a mechanism linking job pressure to somatic distress in teacher contexts [23]. Taken together, the two frameworks point to a possible pattern in which psychological distress may mediate more strongly for teaching efficacy — the well-being dimension most closely tied to professional competence — than for school connectedness, which is more relatedness-anchored and may be more directly shaped by the broader institutional climate of destructive leadership.

This joint-framework prediction is stated prior to the analysis and is therefore not a post hoc rationalization: the pattern it anticipates—stronger distress mediation for teaching efficacy than for school connectedness—was derivable from the combination of COR's loss-asymmetry principle and SDT's competence need-thwarting mechanism before the regression results were examined. This advance specification distinguishes the present study from studies that deploy COR and SDT solely as rhetorical frames applied after the fact to describe observed associations. Whether the empirical results are consistent with this advance prediction is a different question from whether the prediction was made in advance; Section 6.1 assesses the degree of fit between this theoretical expectation and the observed mediation pattern.

## **2.2 Destructive Leadership in Schools**

Thoroughgood, Tate, Sawyer, and Jacobs (2012) developed the most comprehensive empirical taxonomy of destructive leader behavior [24], distinguishing Subordinate-Oriented Destructive Leadership (SODL; harm directed at individuals) from Organizational-Oriented Destructive Leadership (OODL; misuse of institutional authority). Meta-analytic evidence confirms that destructive leadership carries significant and consistent negative associations with follower well-being, job satisfaction, and individual performance across organizational contexts [19]. At the sector level, abusive supervision is negatively associated with subordinates' job satisfaction [25,26] and positively associated with psychological distress and adverse health outcomes [27,28]. Nyberg, Holmberg, Bernin, and Alderling (2011) found that destructive managerial leadership was significantly associated with poorer psychological well-being across three European countries [29]. Tepper et al. (2004) demonstrated that high abusive supervision conditions the relationship between coworkers' prosocial behaviors and fellow employees' attitudes [30], illustrating how a destructive supervisory climate reshapes the entire relational ecology of the workplace. Conway, Høgh, Balducci, and Ebbesen (2021) documented the pathway from adverse workplace treatment to mental health deterioration across multiple occupational settings [31].

Within the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) framework [32], destructive leadership can be conceptualized as a chronic social job demand that depletes employees' psychological and emotional resources, elevating strain and burnout risk. Wang, Kang, Choi, and Jeung (2024) [33], using a two-wave design, demonstrated that abusive supervision negatively predicts employee psychological well-being through depletion of self-determination resources — a finding consistent with both the COR and SDT perspectives adopted in this study. In educational settings, Woestman and Wasonga (2015) found that destructive leadership was negatively correlated with job satisfaction and positively correlated with job stress among U.S. school teachers [20]. Santos, Coelho, Filipe, and Marques (2023) found that employees under abusive supervision reported lower positive affect, higher negative affect, reduced customer orientation, and lower life satisfaction [21], a pattern consistent with SDT-based accounts of need frustration under supervisory mistreatment. The present study extends this evidence base to Taiwanese junior high school teachers.

### **2.3 Teachers' Psychological Distress**

Teaching is consistently identified as a high-pressure profession with elevated psychological distress relative to the general working population [12,34]. The UK's HSE reported work-related stress prevalence of 2.3% among teachers during 2009–2012, compared to 1.2% across all occupations [13]. Stansfeld, Rasul, Head, and Singleton (2011) found a 15% prevalence of common mental disorders among UK teachers [35], exceeding the 13% general workforce rate. Among Libyan primary and secondary school teachers (N = 200), Taher, Samud, Hashemi, and Kabuoli (2016) found that 44.5% reported depression [36], 56% anxiety, and 39.5% stress — figures suggestive of elevated occupational burden, though cross-national comparisons require caution given differences in policy context and measurement conditions.

Multiple antecedents contribute. Sato, Kuroda, and Owan (2020) identified long hours, work overload, lack of control, and poor social support as key contributors in organizational samples [39] — each of which maps onto resources that destructive leadership threatens. Teachers additionally face high emotional labor demands as a profession-specific stressor [37,38]. Benevene, De Stasio, and Fiorilli (2020) demonstrated in a longitudinal design that job demands and interpersonal relationship quality predict depressive symptoms in teachers [40]. In Taiwan specifically, Ko and Chien (2011) documented moderate-level work stress [14], and Yu et al. (2010) found a significant association between working hours and depression [15].

The consequences extend beyond the individual teacher. Teacher absenteeism reduces student achievement [41], and distressed teachers are less capable of building the supportive relationships that students who most need them require [16]. Teachers are expected to model positive social-emotional behaviors [42], a capacity that psychological distress directly impairs.

### **2.4 Background Variables and Teacher Well-Being**

Research on background correlates of teacher well-being produces mixed findings: some studies find longer tenure associated with higher job satisfaction [43,44], while others report the opposite or no consistent pattern. Background variables are treated here as descriptive context rather than primary

predictors.

### 3. Hypotheses Development

Drawing on the COR-SDT interpretive framework and prior evidence in Taiwanese educational contexts, four hypotheses are proposed. H1 and H2 are stated at the level of a composite destructive leadership score, reflecting the bivariate relationships predicted by the theoretical frameworks; the independent contributions of OODL and SODL are then tested separately in the regression analyses. H3 is supported by Taiwanese evidence directly: Liu and Hu (2014) found a significant negative correlation between work stress and well-being among New Taipei City junior high school teachers [45], and Yeh, Lu, Chen, and Lin (2014) found that job stress significantly and negatively predicted job satisfaction among Pingtung County junior high school teachers [46].

H1. Principals' destructive leadership positively predicts teachers' psychological distress.

H2. Principals' destructive leadership negatively predicts teachers' work well-being.

H3. Teachers' psychological distress negatively predicts their work well-being.

H4. The indirect effect of principals' destructive leadership on teachers' work well-being through psychological distress is significant, with a direct effect of destructive leadership on well-being also remaining significant.

