

# Muslim Women Professionals in Malaysia: Family Supportive Supervision, Job Satisfaction, and the Moderating Role of Spirituality

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## Abstract

Numerous studies have found the positive influence of family-supportive supervision in promoting better employee and organisational outcomes, especially for employees with extensive caring duties or heightened personal commitments. Despite the consensus, a dearth of knowledge remains to understand the perception of family-supportive supervision for Muslim women professionals in Malaysia and how it affects their job satisfaction. Furthermore, limited evidence highlights the role of spirituality in this relationship. As such, this paper seeks to examine the effects of family-supportive supervision on the job satisfaction of women employees in Malaysia. It also tests the role of spirituality in moderating this relationship. This study was conducted in a quantitative method with 154 samples of Muslim women professionals whereby data was collected via a self-administered survey. Data was analysed using SPSS Statistics and PROCESS MACRO. Results suggest that high levels of family-supportive supervision are associated with higher levels of job satisfaction among the participants. Spirituality proved to moderate this relationship in which higher-level relationships between family-supportive supervision and job satisfaction are expected when spirituality levels are high compared to low. This study contributes to a greater understanding of the effects of family-supportive supervision on job satisfaction among Malaysian Muslim women professionals. It also highlights the usefulness of cultivating spirituality as a potential tool in supporting women's growth and satisfaction at work.

**Keywords:** Family Supportive Supervision, Job Satisfaction, Spirituality, Muslim Women Professionals

## Abstrak

Pelbagai kajian telah membuktikan bahawa penyeliaan yang menyokong keluarga memberikan impak positif terhadap hasil pekerjaan dan organisasi, terutamanya bagi pekerja yang mempunyai tanggungjawab penjagaan yang tinggi atau komitmen peribadi yang besar. Namun begitu, masih terdapat kekurangan kajian yang meneliti persepsi terhadap penyeliaan yang menyokong keluarga dalam kalangan wanita profesional Muslim di Malaysia serta kesannya terhadap kepuasan kerja. Selain itu, bukti empirikal mengenai peranan kerohanian dalam hubungan ini masih terhad. Oleh itu, kajian ini bertujuan untuk menilai kesan penyeliaan yang menyokong keluarga terhadap kepuasan kerja wanita yang bekerja di Malaysia serta menguji peranan kerohanian sebagai pemboleh ubah moderator dalam hubungan tersebut. Kajian ini menggunakan kaedah kuantitatif dengan melibatkan 154 responden wanita profesional Muslim. Data dikumpul melalui soal selidik sendiri dan dianalisis menggunakan perisian SPSS Statistics serta PROCESS MACRO. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa tahap penyeliaan yang menyokong keluarga yang tinggi berkait secara positif dengan tahap kepuasan kerja yang tinggi dalam kalangan responden. Selain itu, kerohanian didapati berperanan sebagai moderator yang memperkukuh hubungan tersebut, di mana kesan penyeliaan yang menyokong keluarga terhadap kepuasan kerja adalah lebih ketara apabila tahap kerohanian adalah tinggi. Kajian ini menyumbang kepada pengukuhan pemahaman terhadap kepentingan penyeliaan yang menyokong keluarga dalam meningkatkan kepuasan kerja wanita profesional Muslim di Malaysia, serta menekankan potensi kerohanian sebagai aspek yang menyokong perkembangan dan kesejahteraan wanita di tempat kerja.

**Kata Kunci:** Penyeliaan yang Menyokong Keluarga, Kepuasan Kerja, Kerohanian, Wanita Profesional Muslim

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, various forms of support for employees are available under Malaysia's Employment Act (1955), which exists to protect the rights of every employee from a legal standpoint (Noor & Mahudin, 2015). Other terms excluded from this act, such as family-supportive supervision, are considered as an additional initiative for organisations to informally support their employees at work (Allen, 2001; Hammer et al., 2009). Informal types of organisational support have been established to be a great motivating factor in improving employee work-life balance and enrichment (French & Shockley, 2020). Conceptually, family-supportive supervision is a type of informal organisational support that refers to the degree to which immediate supervisors exhibit empathy and supportive behaviours towards their employees' family role demands, simultaneously helping them achieve more balance between work and life (Hammer et al., 2007; Kossek et al., 2011). In general, family-supportive supervision helps employees accumulate positive views at work through the support and understanding that they receive in juggling different life demands. Evidently, family-supportive supervision also has positive influences in promoting job satisfaction among employees (Iqbal et al., 2020; Charoensukmongkol et al., 2016; Thomas & Ganster, 1955). Therefore, the current study seeks to investigate the role that family-supportive supervisors play in improving the job satisfaction of Muslim women professionals in Malaysia which may then help to assist in crafting policies that are more supportive towards women and their dual roles no matter the organisation or industry that they are in.

