

Does Belief in Supernatural Agents Moderate the Association Between Interpersonal Conflict at Work and Worker Well-Being?

JONG HYUN JUNG 
Department of Sociology
Sungkyunkwan University

GAYOUNG CHOI
Department of Sociology and Social Innovation
Convergence Program
Sungkyunkwan University

SHANNON ANG 
School of Social Sciences
Nanyang Technological University

This study examines how interpersonal conflict at work is associated with worker well-being in Singapore. More importantly, it assesses how this association is contingent upon belief in angelic intervention and belief in supernatural evil. Using data from the 2021 Work, Religion, and Health Survey (N = 508), the analyses show that interpersonal conflict at work is positively associated with anxiety and job burnout. In addition, belief in angelic intervention and belief in supernatural evil moderate the association. Specifically, the positive association between interpersonal conflict at work and anxiety is weaker for those who report the belief in angelic intervention. Similarly, higher levels of belief in supernatural evil reduce the positive association of interpersonal conflict at work with anxiety and job burnout. These findings indicate that belief in supernatural agents acts as a key personal resource in the workplace, buffering against the harmful effects of interpersonal conflict at work on worker well-being.

Keywords: workplace interpersonal conflict, JD-R model, belief in angelic intervention, belief in supernatural evil, worker well-being.

Interpersonal interactions play a pivotal part in pursuing the collective goals of work organizations (Ilies et al. 2011). Many interactions at work are supportive, but not all workers experience positive interactions with other people in the workplace. Experiences of poor work relationships are work stressors that lead to negative individual and organizational outcomes including psychological distress, depression, physical symptoms, lower organizational commitment, and increased counterproductive work behavior (Fox, Spector, and Miles 2001; Frone 2000; Glambek et al. 2014; Karasek 1979; Nixon et al. 2011; Penney and Spector 2005; Spector and Jex 1998). In this article, we focus on the association of interpersonal conflict at work with two important indicators of worker well-being: anxiety and job burnout. Anxiety refers to a mental disorder characterized by fear, hyperarousal, and excess worry that is unsettling and debilitating (Remes et al. 2016). It represents an important dimension of individual psychological outcomes that is

Correspondence should be addressed to Jong Hyun Jung, Department of Sociology, Sungkyunkwan University, 25-2 Sungkyunkwan-ro, Jongno-gu, Faculty Hall 40507, Seoul, South Korea. E-mail: sociocus75@gmail.com

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often linked with overall health (Celano et al. 2018). Job burnout is a critical aspect of organizational psychological outcomes, involving intense emotional exhaustion and cynicism in response to job strains (Demerouti, Mostert, and Bakker 2010).

In this study, we expect that individuals who experience conflictive relationships at work will tend to exhibit higher levels of anxiety and job burnout. We then elaborate on these basic associations by asking: Do religious beliefs modify the association of interpersonal conflict at work with anxiety and job burnout? We examine the role of two specific facets of religious beliefs—belief in angelic intervention and belief in supernatural evil—as potential moderators in the links between interpersonal conflict at work, anxiety, and job burnout. While belief in angelic intervention refers to belief in receiving help from angels in a time of need (Draper and Baker 2011; Jung 2022), belief in supernatural evil represents belief in the existence of the devil, demons, and hell (Ellison et al. 2021; Martinez 2013). Belief in supernatural agents such as angels and demons who engage the world is one of the most widespread beliefs across cultures (Boyer 2001). Although considerable research has demonstrated the importance of religion for health and well-being (see Koenig, King, and Carson 2012 for review), scholars have given these supernatural agent beliefs short shrift (see Jung, 2020, 2022 for an exception). To address this gap and round out our understanding of health implications of religious beliefs, we examine how belief in supernatural agents shapes the association between workplace interpersonal conflict and worker well-being. In this effort, we use data from the 2021 Work, Religion, and Health Survey collected in Singapore. As the data set has an extensive battery of questions regarding job conditions, religion, and health, it offers a unique opportunity to assess the complex interplay between interpersonal strife in the workplace, religion, and worker well-being. Hence, one of the main contributions of the study is to identify the conditions under which the fundamental link between interpersonal conflict at work and worker well-being is either reduced or amplified.

THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL BACKGROUND

Workplace Interpersonal Conflict and Worker Well-Being

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model provides a basis for understanding how interpersonal conflict at work is associated with worker well-being (Bakker and Demerouti 2007; Hu, Schaufeli, and Taris 2011; Nahrgang, Morgeson, and Hofmann 2011). This model divides work conditions into two general categories: job demands and resources. Job demands refer to negative job characteristics that require workers to expend psychological and physical efforts (Voydanoff 2005). By contrast, job resources represent positive job characteristics that mitigate job demands and stimulate personal growth (Demerouti et al. 2001). Researchers have employed this model to examine how job demands are related to negative mental health outcomes whereas job resources are associated with positive ones (for review, see Häusser et al. 2010). Interpersonal conflict appears to act as a workplace demand because it places the individual in a state of stress—and these, in turn, may undermine their well-being (Meier, Semmer, and Gross 2014; Taris, Kalimo, and Schaufeli 2002). In his formulation of the JD-C model, Karasek (1979:291) specifically pointed out interpersonal conflict as a work stressor, stating that job demands encompass “psychological stressors involved in accomplishing the work load, stressors related to unexpected tasks, and stressors of job-related personal conflict”.

Consistent with the literature (Schieman and Reid 2008:297), we define interpersonal conflict as “perceptions about exposure to negative forms of interaction that range from minor disagreements to more severe altercations”. As a work stressor, workplace interpersonal conflict may have deleterious consequences for anxiety and job burnout. For example, when antagonistic relationships with coworkers or supervisors occur, individuals may feel that the workplace is a dangerous place that poses a threat of harm. This sense of dangerousness of the workplace may be amplified

when they are victimized by aggressive behaviors such as bullying or social undermining. Given that the core feature of anxiety involves “a state of constant apprehension about future harm” (Grillon 2008:422), hostile work encounters may increase symptoms of anxiety. Moreover, the experience of interpersonal conflict at work may exacerbate the stresses of work and psychological demands, which in turn may hinder the performance of work roles (Jaramillo, Mulki, and Boles 2011). Hence, workplace interpersonal conflict may result in a reduction in one’s feelings of successful achievement and competence in one’s work. In addition, individuals who are exposed to negative interpersonal experiences at work may be emotionally extended and drained as they are dealing with the hostile work encounters (Giebels and Janssen 2005). Considering that some of the primary defining aspects of job burnout include emotional exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment (Leiter and Maslach 1988), interpersonal conflict at work may lead to job burnout. The foregoing discussions form a basis for the following hypotheses:

H1: Interpersonal conflict at work will be positively associated with anxiety.

H2: Interpersonal conflict at work will be positively associated with job burnout.

The Moderating Role of Belief in Supernatural Agents

Although the basic association between interpersonal conflict at work and worker well-being is well established, we seek to evaluate how supernatural agent beliefs moderate that association. Although the core propositions of the JD-R model focus on the effects of work conditions on well-being, scholars have extended the model by assessing how job resources buffer the consequences of job demands (Bakker and Demerouti 2017; Glavin and Schieman 2012). This extension is inspired by the buffering hypothesis in stress research whereby the deleterious health effects of stressors are attenuated among those who possess coping resources to deal with them (Pearlin 1989; Wheaton 1985). In line with this theoretical perspective, research has documented that a diverse set of job qualities as well as personal traits function as a protective resource that weaken the effects of job stressor on worker well-being. For example, social support at work mitigates the positive association between perceived underpayment and job dissatisfaction (Narisada and Schieman 2022). In addition, self-efficacy moderates the association between exposure to bullying behaviors and psychological health complaints (Mikkelsen and Einarsen 2002). However, we know relatively little about the ways that religiosity acts as a protective buffer against job strain.