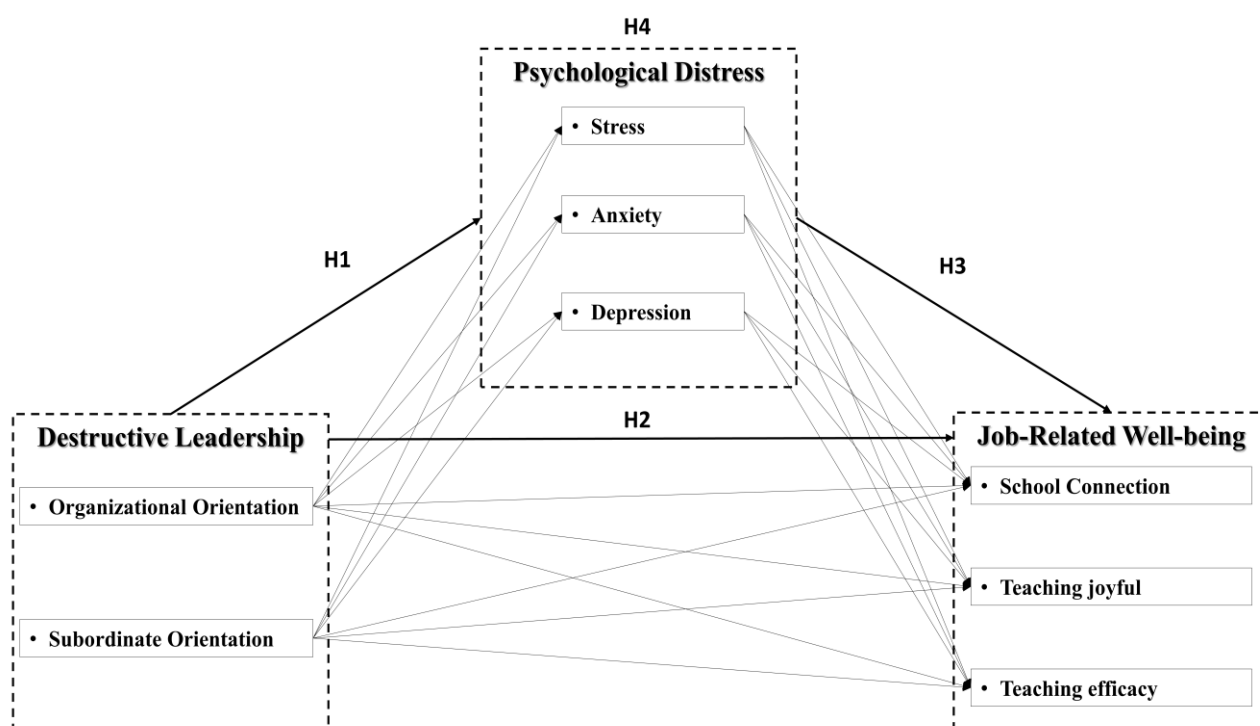


Figure 1. Research framework

## 4. Research Design

### 4.1 Sampling and Participants

A multi-stage proportional sampling strategy recruited in-service teachers from public junior high schools in Tainan City and Kaohsiung City, Taiwan. These two cities were selected as

representative southern Taiwan metropolitan centers where the research team had established institutional access; the restriction to southern cities is a geographic convenience that limits generalizability and does not reflect a theoretical claim that southern and northern Taiwan differ systematically in leadership or well-being. Schools were stratified by size (fewer than 24 classes; 25–48 classes; 49 or more classes). The formal survey ran from June 7 to June 30, 2016. A total of 695 questionnaires were returned, of which 689 were valid (valid response rate = 99.1%). Participants included 463 women (67.2%) and 226 men (32.8%). The largest age cohort was 40–50 years, followed by 30–40 years. Most respondents held 5–15 years of experience. A pilot study (N = 151 valid responses, 18 schools, May–June 2015) confirmed internal consistency and content validity prior to formal data collection.

Data recency note: data were collected in 2016. Taiwan's educational environment has changed substantially since then, including the 12-Year Basic Education Curriculum Guidelines (2019) and associated restructuring of principal evaluation frameworks. All findings should be treated as evidence from a 2016 baseline; their contemporary applicability requires replication.

## 4.2 Measures

### 4.2.1 Destructive leadership scale

Adapted from Thoroughgood et al. (2012) [24], this scale distinguishes SODL (14 items) from OODL (11 items; 25 items total). Items were translated into Chinese and reviewed by five educational experts for content validity. A five-point Likert format was used.

### 4.2.2 Work well-being scale

Adapted from the Teacher Subjective Wellbeing Questionnaire (TSWQ) [47], originally an 8-item, two-subscale measure developed and validated with English-speaking U.S. samples for School Connectedness and Teaching Efficacy. This study added a third subscale — Teaching Joyful (4 items) — yielding a 12-item instrument. Mankin, von der Embse, Renshaw, and Ryan (2018) confirmed via CFA (N = 1,883) that the TSWQ's original two-factor structure is valid and measurement-invariant across school levels [48]; their findings do not support a three-factor extension, and cross-cultural measurement equivalence for Chinese-speaking Taiwanese samples has not been independently established. The present three-factor adaptation is exploratory and requires independent CFA validation before broader application.

### 4.2.3 Psychological distress scale

The Depression Anxiety Stress Scales–21 (DASS-21) comprises three 7-item subscales (Depression, Anxiety, Stress) rated on a four-point frequency scale [49]. Items were translated into Chinese following forward-translation and expert review. The DASS-21 has been extensively validated in occupational research contexts [35,36].

## 4.3 Common Method Bias Assessment

Because all constructs were measured from the same teachers at a single time point, Harman's single-factor exploratory factor analysis was conducted as a descriptive screen [6]. The first unrotated

factor accounted for 21.4% of total variance, below the conventional 50% threshold. This result is treated as neither confirmatory nor disconfirmatory of common method bias and is reported for transparency only; given the test's recognized insensitivity, it does not serve as evidence regarding CMB. Future research should employ procedural remedies such as temporally separated measurement, or stronger statistical controls such as an unmeasured latent method construct.