The number of work-life policies that cater towards the needs of women professionals is only proportionate in women-dominated organisations (Kalysh et al., 2016). Historically, women are less likely to penetrate male-dominated industries due to the perception that their innate behaviours may not align with the ideal work characteristics of a more 'masculine' job, thus causing conflicts (Sargent et al., 2022). The results of perceptions such as these can be seen through statistics, for example, of engineers in Malaysia that show only 27.1% of them are women (Lawrence, 2024). Although these numbers may seem small in comparison to their male counterparts, it is also worth mentioning that even with the gender-based stereotype that the world has on women's engineering competence (Atiq et al., 2018), the Malaysian female population is persistently breaking the glass ceiling. Due to the predominant stereotype describing women as having a higher intensity when it comes to their emotional responses compared to men (Brotheridge & Lee, 2010; Heesacker et al., 1999), women who are expressive of their emotions at work are often seen as incompetent (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2008; Shields, 2002). Another gender-based challenge that women may face in the workplace includes issues adapting to masculinity in male-dominated industries (Ahmadi et al., 2019), leading to lower levels of self-confidence (Shanmugam et al., 2007). Women professionals who put the effort to push through these stereotypes, especially in male-dominated industries are one of the inspirations behind this study. By understanding the resources that these women need, organisations can promote a more enriching workplace environment by providing family-supportive resources for their women employees.

The Conservation of Resources theory posits that the state of resource gain and loss is important in predicting psychological distress (Holmgren et al., 2017). The earlier (gain) is linked to accruing more positive benefits, while the latter is the opposite. Based on this theory, women who have access to family-supportive supervision tend to acquire better job satisfaction due to the resources they gain from family-supportive supervision, which eventually cushions the negative effects of work-life imbalance. The existing positive linkage may be strengthened by greater spiritual levels among women professionals underlined by clearer meaning and the contributions they developed from such practice within these two life aspects. Since spirituality deals with meaning and developing a greater purpose, it helps women professionals gain additional resources based on the Conservation of Resources theory, enabling further accumulation of positive effects. As research on spirituality is lacking among Muslim women professionals at work, and the framework that combines family-supportive supervision is limited, this study contributes and signifies a better understanding of how Muslim women professionals may benefit further from both these formal and informal resources.

Research on the work-family interface has been rapidly growing for the past decades due to the prominent concern for work-life balance, dual-career relationships (Eby et al., 2005; Kumar & Chaturvedi, 2017), and the blurring of gender role issues (Greenhaus & Foley, 2007). Work environments can significantly affect an employee's work-life balance experience, with positive workplace environments linked to lower stressors and increased work satisfaction (Andreassi & Thompson, 2008; Thomas & Ganster, 1995). Job satisfaction is an important aspect of workplace outcomes, referring to how a work environment can satisfy employees' needs (Meier & Spector, 2015). Many women professionals find balancing between work and family challenging, especially with heightened demands and rapid competition in the current world of work. In response to this issue, this study examines the role of family-supportive supervision on Muslim women professionals' job satisfaction. It also tests the role of spirituality in moderating such a linkage and focuses on this aspect for two reasons. First, women professionals are known to be more vulnerable to the issues surrounding work-life balance (Noor, 2011; Noor & Zainuddin, 2011). Second, the actual examination of how spirituality influences Muslim women professionals is scarce on job satisfaction despite the abundance of research reported on this construct's positive effect on the well-being of individuals.