Among various dimensions of religiosity, we focus on belief in angelic intervention and belief in supernatural evil as a moderator. These beliefs are still powerful in many contemporary religions, representing a critical element of religious life. For example, research shows that belief in angels and their intervention is prevalent across the boundaries of religion in the United States (Draper and Baker 2011). In addition, belief in supernatural evil persists throughout human history and exists in many contemporary religions (Norenzayan and Shariff 2008). Moreover, recent scholarly work has begun to link this belief with a variety of outcomes in life, including greater religious commitment (Martinez 2013), stronger beliefs in the wrongfulness of moral behaviors such as pornography (Desmond, Clark, and Bader 2023), more tolerant attitudes toward capital punishment (Baker and Booth 2016), higher levels of approval of parenting practices such as corporal punishment (Martinez et al. 2018), greater support for gun policy (Ellison et al. 2021), more restrictive views of immigration (Martinez, Tom, and Baker 2022), and stronger disapproval of non-heterosexual, nonmarital sex (Baker, Molle, and Bader 2020). More importantly for the purpose of the current study, previous scholarship also provides evidence that certain aspects of supernatural evil are associated with health and well-being. For instance, belief in devil and demons is positively associated with general anxiety and paranoia (Jung 2020) and negatively associated with mental health (Nie and Olson 2016). Further, hell beliefs are inversely associated with happiness and life satisfaction cross-nationally (Shariff and Aknin 2014). Taken together, the current study seeks to extend these studies by evaluating the *moderating* role of belief in angelic

intervention and supernatural evil in the link between interpersonal conflict at work and worker well-being.

Belief in angels and their interventions in the material world may mitigate the deleterious association between workplace interpersonal conflict and worker well-being. Believing that one received help from angels in a time of need may be considered as a type of religious social support (Jung 2022). In stress research, social support has been one of the most important coping resources people rely on when dealing with negative life experiences (Thoits 1995; Turner and Turner 2013). Although stressors tend to erode the person's self-concept, social support may help the stressed person to replenish and maintain positive self-feelings (Ross 1991). Moreover, when individuals receive social support from others, they may redefine their stressful situations as less threatening, which may foster their perceived ability to overcome the situations. In line with this view, a large body of work provides empirical evidence that social support from significant others lessens the pernicious effects of stress on mental health (Cohen 2004; Donnelly, Robinson, and Umberson 2018; Zhang et al. 2015). More relevant to the study, research has shown that work-based social support weakens the harmful effects of job stress on worker well-being (Ilies et al. 2011; Terry, Nielsen, and Perchard 1993). Although social support provided by angels may not be the same thing as interpersonal social support, it nevertheless seems plausible to argue that the beneficial effects of this angelic belief may go a long way toward counterbalancing the problems associated with interpersonal conflict at work. As the belief that one received support from angels may provide workers with respect, dignity and esteem, it may serve as a buffer against the consequences of workplace interpersonal conflict.

H3: The positive association between interpersonal conflict at work and anxiety will be reduced for individuals who report a belief in angelic intervention.

H4: The positive association between interpersonal conflict at work and burnout will be reduced for individuals who report a belief in angelic intervention.

How might belief in supernatural evil moderate the association between workplace interpersonal conflict and worker well-being? We articulate two competing views on the moderating role of belief in supernatural evil. To begin with, we expect that belief in supernatural evil may attenuate the detrimental association between interpersonal conflict at work and worker well-being. Individuals who believe in supernatural evil tend to adopt a dualistic worldview whereby there is an ongoing cosmic battle between good and evil (Martinez, Tom, and Baker 2022). In that worldview, evil forces aim to frustrate the forces of good and constantly work toward the detriment of people, especially the faithful. Hence, believers in supernatural evil may see the world as filled with not only the normal dangers of life, but also antagonistic supernatural threat (Martinez 2013). The idea that the world is suffused with supernatural adversaries actively seeking to work against humanity may have important implications for the current study because it may normalize individuals' negative life experiences. To the extent that individuals view workplace interpersonal conflict as common and typical of social life, its harmful effects may be mitigated. Also, as they have been exposed to past stressors perceived to be caused by evil entities, they may develop various coping strategies that help them better deal with potential harms (Kok et al. 2021; Seery, Holman, and Silver 2010). These coping strategies may be utilized to protect them against the negative effects of interpersonal conflict at work.