#### 4.4 Data Analysis

Pearson correlations examined bivariate associations (H1 and H2 evaluated here using composite destructive leadership score). Forward-entry stepwise regressions offered SODL and OODL as candidate predictors in each model to assess their independent subscale contributions to each well-being dimension and the composite. This exploratory procedure is used to identify which subscale carries stronger association with each outcome prior to imposing a theoretically specified entry order; the resulting pattern is then evaluated against the a priori COR prediction that OODL should dominate. Mediation was analyzed using PROCESS macro Version 2.15 [7]. The SM index (%) =  $[(c - c') / c] \times 100$  was computed from unrounded PROCESS output coefficients throughout, where  $c$  is the total effect of destructive leadership and  $c'$  is the direct effect after including the mediator; tabled  $b$  coefficients are rounded to three decimal places, so minor discrepancies between reported SM% values and those computed from tabled values reflect rounding. Indirect effect significance was evaluated via bootstrap 95% confidence intervals (5,000 resamples), which are reported as the primary criterion. Consistent with the analytical framework elaborated in Hayes (2017) [50], effects are characterized by whether the indirect effect is significant and whether the direct effect remains significant after including the mediator, rather than by 'partial' or 'full' mediation terminology that Hayes (2017) identifies as of limited theoretical value [50]. All reported associations are cross-sectional; causal conclusions are not warranted. The choice to use forward-entry stepwise regression rather than a purely theory-driven simultaneous entry requires explicit justification. OODL and SODL are conceptually distinct constructs in Thoroughgood et al.'s (2012) taxonomy [24], but that taxonomy does not generate a clear a priori ordering of their relative predictive weights across well-being outcomes. No prior study in a Taiwanese educational context has established which subscale should enter first in a hierarchical design; imposing an entry order without empirical precedent would introduce an assumption at least as strong as the one stepwise entry avoids. The stepwise approach therefore serves an explicitly exploratory function: to let the data reveal which subscale carries the stronger association with each outcome before that pattern is theorized. This exploratory result — OODL entering in every model while SODL was excluded — is then evaluated against the a priori COR prediction that OODL should dominate, and is consistent with it. The consistency of the OODL-entry pattern across all four well-being dimensions strengthens confidence that it is not an artifact of any single model's statistical characteristics. Although formal VIF diagnostics were not available from the archived dataset, the consistent exclusion of SODL across all four models — despite sharing scale origin with OODL — provides a conservative indication that the OODL effect is not merely a proxy for scale-level overlap. Simultaneous hierarchical regression with explicit incremental  $\Delta R^2$  tests and VIF diagnostics is identified as the preferred approach for confirmatory replication.

## 5. Results

### 5.1 Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Pearson correlations using the composite destructive leadership score yielded a significant positive association with psychological distress ( $r = .231, p < .001$ ), supporting H1, and a significant negative association with work well-being ( $r = -.251, p < .001$ ), supporting H2. Psychological distress was negatively associated with work well-being ( $r = -.333, p < .001$ ), supporting H3. These bivariate tests use the composite DL score as the relevant indicator for H1 and H2; the independent contributions of OODL and SODL are evaluated separately in the stepwise regressions below. This shift from composite to subscale reflects a deliberate analytical choice to examine OODL and SODL contributions independently, consistent with Thoroughgood et al.'s (2012) taxonomic rationale that subordinate-oriented and organization-oriented destructive behaviors represent conceptually and empirically distinct constructs [24].

### 5.2 Stepwise Regression: Predictors of Work Well-Being

#### 5.2.1 School connectedness

Psychological distress ( $\beta = -.278, p < .001$ ) entered first, explaining 10.3% of variance; OODL ( $\beta = -.193, p < .001$ ) entered second, bringing total  $R^2$  to .139 (Table 1).

Table 1. Stepwise regression: predictors of school connectedness (n = 689)

Variable	R	R <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$	F	b	$\beta$	t
Constant					3.672		
Psychological distress	.322	.103	.103	78.72***	-.237	-.278	-7.61***
OODL	.372	.139	.036	54.81***	-.182	-.193	-5.27***

Note. SODL did not attain significance and was excluded. OODL = Organizational-Oriented Destructive Leadership. \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

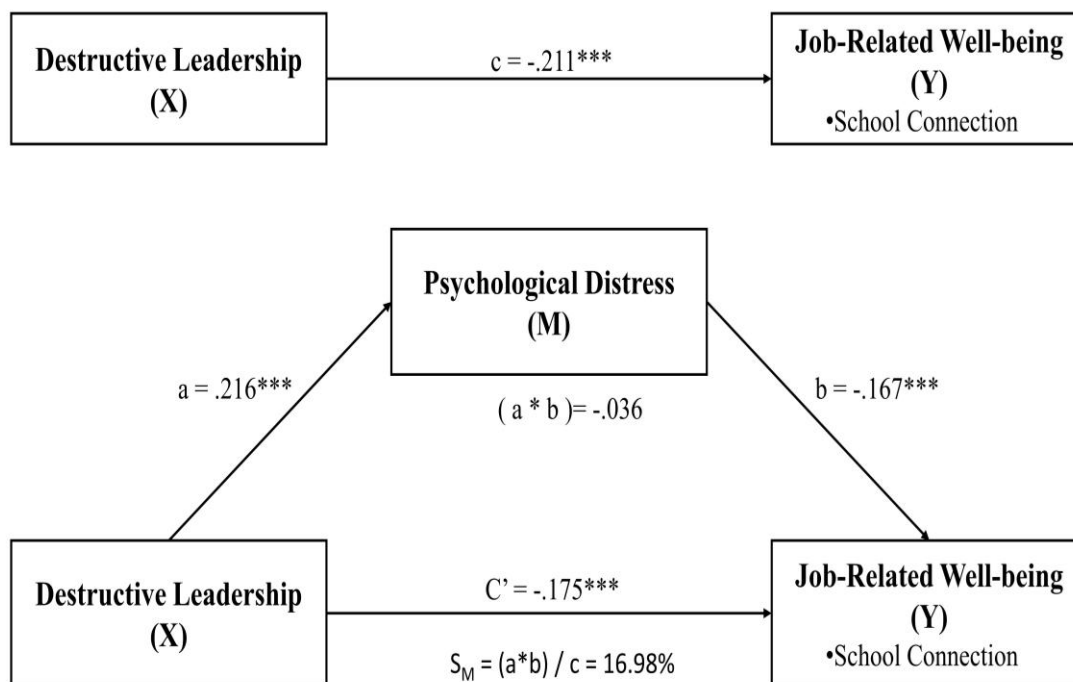


Figure 2. Mediation of psychological distress on destructive leadership → school connectedness

### 5.2.2 Teaching joyful

Results for teaching joyful should be interpreted with the additional constraint that this subscale is exploratory and its construct validity has not been independently confirmed via CFA. Accordingly, the Teaching Joyful results ( $SM = 27.3\%$ ; Table 2) carry lower interpretive weight than those for Teaching Efficacy and School Connectedness, which rest on the validated TSWQ two-factor structure [48]; they should be regarded as directional indicators requiring independent CFA confirmation before bearing theoretical conclusions of equivalent confidence. Psychological distress ( $\beta = -.328$ ,  $p < .001$ ) entered first ( $R^2 = .133$ ); OODL ( $\beta = -.169$ ,  $p < .001$ ) entered second ( $R^2 = .159$ ; Table 2).