## ■ 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Women Professionals in Malaysia.

Women have made notable progress in the world of work. The visibility of high-achieving women in Malaysia has increased drastically compared to past statistics. In 1982, the rate of the women labour force participation were stagnating at 44.5% up until 2011 when the labour force participation rate for women improved from 47.9% to 54.3% in 2016 (Riyanti & Layali, 2019). In October 2023, the rate for Malaysian women who participated in the labour force was reported to be 56.4% (DOSM, 2023), illustrating how the numbers have significantly increased over the years. Literature suggests that when compared to their male counterparts, lower rates for women participating in the workforce may be due to their responsibilities as married women (İkcaracan, 2012; Nor & Said, 2016; Paul et al., 2015) and their roles in childcare (Ferrant et al., 2014; Samman et al., 2016). This is true in many communities, including among Malaysians, where the burden of housework and childcare is assumed as a 'good' wife's responsibilities, thus creating a heightened barrier to developing a good growth trajectory in the workforce (Salleh & Mansor, 2022; Abdullah et al., 2008; Noor & Zainuddin, 2011) with no exception for single women or single mothers likewise. Married women professionals have a higher vulnerability towards work-family conflict due to the exchange between work and family responsibilities which leads to negative consequences such as job dissatisfaction (Noor, 2011). A woman's experience in the workforce is said to be associated with the condition of the workplace environment which may bend or break them (Subramaniam et al., 2015). This is illustrated in a study by Kumar and Chaturvedi (2017) who found that a workplace environment with supervision support and its direction have a crucial role in retaining and promoting the satisfaction of women workers. Supervision styles that support women in striving for multiple commitments, such as family-supportive supervision, can enable greater work-life balance (Agha, 2017; Scandura & Lankau, 1997). Due to its fundamental approaches to appreciating women's multiple roles, family-supportive supervision helps women thrive at work through better syncing, integration, and flexibility in working around expectations from both domains.

### 2.2 Relationship between Family Supportive Supervision and Job Satisfaction.

Literature has established that various forms of organisational support are positively associated with job satisfaction and other positive organisational outcomes (Michel et al., 2011; Subramaniam et al., 2015; Hasan & Teng, 2017). Family-supportive supervision is a form of organisational support that can promote positive attitudinal work-related outcomes such as job satisfaction and turnover intentions (Thomas & Ganster, 1995), despite lacking in impactful individual and organisational outcomes (Hammer, 2011; Kelly et al., 2008). Previous studies have operationalised family-supportive supervision as a supervisor's understanding of their employee's or subordinates' family demands (Thomas & Ganster, 1995), which promotes a much more functional employee-supervisor relationship based on

empathy. It is suggested that employees who receive family-supportive supervision are more likely to shape better perceptions of overall organizational support (Hammer et al., 2011), thus improving satisfaction at work. This is in line with Iqbal and colleagues' (2020) study which highlights supervisor support as having a positive influence on job satisfaction. Similarly, evidence of a positive correlation between supervisor support and job satisfaction was also found in an academic sample (Charoensukmongkol et al., 2016). Based on the significant findings of previous research, this study aims to investigate the associations between family-supportive supervision and job satisfaction in the context of Muslim women professionals in Malaysia thus the first hypothesis is as follows:

**H1:** High levels of family-supportive supervision are associated with higher job satisfaction among Muslim women professionals in Malaysia.

### 2.3 Spirituality as a Moderator in the Relationship between Family Supportive Supervision and Job Satisfaction.

Spirituality refers to an individual's pursuit of searching for answers to existential questions about life, which may or may not include religious beliefs (Panzini et al., 2017). For Muslims, spirituality is often perceived as the presence of a relationship with God which defines an individual's sense of meaning, self self-worth, as well as their connectedness with other beings and nature (Nasr, 1987; Grine et al., 2015). The concept highlights how humans view life and find meaning in it leading to a richer, more satisfying life experience (Sawatzky et al., 2005), which may or may not be influenced by their faith. In a workplace setting, spirituality is not commonly perceived and considered as a personal aspect of an employee's work experience (Pawar, 2016). However, spirituality has been increasingly recognised as a crucial component in facilitating positive work environments (Ramesh & Sinnu, 2024) including improved employee emotional states (Ramesh & Sinnu, 2024; Lee et al., 2014), work productivity (Paul et al., 2015; Petchsawang & Duchon, 2012), and better organisational outcomes (Hassan et al., 2016; Piryaei & Zare, 2013). Empirical evidence has found positive links between spirituality and job satisfaction (Sony & Mekoth, 2019; Hassan et al., 2016; Van der Walt & De Klerk, 2014). Regardless, the direct effects of family-supportive supervision and spirituality are limited in the literature indicating a lack of consensus under such a link and limited practical research on this subject (Panzini et al., 2017). However, as family-supportive supervision helps women professionals perform better at work (Campo et al., 2021), it is assumed that a moderating factor may be able to further strengthen this relationship leading to positive work outcomes such as job satisfaction among our sample. Relying on its common use as a source of support, spirituality can act as a protection against adversity through spiritual coping strategies (Debnam et al., 2017). Its ability to buffer such negative effects signifies its moderating role between workplace environments and individual outcomes such as job satisfaction. Thus, spirituality is assumed to be a functional moderator between family-supportive supervision and job satisfaction in buffering the negative effects of work-life imbalance of Muslim women professionals. Therefore, the second hypothesis is below:

**H2:** Spirituality moderates the relationship between family-supportive supervision and job satisfaction of Muslim women professionals in Malaysia, in which the relationship is higher when presented at a high level.

### 2.4 Theoretical Framework

This study uses the Conservation of Resources theory as its underlying framework to examine the mechanisms of family-supportive supervision and its association with Muslim women professional's job satisfaction. The theory posits that humans are inclined to protect their acquired resources and gain new resources (Halbesleben et al., 2014). It also argues that the human self is motivated to use all available resources, including social support, in replenishing any losses caused by circumstances that can evoke a threatened or actual feeling of loss for valued resources (Holmgreen et al., 2017). In this study's context, workplace-supportive relationships such as family-supportive supervision can be seen as a social resource when dealing with work-family issues (Marcinkus et al., 2007) and job satisfaction (Iqbal et al., 2020). Essentially, resources are vital in determining how an individual appraises stressful situations which can help minimise the tendency to experience psychological distress. According to the Conservation of Resources theory, the state of a resource gain and loss is important in predicting psychological distress (Holmgreen et al., 2017), thus, based on this argument, family-supportive supervision and spirituality can both be assumed to be valued resources for Muslim women professionals who experience commitment imbalance or other form of resources loss, which in turn can cushion the levels of employee satisfaction (Sawatzky et al., 2005; Hassan et al., 2016). Thus, this concludes the relevance of using the Conservation of Resources theory in this study as well as the rationale of the proposed framework illustrated in Figure 1 below:

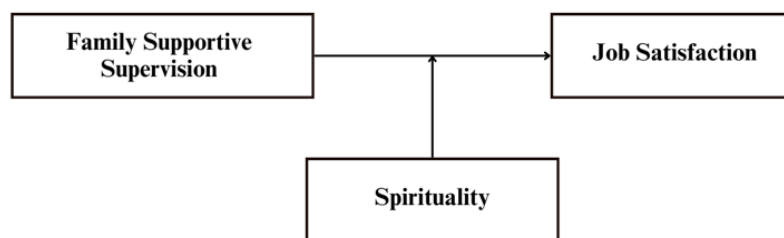


Figure 1 The framework of study.

### 3.0 METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Samples and Procedures

A quantitative approach was used where 154 Muslim women professionals in Malaysia participated in a self-administered survey via Qualtrics through a random sampling technique. Participants were recruited via advertisement posters distributed across various social media platforms containing a brief of this study as well as the link and QR code leading them to the online questionnaire. Participation were on a voluntary basis and participants were given the right to withdraw from the questionnaire at any point during the data collection period. Since the research objectives focus on Muslim women professionals, the participants only included Muslim women professionals in Malaysia to refine the data collected and to remove any external variables. The respondents' ages ranged from ages less than 20-year-olds to over 50-year-olds. The largest group of respondents belonged to ages 31 to 40 (37.7%) followed by 20 to 30-year-olds (36.4%), 41 to 50-year-olds (13.6%), above 50-year-olds (9.1%), and the smallest group belonged to the less than 20-year-olds (3.2%). The samples were represented mostly by married women (58.4%), followed by single (37%), divorced (3.2%), and widowed (1.3%) women. IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 28.0 and PROCESS MACRO Version 4.2 were used to test the hypotheses of this study.

#### 3.2 Measure and Data Analyses

**Family Supportive Supervision** was measured using the 3-item scale adapted from Clark (2001). Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. Sample items include “My supervisor listens when I talk about my family.” The Cronbach’s Alpha value for this subscale is at 0.86 indicating an acceptable level of reliability (Clark, 2001).