Moreover, belief in supernatural evil may function as a meaning system within which people interpret their stressors and decide what can be done to cope with them (Park 2005). When faced with a stressful event such as antagonistic interpersonal relationship at work, people often want to make sense of the event to deal with it (Ray et al. 2015). Supernatural evil beliefs can play a coping role by offering a framework for understanding the negative event (Wilt, Tongeren, and Exline 2023). Attributions of workplace interpersonal conflict to supernatural evil forces may help people to better explain the event, especially when the conflictive social relationship is too terrible

to be attributed to humans alone. Such demonic attributions may be particularly relevant for those who are highly invested in religion because it may support their broader religious worldviews that affirm the existence of evil forces (Routledge, Abeyta, and Roylance 2016). This in turn may provide a sense of coherence, connect them to larger narratives of religious faith, and promote the belief that one is part of a purposeful universe, all of which may contribute to better adjustment to the event. In addition, the negative event attributions to evil forces may inspire meaningful and purposeful actions to combat evil (Wilt, Tongeren, and Exline 2023). Taken together, supernatural evil beliefs provide a coping framework for people to make sense of workplace interpersonal conflict and take appropriate actions to deal with it, which may mitigate its harmful effects on worker well-being.

- H5a: The positive association between interpersonal conflict at work and anxiety will be reduced for individuals who report higher levels of belief in supernatural evil.
- H6a: The positive association between interpersonal conflict at work and burnout will be reduced for individuals who report higher levels of belief in supernatural evil.

At the same time, belief in supernatural evil may amplify the deleterious association between interpersonal conflict at work and worker well-being instead. Individuals who believe in supernatural evil may be vigilant and fearful as they engage in spiritual warfare against the forces of evil. In particular, they may consider antagonistic interpersonal relationship at work as a manifestation of evil forces and ongoing battles in a spiritual war. If coworkers or supervisors with whom one has a conflictive social relationship are animated by evil, they may pose an *unlimited* threat to the one who is stressed—these challenges may tax the person's resources and undermine their capacity to deal with workplace interpersonal conflict because they need to redouble their efforts to protect themselves against not only the coworkers or supervisors but also supernatural antagonists driving them. Moreover, demonic attributions may lead to more hostility and aggression toward the coworkers/supervisors who are involved in the conflict because they are perceived to be agents of active evil forces (Pargament et al., 1998, 2007; Wong et al. 2019). Such demonization of others may end up escalating the conflict, which in turn may intensify its detrimental effects. This argument is supported by research showing that divorced individuals who believe that their ex-spouse is under demonic influence tend to report greater psychological maladjustment following divorce (Krumrei, Mahoney, and Pargament 2011). By extension, then, higher levels of belief in supernatural evil may exacerbate the consequences of interpersonal conflict at work.

- H5b: The positive association between interpersonal conflict at work and anxiety will be amplified for individuals who report higher levels of belief in supernatural evil.
- H6b: The positive association between interpersonal conflict at work and burnout will be amplified for individuals who report higher levels of belief in supernatural evil.