Table 2. Stepwise regression: predictors of teaching joyful (n = 689)

Variable	R	R <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$	F	b	$\beta$	t
Constant					.046		
Psychological distress	.367	.133	.133	105.94***	-.028	-.328	-9.11***
OODL	.402	.159	.026	65.60***	-.031	-.169	-4.69***

Note. Exploratory subscale; construct validity not independently confirmed. OODL = Organizational-Oriented Destructive Leadership. \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

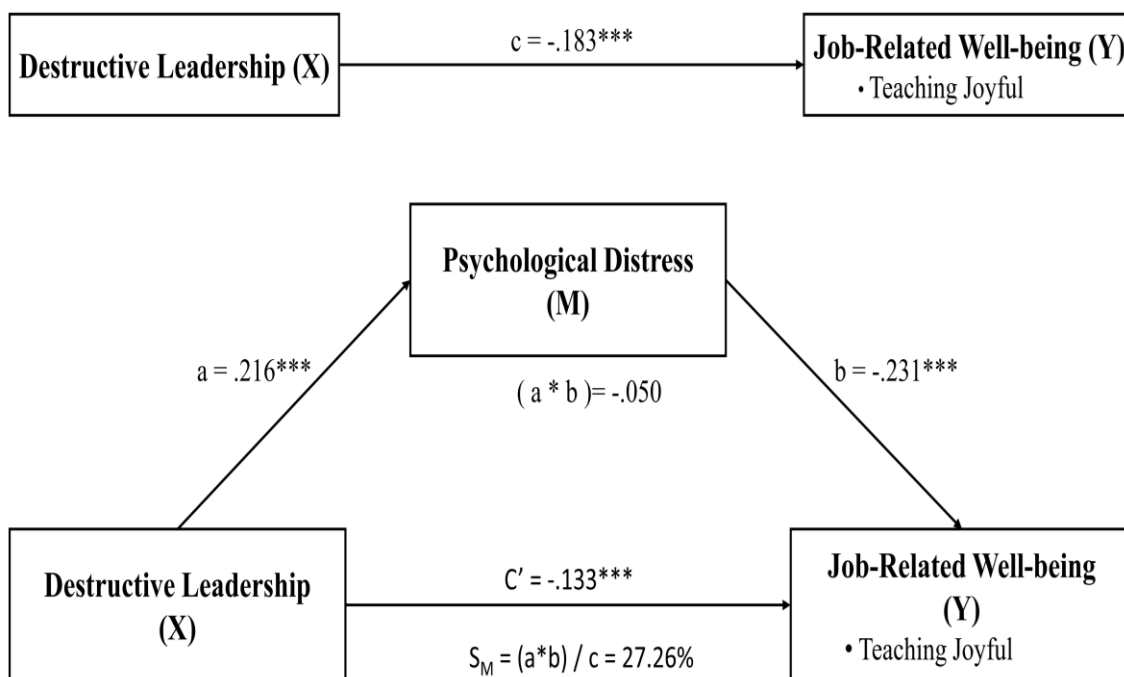


Figure 3. Mediation of psychological distress on destructive leadership → teaching joyful

### 5.2.3 Teaching efficacy

Psychological distress ( $\beta = -.256, p < .001$ ) entered first ( $R^2 = .077$ ); OODL ( $\beta = -.097, p < .001$ ) entered second ( $R^2 = .086$ ; Table 3).

Table 3. Stepwise regression: predictors of teaching efficacy (n = 689)

Variable	R	R <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$	F	b	$\beta$	t
Constant					3.506		
Psychological distress	.278	.077	.077	57.06***	-.200	-.256	-6.80***
OODL	.293	.086	.009	32.05***	-.083	-.097	-2.57***

Note. OODL = Organizational-Oriented Destructive Leadership. \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

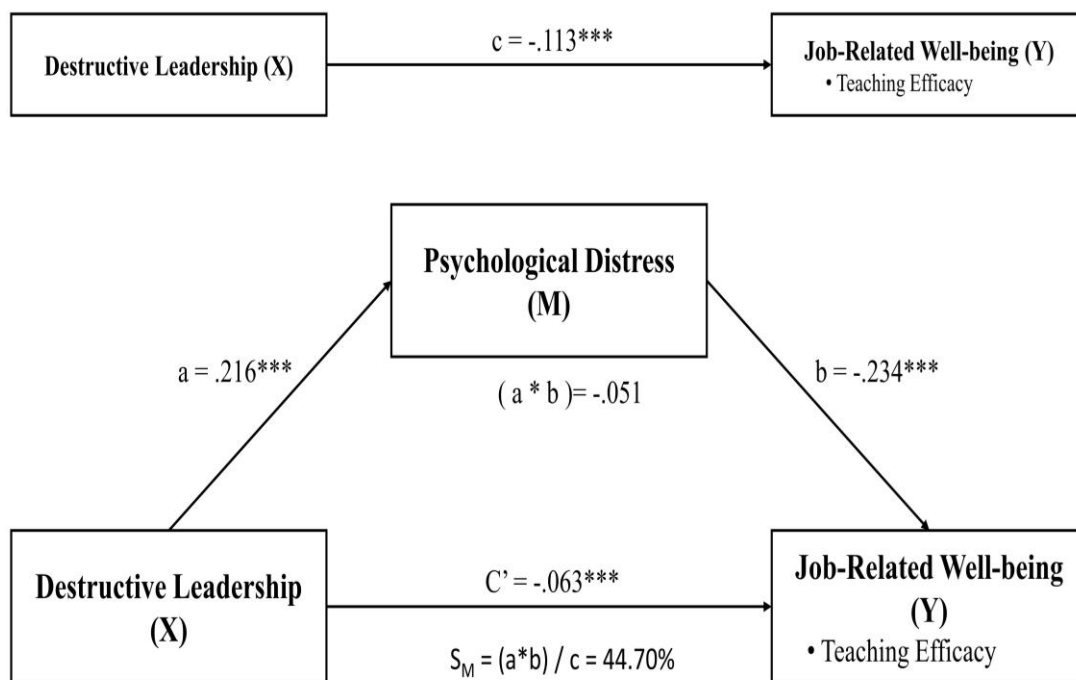


Figure 4. Mediation of psychological distress on destructive leadership → teaching efficacy

### 5.2.4 Overall work well-being

Psychological distress ( $\beta = -.334, p < .001$ ) entered first ( $R^2 = .141$ ); OODL ( $\beta = -.136, p < .001$ ) entered second ( $R^2 = .171$ ; Table 4).