**Job Satisfaction** measurements used Copenhagen’s Psychosocial Questionnaire III (COPSOQ III) subscale consisting of 4 items answered in a 5-point Likert scale format ranging from 1 = Strongly Dissatisfied to 5 = Strongly Satisfied. This subscale asks participants to rate their levels of job satisfaction with questions such as “How pleased are you with the way your abilities are used?” This scale is internally reliable with a Cronbach’s Alpha value of 0.80 (Burr et al., 2019).

**Spirituality** levels were measured using the spirituality subscale under the Positive Mental Health Instrument (Vaingankar et al., 2011). It consists of 7 items with a 5-point Likert scale format ranging from 1 = Never to 5 = Always. Sample items of this subscale include “I find comfort in my religion or spiritual beliefs.” This subscale has a Cronbach’s Alpha value of 0.94 indicating high levels of reliability.

#### 3.3 Ethics and Risk Assessment

Involvement in this study presented no risks and participants' consent was obtained before any collection of data. This research has concealed or removed any identifiable data before analysis to ensure the anonymity of the participants.

### 4.0 RESULTS

#### 4.1 Descriptive and Correlation Results.

The skewness and kurtosis values found in Table 1 indicate no outliers within the datasets since all values for skewness and kurtosis are in between -2 and +2 and -7 and +7 respectively, illustrating a normally distributed data. The average mean for all variables is at high levels with 3.584 for family-supportive supervision, 3.815 for job satisfaction and 4.581 for spirituality. The correlation analysis reveals a positive correlation between family-supportive supervision with both job satisfaction ( $r = 0.502, p < 0.01$ ) and spirituality ( $r = 0.170, p < 0.05$ ) as well as job satisfaction with spirituality ( $r = 0.384, p < 0.05$ ).

**Table 1** Correlations and Descriptive Statistics (Skewness and Kurtosis)

	Mean	SD	FSS	JS	Skewness		Kurtosis	
					Statistics	Std.Error	Statistics	Std.Error
FSS	3.584	0.786	1	-	-.740	0.195	0.936	0.389
JS	3.815	0.772	0.502**	1	-1.255	0.195	2.393	0.389
Spirituality	4.581	0.687	0.170*	0.384*	-2.416	0.195	7.686	0.389

**Notes:** \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); \*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed); FSS = Family-Supportive Supervision; JS = Job Satisfaction.

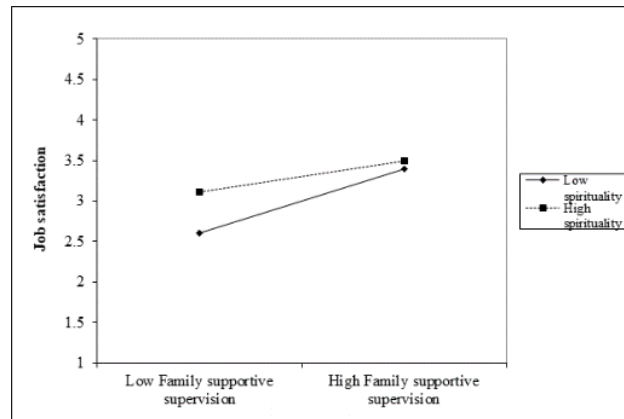
#### 4.2 Hypothesis Testing

Table 2 illustrates the moderating effects of spirituality in the relationship between family-supportive supervision and job satisfaction conducted through SPSS PROCESS MACRO. Model 1 is set for moderation results with a 95% confidence interval with 5000 bootstrapping samples. Results indicate that family-supportive supervision has a positive and direct effect on job satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.441, p < 0.001$ ). Thus, supporting Hypothesis 1. Spirituality also has a direct and positive influence on job satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.291, p < 0.001$ ). Interaction effects suggest that spirituality significantly moderates the relationship between family-supportive supervision and job satisfaction (interaction effect:  $-0.195, p = 0.025$ ), therefore, Hypothesis 2 is also accepted. Results suggest that higher-level relationships between family-supportive supervision and job satisfaction are expected when spirituality levels are high compared to low. The moderation plot is illustrated in Figure 2 below.

**Table 2** Direct and Moderating Effects Results for Spirituality in the Relationship between Family-Supportive Supervision and Job Satisfaction.