Table 4. Stepwise regression: predictors of overall work well-being (n = 689)

Variable	R	R <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$	F	b	$\beta$	t
Constant					3.672		
Psychological distress	.375	.141	.141	111.50***	-.230	-.334	-9.32***
OODL	.413	.171	.030	70.21***	-.136	-.136	-5.00***

Note. OODL = Organizational-Oriented Destructive Leadership. \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

### 5.3 Mediation Analyses

SM (%) =  $[(c - c') / c] \times 100$ , computed from unrounded PROCESS output coefficients. Bootstrap 95% CIs (5,000 resamples via PROCESS v2.15; Hayes, 2013) [7] are the primary significance criterion. Results are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. Mediation analyses (PROCESS Macro v2.15; Hayes, 2013)

Outcome	c (b)	a (b)	b (b)	c' (b)	a×b	Bootstrap 95% CI	SM%
School connectedness	-.211	.216	-.167	-.175	-.036	[-.062, -.015]	16.98

Teaching joyful	-.183	.216	-.231	-.133	-.050	[-.079, -.025]	27.26
Teaching efficacy	-.113	.216	-.234	-.063	-.051	[-.079, -.027]	44.70
Overall well-being	-.169	.216	-.211	-.124	-.045	[-.070, -.023]	26.87

Note. All coefficients are unstandardized (b). a = DL → psychological distress; b = distress → outcome controlling DL; c = total effect; c' = direct effect. All bootstrap 95% CIs exclude zero; all direct effects significant. All effects  $p < .001$ .

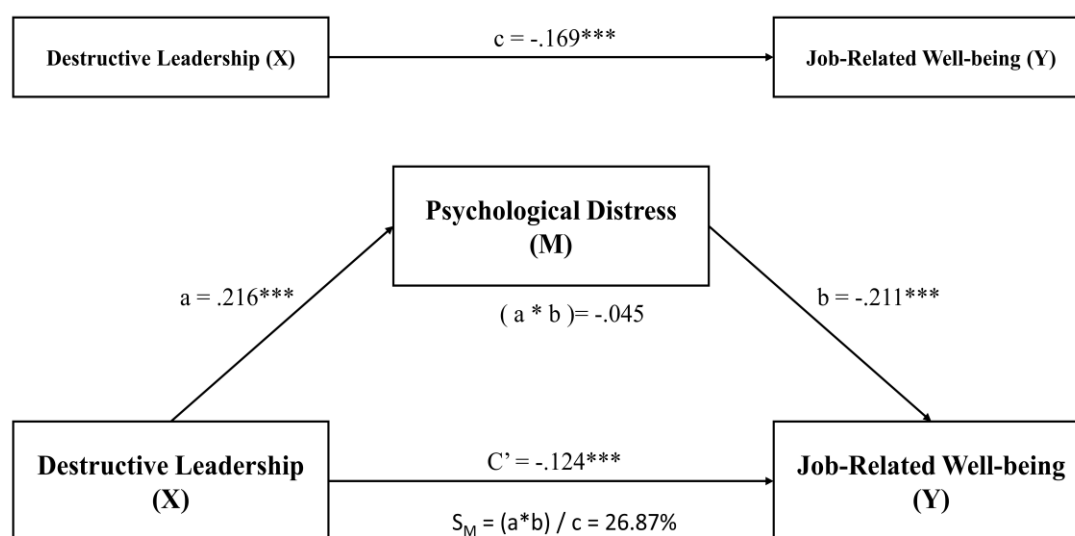


Figure 5. Mediation of psychological distress on destructive leadership → overall work well-being

## 6. Discussion

### 6.1 Principal Findings and Theoretical Interpretation

The most consistent finding across all four regression models is the differential behavior of OODL and SODL. Once psychological distress is in the model, only OODL retains independent predictive weight; SODL is excluded in every case. This parallels the directional pattern reported by Santos et al. (2023) [21], though direct comparison across governance contexts requires caution. The key point is not simply that destructive leadership is harmful — that much was already known — but that its two subdimensions do not carry equivalent predictive utility.

One possible interpretation, drawing on COR theory [3], is that organization-oriented destructive behaviors may operate through channels that are not fully captured by individual-level psychological distress. In such cases, the issue may not be limited to how teachers experience stress, but may also involve changes in institutional conditions—such as diminished protection, unstable expectations, or weakened professional recognition. Psychological distress may reflect part of this process, but is unlikely to account for it entirely. The persistence of direct effects after controlling for distress is

therefore suggestive of a broader mechanism, though this interpretation would require direct measurement of condition-resource levels to be substantiated.

At the same time, this interpretation should not be overstated. The OODL-entry pattern was identified through a stepwise procedure rather than a confirmatory hierarchical design, and formal VIF diagnostics are not available from the archived dataset from the archived dataset. Two features of the data, however, provide partial reassurance about directional stability. First, the OODL-dominance pattern replicates consistently across all four well-being models, making it unlikely that any single model's sampling variance is driving the result. Second, SODL was excluded from every model despite sharing scale origin with OODL, which would ordinarily work against OODL's independent entry; the fact that OODL entered reliably under these conditions is a conservative indicator that the effect is not merely an artifact of scale-level overlap. Confirmatory replication using simultaneous hierarchical regression with explicit  $\Delta R^2$  decomposition and VIF diagnostics remains necessary before this pattern can bear stronger interpretive weight.

Beyond the COR-based resource-depletion account, at least three alternative explanations for the OODL dominance finding deserve explicit consideration before treating the resource-depletion interpretation as the most parsimonious account. First, the relatively greater predictive weight of OODL may reflect contextual norms specific to Taiwanese school governance. In Taiwan's public junior high schools, principals exercise formal authority over teacher evaluation, resource allocation, curriculum approval, and institutional representation [14]; within this governance structure, organization-oriented behaviors—such as withholding institutional protection, avoiding consequential decisions, or denying professional recognition—may be particularly salient because they directly implicate the principal's unique positional power in ways that interpersonal behaviors do not. The observed OODL pattern may therefore partly reflect a feature of this institutional configuration rather than a fully generalizable leadership dynamic. Second, the formal evaluation role of Taiwanese principals creates a structural power asymmetry that may amplify teachers' sensitivity to organization-oriented acts. When the same authority figure who evaluates performance simultaneously withholds recognition or institutional protection, the symbolic and material consequences may combine in ways that are more threatening—and thus more distress-inducing—than supervisory interpersonal behavior in non-evaluative relationships. Whether this asymmetry effect would replicate in systems where evaluation authority is distributed (e.g., peer review or external inspection models) remains an open question. Third, a perceptual attribution account must be entertained: under chronic occupational stress, teachers may be more likely to attribute negative outcomes to visible institutional sources—such as the principal's use of formal authority—than to the diffuse interpersonal climate. If so, OODL scores may partly reflect stress-reactive attribution tendencies rather than objective differences in leadership behavior, an interpretation that cannot be ruled out in single-source cross-sectional data. Distinguishing between these explanations—resource depletion, governance context, power asymmetry, and attribution effects—would require independent rater data on principal behavior, longitudinal designs capable of separating perception from behavior, and comparative samples drawn from systems with different governance structures. Until such

evidence is available, the OODL dominance finding should be interpreted as a replicable but theoretically underdetermined pattern.

A related observation concerns the variation in indirect effect strength. The stronger mediation observed for teaching efficacy (SM = 44.7%), compared to teaching joyful (27.3%), overall well-being (26.9%), and school connectedness (17.0%), aligns in part with SDT-informed expectations. Bartholomew et al. (2014) found that competence need-thwarting was particularly associated with somatic distress outcomes [23], which may offer a tentative explanation for why teaching efficacy appears more sensitive to psychological distress. However, the extent to which this pattern generalizes to subject-matter teachers in general secondary education remains uncertain and should not be assumed without further empirical verification.

By contrast, school connectedness may be more directly shaped by the broader organizational climate associated with destructive leadership. This interpretation is compatible with COR's emphasis on condition resources [1], although, again, such a claim cannot be directly tested within the present design. Taken together, the findings suggest that psychological distress captures only part of the relationship between destructive leadership and teacher well-being, and that additional pathways—possibly structural in nature—remain to be specified.

## 6.2 Theoretical Contributions

First, the findings raise questions about the common practice of treating destructive leadership as a unidimensional construct. While prior research has often aggregated its various forms, the present results suggest that organization-oriented destructive leadership (OODL) and subordinate-oriented destructive leadership (SODL) may not carry equivalent analytical weight. In particular, OODL appears to be more consistently associated with teacher well-being outcomes, indicating that institutional misuse of authority may represent a qualitatively distinct mechanism of influence rather than simply a more severe form of interpersonal mistreatment. This extends the taxonomy proposed by Thoroughgood et al. (2012) by highlighting differences in outcome relevance across subdimensions [24].

Second, the study invites a more nuanced application of Conservation of Resources (COR) theory [3]. Rather than assuming that leadership effects are transmitted primarily through individual-level affective responses, the persistence of OODL effects after controlling for psychological distress suggests that resource loss may occur through multiple channels. Some of these losses may be experienced subjectively as distress, while others may be embedded in the structural conditions of work, such as institutional support or procedural stability. The present findings are consistent with this interpretation, although direct evidence of resource change is not available in the current dataset.

Third, the results offer a modest refinement to the application of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) in educational settings. The observed variation in mediation strength across well-being dimensions suggests that psychological distress does not exert uniform influence. Competence-related outcomes, such as teaching efficacy, appear more sensitive, whereas relational dimensions, such as school connectedness, may be more directly shaped by contextual or organizational factors. This interpretation is broadly consistent with the findings of Bartholomew et al. (2014) [23], although

its applicability to different educational contexts remains to be established.

These contributions should be understood as interpretive rather than confirmatory. Given that neither resource levels nor need-thwarting were directly measured, the mechanisms proposed here remain provisional. What the study provides is not a definitive account, but a set of empirically grounded indications that the relationship between destructive leadership and teacher well-being may be more layered than is typically assumed.

The present findings suggest that a single-path account—distress fully mediating leadership effects on well-being—is incomplete. Both the persistence of OODL's direct effect after distress is controlled and the variation in indirect effect strength across outcome dimensions point toward mechanisms that differ in type, not just in magnitude. Studies aggregating OODL and SODL into a composite score may therefore produce pooled estimates that obscure differential processes across the two subdimensions.

Taken together, the three theoretical contributions elaborated above generate a set of testable propositions for future research. Rather than treating these insights as mere contextual extensions, the following propositions make explicit the conditions under which the present findings should or should not be expected to replicate—thereby positioning this study as a generative rather than solely confirmatory contribution to the literature.

P1 (Governance-conditioned OODL salience): In educational governance systems where evaluation authority, resource allocation, and institutional representation are formally concentrated in the principal, OODL will exhibit stronger associations with teacher well-being than SODL. In systems where these functions are distributed—for example, through peer review panels, external inspection agencies, or collegial governance structures—the OODL dominance observed in the present study should attenuate or disappear. This proposition is directly falsifiable through cross-national comparative replication.

P2 (Dual-channel resource depletion): The total effect of OODL on teacher well-being operates through at least two analytically separable channels—a psychological channel (mediated by distress, as documented here) and a structural channel (operating through depletion of condition resources such as institutional standing, procedural fairness, and organizational protection). The structural channel should produce a direct OODL effect on well-being that persists after controlling for psychological distress, survives the addition of independent ratings of condition-resource levels, and is not replicable with SODL alone. Future research designs that incorporate independent assessments of perceived resource stocks [1, 2] and independent-source leadership ratings are required to partition these channels and test this proposition directly.

P3 (Need-specific mediation gradient): Psychological distress will mediate the effect of destructive leadership more strongly for well-being dimensions anchored in competence resources (e.g., teaching efficacy) than for dimensions anchored in relatedness resources (e.g., school connectedness), because competence need-thwarting is the SDT mechanism most directly amplified by occupational strain [23]. This gradient should be reproducible across educational samples where need-thwarting is directly measured, and should be stronger in high evaluation-pressure contexts than

in low-pressure ones. Designs that directly measure autonomy, competence, and relatedness need-thwarting as mediators—rather than treating distress as a proxy—are required to test this proposition with precision. These three propositions are offered not as conclusions but as theoretically derived research questions that the present findings motivate: they specify the conditions, mechanisms, and comparative contrasts that future studies would need to address in order to determine whether the patterns observed here reflect generalizable theoretical processes or context-specific artifacts.

## 7. Limitations

Several features of the present design place constraints on how the findings should be interpreted. To begin with, the cross-sectional nature of the data does not allow for causal inference. Although the observed patterns are consistent with expectations derived from COR and SDT, alternative orderings remain plausible. For instance, it is equally possible that teachers experiencing higher levels of psychological distress may be more likely to perceive their principals' behaviors as destructive. Establishing temporal precedence would require longitudinal or panel designs.

More importantly, a limitation that bears directly on how the findings should be interpreted concerns measurement. Neither COR resource stocks nor SDT need-thwarting were directly assessed in this study, and as a result, both frameworks function here primarily as interpretive lenses rather than empirically tested mechanisms. This is not unusual in cross-sectional research. At the same time, it constrains the extent to which the underlying processes can be specified with confidence. The mechanisms discussed above should therefore be understood as plausible accounts rather than established explanations. Future research would benefit from incorporating direct measures of perceived resource levels and need-thwarting (e.g., Bartholomew et al., 2014) to examine whether the mechanisms suggested here can be empirically substantiated [23].

A third consideration relates to common method bias. Harman's single-factor test was included as a descriptive transparency check, but given its well-documented insensitivity [6], the 21.4% result should not be taken as evidence either for or against the presence of common method variance. More robust approaches—such as temporally separated measurement or the use of latent method factors—would provide stronger tests in future studies.