Constructs	R	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	SE	t	Sig.	95% BC	
							LLCI	ULCI
Outcome: Job Satisfaction	0.605	0.366	-	-	-	-	-	-
FSS	-	-	0.441***	0.065	6.808	0.000	0.313	0.569
Spirituality	-	-	0.291***	0.078	3.734	0.000	0.137	0.445
Interaction: FSS x Spirituality	-	-	-0.195*	0.086	-2.267	0.025	-0.365	-0.025

Notes: \*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.005, \*\*\*p<0.001; FSS = Family-Supportive Supervision.

**Figure 2** The Interactive Effects of Spirituality in the Relationship between Family-Supportive Supervision and Job Satisfaction.

## 5.0 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The findings of this study highlight family-supportive supervision as a valuable type of work support and provide evidence of its practical influence on women professional's job satisfaction. It also found evidence of positive associations in the relationship between family-supportive supervision and job satisfaction, suggesting that job satisfaction increases when family-supportive supervision is at high levels, consistent with empirical research that found similar results (Iqbal et al., 2020; Charoensukmongkol et al., 2016). These similarities suggest that family-supportive supervision is a reliable source of support which can influence the job satisfaction of Muslim women professionals who are vulnerable to the negative effects of work-life imbalance. When Muslim women find themselves struggling to juggle their work and life commitments, family-supportive supervision may be a valuable type of organisational support through its operationalisation of being understanding of and empathetic towards family responsibilities, thus increasing these women's job satisfaction (Michel et al., 2011; Subramaniam et al., 2015; Hasan & Teng, 2017).

The current research also contributes to the greater understanding of spirituality's role in further promoting the positive impacts of family-supportive supervision on Muslim women professionals' satisfaction at work. Aligned with previous research, spirituality was found to have positive links with job satisfaction (Hassan et al., 2016; Sony & Mekoth, 2019). Results also suggest that spirituality is a functional moderator in the relationship between family-supportive supervision and job satisfaction. This significantly indicates that spirituality plays a buffering role in the negative effects of work-life imbalance on Muslim women professionals in Malaysia. In a study by Grine and colleagues (2015), Muslim women employees expressed how their relationship with God and strong spiritual beliefs have sustained and motivated them to persevere against adversities that they face at work. This is supported by Debnam and colleagues (2017), who found that through spiritual coping strategies, spirituality may act as a protection for women professionals against adversities that they go through both at home and in their workplace. Since research on spirituality as a moderator in this relationship is lacking within this sample, the findings of this study add to the body of knowledge on spirituality among Muslim women professionals in Malaysia.

Finally, a limitation of this study is its sample population which only focused on the perspectives of women professionals. Hence, it is recommended to include the male perspective in future research to ensure a fair comparison between these populations as well as to investigate how family-supportive supervision can be beneficial for the male population. Since this study emphasises on Muslim women, it would also be interesting to include the perspectives of non-Muslims to investigate the influence of spirituality among different cultural and religious beliefs, especially for a multicultural and multifaith nation like Malaysia. Perhaps, these inclusions could offer significant insights on how cultural, religious, and gender differences influence Malaysians' work-life balance and its associations with family-supportive supervision, spirituality, and job satisfaction. Overall, this research hopes to instigate further studies regarding family-supportive supervision and how organisations can instil this behaviour to create a better work environment for their women employees.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION

Finding balance between work and life may be easier said than done especially for a woman who struggles to find harmony between striving at work and keeping her family in order. The progress that women have made in the world of work so far is astonishing, and to think that they can juggle between having a hectic work life and a demanding personal life is commendable. In response to the low labour participation rates for women in Malaysia, organisations should enforce the implementation of family-supportive policies through informal family support from supervisors to retain their women employees as well as to welcome more female employees into their organisations. As highlighted in this study, supervisors play a critical role in effectively promoting job satisfaction among their women employees, suggesting that the more family support they receive from their supervisors, the higher their perception of job satisfaction. Such benefits are also further strengthened under employee's high levels of spirituality. Therefore, it is not only important to cultivate a spiritual work environment but ensuring that family-supportive supervision exists in organisations is also crucial in supporting women professionals to achieve satisfaction at work, simultaneously helping to reduce the negative effects of her family demands, thus encouraging better work-life balance.

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### Conflicts of Interest

The author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper

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