The scope of the sample also warrants caution. The data are drawn from two cities in southern Taiwan and reflect conditions in 2016. Since then, Taiwan's educational system has undergone notable policy and structural changes. It would therefore be premature to assume that the patterns observed here apply unchanged under current conditions. Replication with more recent and geographically broader samples is needed before stronger generalizations can be made.

Measurement issues are also present in the operationalization of work well-being. The scale used in this study extends the validated Teacher Subjective Wellbeing Questionnaire (TSWQ) by adding a "Teaching Joyful" dimension [47]. As Mankin et al. (2018) confirmed only the original two-factor structure [48], the three-factor specification employed here should be regarded as exploratory. In addition, the TSWQ was originally developed with English-speaking U.S. samples, and its cross-cultural measurement equivalence for Taiwanese teachers has not been independently established.

These factors introduce an additional layer of uncertainty that should be addressed through confirmatory factor analysis in future research.

Finally, the analytical strategy introduces a limitation that warrants explicit acknowledgment. Forward-entry stepwise regression identifies which predictors carry stronger statistical associations rather than testing a theoretically pre-specified entry order; as a result, it does not provide a formal test of incremental predictive validity equivalent to simultaneous hierarchical regression with planned comparisons. This limitation is real, and simultaneous hierarchical regression with explicit  $\Delta R^2$  decomposition, VIF diagnostics, and theory-driven entry order is identified as the appropriate design for confirmatory replication. At the same time, three features of the present results limit the severity of this concern. First, the stepwise approach was chosen precisely because no prior empirical basis exists for imposing a subscale entry order in a Taiwanese educational context; selecting an entry order without such a basis would introduce an assumption at least as consequential as the one avoided here. Second, the OODL-dominance pattern replicates across all four well-being outcomes rather than appearing in a single model, which makes sampling-variance artifacts less plausible as an explanation. Third, SODL was consistently excluded despite sharing scale origin with OODL, providing a conservative indication that the OODL signal is not simply a function of overlapping item content. These features do not substitute for a confirmatory hierarchical design, but they do suggest that the directional pattern is unlikely to reverse under more rigorous testing.

A further limitation concerns the generalizability of the OODL dominance finding itself. As noted in Section 6.1, this pattern may reflect either a generalizable leadership dynamic or a feature of the specific institutional configuration of Taiwanese public junior high schools—where principals hold concentrated formal authority over teacher evaluation, resource allocation, and career advancement. The present single-context design cannot adjudicate between these interpretations. A concrete comparative research agenda is therefore proposed. If the OODL dominance pattern were to replicate in educational systems where evaluation authority is distributed rather than concentrated—for example, in the United Kingdom, where formal teacher appraisal involves head of department review and external inspection through Ofsted, or in Finland, where teacher professional accountability is predominantly collegial—that would support treating OODL dominance as a generalizable leadership dynamic independent of governance structure. Conversely, if the OODL effect attenuates or disappears in such systems while remaining robust in concentrated-authority systems similar to Taiwan's, the finding should be reclassified as a governance-conditioned contextual effect rather than a universal leadership phenomenon. Until such comparative evidence is available, the OODL dominance finding must be interpreted as theoretically underdetermined with respect to the general versus context-specific distinction. This limitation does not diminish the study's contribution—identifying a pattern that future comparative research can interrogate is itself a contribution to theory development—but it does constrain the confidence with which the OODL findings can be generalized beyond the Taiwanese public school context.

## 7.1 Data Temporal Positioning

The temporal positioning of the dataset requires careful consideration. The data were collected in 2016, prior to the implementation of major educational reforms in Taiwan, including the 12-Year Basic Education Curriculum Guidelines (2019) and subsequent changes in principal evaluation and accountability systems. At face value, this time gap may appear to limit the study's relevance to current conditions.

However, the dataset can also be understood in a different way. Rather than reflecting the present institutional environment, it captures a configuration of relationships that existed before these structural changes took effect. In this sense, the data provide a baseline against which later developments may be assessed. This is not to suggest that the patterns identified here remain unchanged, but rather that they offer a reference point for examining how institutional transformations may alter—or fail to alter—these relationships.

It should nevertheless be acknowledged that educational systems are not static. Changes in policy, governance structures, and professional expectations may influence both leadership practices and teachers' perceptions of them. For this reason, the findings reported here are best interpreted as indicative of underlying relational tendencies, rather than as direct representations of the current system.

Future research would benefit from replicating the present model using post-reform data, allowing for a more explicit assessment of whether and how institutional change moderates the relationships among destructive leadership, psychological distress, and work well-being.

## 8. Implications for Policy Research

The following implications are offered as research hypotheses for future policy development, conditioned on replication with a contemporaneous sample under current Taiwan educational policy conditions.

If the OODL/SODL differential finding replicates with a contemporaneous, nationally representative sample under current Taiwan educational policy conditions, it would suggest that professional development for principals may benefit from explicitly addressing organization-oriented behaviors — avoidance of important institutional decisions, failure to recognize performance, withholding of protection from external pressures — in addition to interpersonal communication skills. From an SDT perspective [4, 5], such behaviors may frustrate the basic psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. From a COR perspective [2, 3], they may erode the condition resources — professional standing, institutional protection, procedural fairness — that constitute core elements of teachers' working lives. These observations are offered as research hypotheses for future investigation, not as practice directives. Any consideration of structured feedback mechanisms would require replication evidence, stakeholder consultation, and institutional feasibility assessment before implementation.

If the mediation finding replicates — particularly the strongest indirect effect for teaching efficacy — it would suggest that distress-reduction programs are a legitimate priority for protecting

teachers' professional self-efficacy, not merely an add-on welfare measure. Training that draws on cognitive-behavioral principles of occupational stress regulation could be relevant here; Adil and Kamal (2020) [51] offer one example from a university occupational context, though their findings come from a Pakistani university sample and cannot be assumed to transfer directly to Taiwanese junior high school teachers. Any implementation would require context-specific validation and is not proposed here as a ready-made recommendation. These observations are conditioned on the study's 2016 data, its geographic restriction to two southern Taiwan cities, and the absence of longitudinal or experimental evidence.

## 9. Conclusions and Suggestions

### 9.1 Conclusions

This study examined associations among principals' destructive leadership, teacher psychological distress, and teacher work well-being in Taiwanese junior high schools ( $N = 689$ , Tainan City and Kaohsiung City, June 2016). Three direct-effect hypotheses and one mediation hypothesis were evaluated. The bivariate analyses supported all three directional hypotheses: H1, that destructive leadership was positively associated with teachers' psychological distress ( $r = .231$ ,  $p < .001$ ); H2, that destructive leadership was negatively associated with teachers' work well-being ( $r = -.251$ ,  $p < .001$ ); and H3, that psychological distress was negatively associated with work well-being ( $r = -.333$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In the forward-entry stepwise regression analyses, Organizational-Oriented Destructive Leadership (OODL) — but not Subordinate-Oriented Destructive Leadership (SODL) — retained independent predictive utility across all four well-being dimensions after psychological distress was entered. PROCESS mediation analysis (5,000 bootstrap resamples) [7] found significant indirect effects of destructive leadership on all four well-being dimensions through psychological distress, with direct effects of OODL on well-being remaining significant throughout — indicating that psychological distress functions as one significant pathway through which destructive leadership operates on teacher well-being, though not the only one. Indirect effect strength was strongest for teaching efficacy ( $SM = 44.70\%$ ), intermediate for teaching joyful ( $SM = 27.26\%$ ) and overall well-being ( $SM = 26.87\%$ ), and weakest for school connectedness ( $SM = 16.98\%$ ). All bootstrap 95% confidence intervals excluded zero (H4 supported).

These findings are interpreted through the lens of Conservation of Resources (COR) theory [1–3] and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) [4, 5], with the explicit constraint that neither COR resource stocks nor SDT need-thwarting were directly measured; both frameworks generated advance predictions that guided the study design, but the underlying mechanisms remain interpretive inferences rather than tested causal claims, because the constructs required to confirm them were not measured. Under a COR interpretation, OODL behaviors — misuse of institutional authority, withholding of organizational protection, denial of professional entitlements — may be associated with condition-resource depletion channels that differ in type from the interpersonal dimension of SODL; the persistence of direct OODL effects after psychological distress is controlled is consistent with this account, though confirming it requires independent measurement of resource levels. The

variation in indirect effect strength across well-being dimensions is consistent with the SDT-informed expectation that teaching efficacy, as a personal-competence resource, is particularly sensitive to the effects of psychological distress — a pattern directionally consistent with Bartholomew et al.'s (2014) finding that competence need-thwarting specifically predicted somatic distress outcomes in physical education teachers, though generalizability to subject-matter teachers in general secondary education remains an open question. This result is also in line with prior evidence from educational settings: Woestman and Wasonga (2015) found that destructive leadership was negatively correlated with job satisfaction and positively correlated with job stress among U.S. school teachers [20]. Wang et al. (2024) demonstrated, in a two-wave design, that abusive supervision negatively predicted employee psychological well-being through depletion of self-determination resources [33].

Four design constraints limit the scope of inference. First, the cross-sectional structure precludes causal conclusions; both the observed direction and its reverse — that psychologically distressed teachers perceive their principals as more destructive — remain plausible, and longitudinal designs are needed to establish temporal precedence. Second, neither COR resource stocks nor SDT need-thwarting were measured, so the proposed mechanisms remain interpretive inferences. Third, the data were collected in 2016; Taiwan's educational policy context has changed substantially since then, and all findings should be treated as evidence from a 2016 baseline. Fourth, the sample is geographically restricted to two cities in southern Taiwan.

The study's contribution is not a causal account, but a set of patterns that give COR and SDT more specific content in an educational governance context and generate falsifiable propositions for subsequent confirmatory work.

The broader implication is that models treating destructive leadership as a single-level construct may be insufficiently sensitive to the distinct pathways through which its subdimensions operate. Whether the OODL/SODL distinction and the variation in mediation strength observed here reflect generalizable features of the leadership-well-being relationship, or are specific to the governance configuration of Taiwan's public schools, is ultimately an empirical question that requires cross-national comparative replication to resolve.

## 9.2 Suggestions for Junior High School Principals

The differential OODL/SODL finding — if replicated with a contemporaneous sample — carries implications for how principal development programs are framed. The pattern is consistent with COR theory's distinction between condition resources (institutional standing, procedural fairness, organizational protection) and interpersonal resources [1, 2], and with SDT's account of how withholding recognition thwarts competence needs while denying staff voice thwarts autonomy [4, 5]. If this finding replicates, it would suggest that professional development for principals should explicitly address organization-oriented behaviors — avoidance of institutional decisions, failure to recognize performance, withholding of protection from external pressures — rather than focusing solely on interpersonal communication skills.

The finding that OODL predicted all four well-being dimensions while SODL did not, even in

the presence of substantial SODL-ODL intercorrelation, suggests that institutional behaviors may warrant dedicated attention in principal evaluation and support programs. Any specific mechanisms for monitoring principal leadership patterns would require replication evidence, stakeholder consultation, and institutional feasibility assessment before implementation, and are not proposed here as ready-made practice recommendations.

### **9.3 Suggestions for Junior High School Teachers**

The strongest indirect effect was observed for teaching efficacy ( $SM = 44.70\%$ ), the well-being dimension most directly tied to professional competence. This pattern is consistent with the SDT account that competence need-thwarting amplifies the link between occupational stressors and professional self-efficacy [23]. If this finding replicates, it would suggest that interventions targeting teachers' distress-regulation capacity are especially important for protecting professional self-efficacy.

Pre-service and in-service training that draws on cognitive-behavioral principles of occupational stress management is one plausible avenue; Adil and Kamal (2020) [51] illustrate this approach in a university occupational context, though their sample is Pakistani university staff and the findings cannot be assumed to transfer to Taiwanese junior high schools without context-specific validation. No specific program is proposed here as a ready-made recommendation; any implementation would require empirical evaluation in the target context.

### **9.4 Recommendations for Educational Administrative Authorities**

The pattern of findings, taken as a whole and conditioned on replication, carries several implications for educational policy research. If the OODL finding replicates, it would suggest that evaluation frameworks for school principals should incorporate explicit behavioral indicators of organization-oriented destructive conduct — not only interpersonal behavior — alongside positive leadership competencies. From both COR and SDT perspectives, such behaviors directly erode the institutional resources and basic psychological needs of teachers, with consequences for distress and professional functioning that extend beyond what interpersonal support alone can address.

If the mediation findings replicate — particularly the concentration of indirect effect strength on teaching efficacy — they would suggest that systemic distress-reduction initiatives represent a legitimate policy priority rather than a supplementary welfare measure. Institutional support mechanisms, including occupational mental health resources, structured peer mentoring, and workload management, are consistent with both the COR prediction that resource availability buffers loss spirals and the SDT prediction that need-supportive environments sustain professional functioning [2, 3, 5]. These suggestions are conditioned on the study's 2016 data, its geographic restriction to two southern Taiwan cities, and the absence of longitudinal or experimental evidence; their implementation would require replication under current educational policy conditions before proceeding.

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## Conflicts of Interest

**The authors confirm that there are no conflicts of interest.**

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