The Singaporean Context

We evaluate the hypotheses outlined above in the context of Singapore for two reasons. First, Singapore is a country with high levels of religious diversity (Woods 2018). According to the 2020 Census, the Singapore population consists of 31.1 percent Buddhists, 20 percent religious nones, 18.9 percent Christians, 15.6 percent Muslims, 8.8 percent Taoists, and 5 percent Hindus (Sing-Stat 2020). As Western and Eastern religious traditions co-exist in Singapore, it is an interesting setting for examining the moderating role of belief in supernatural agents that is distinguishable from the Western, Christian-majority contexts. Second, supernatural beliefs are widespread and common among Singaporeans. The 2018 International Social Survey Program suggests that 76.8

percent of the respondents in Singapore hold beliefs in hell whereas 69.8 percent believe in religious miracles. Another nationwide survey of 3128 Singaporeans shows that between 60 and 70 percent of Christians and Muslims believe in angels (Mathew, Mohammad, and Teo 2014). In addition, slightly less than two-thirds of Protestants and Muslims and half of Catholics believe in the existence of Satan. Although skeptical of the concept of angels or Satan, 48.5 percent of Buddhists and 45.2 percent of Taoists believe that there are ghosts and about half of them accept that there are spirits. Even among those who do not claim any religious affiliation, 41.8 percent hold onto some form of supernatural beliefs. Considering that beliefs in supernatural agents are strong in Singapore, we evaluate whether they play a significant role in shaping the association between workplace interpersonal conflict and worker well-being.

DATA AND METHODS

Study Participants

To address the hypotheses, the current study analyzes data from the 2021 Work, Religion, and Health Survey (WRH). The WRH is a national study of the Singapore labor force. Data were collected by the survey firm Techsumption from September 2021 to April 2022 to study the effects of religion, job demands, and job resources on workers' well-being. The sample selection started with a randomized search executed with addresses purchased from Singapore Statistics. Field surveyors visited the residences to survey the participants with an average time taken of 40 minutes per survey. To be eligible, individuals had to be (1) aged 20 years or older; (2) in the paid labor force; (3) Singaporean or Singapore Permanent Resident; and (4) employed full time. Participants had to be sufficiently fluent in English or Mandarin to complete the survey. The final full sample was 508 workers. Institutional ethical approval to conduct this study was granted by the Institutional Review Board at Nanyang Technological University (IRB-2021-02-052). In addition, informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study. We use multiple imputation techniques in Stata to deal with item nonresponse. The following multivariate analyses are based on twenty imputed data sets, and the final analytical sample consists of 508 cases. In addition, the current analysis does not employ weights because the analytic models in the study include most of the variables (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity, marital status, education) on which individuals may be under- or oversampled (Winship and Mare 1992).

Focal Measures

Anxiety

One of the dependent variables in the study is anxiety. It was measured with a five-item mean index based on the question asking, "Please indicate the frequency with which you experienced the following symptoms of anxiety in the last month". The five items include (1) "how often have you felt nervous and stressed," (2) "how often have you been bothered by minor health problems such as headaches, insomnia, or stomach upsets," (3) "how often have you had trouble falling asleep when you go to bed?" (4) "how often have you awakened before you wanted to and had trouble falling back asleep," and (5) "how often have you had trouble sleeping to the point that it affected your performance on and off the job?" The response options range from 1 = "never" to 5 = "very often". The Cronbach's alpha for this construct is .94.

Job Burnout

The other dependent variable is job burnout. It was measured with a 10-item mean index that addresses the question asking, "When you think about your work overall, how often do you feel the following?" The 10 items include (1) "tired," (2) "disappointed with people," (3) "hopeless,"

(4) “trapped,” (5) “helpless,” (6) “depressed,” (7) “physically weak/sickly,” (8) “worthless/like a failure,” (9) “difficulties sleeping,” and (10) “I’ve had it”. The response categories range from 1 = “never” to 7 = “always”. The Cronbach’s alpha for this index is .96.

Interpersonal Conflict at Work

Interpersonal conflict at work was measured with an index composed of the mean value from the following eight items: “In the past 30 days, how often have you experienced the following instances?” (1) “someone treated you unfairly,” (2) “someone blamed or criticized you for something that wasn’t your fault,” (3) “someone did not do the work that needed to be done or did it in a sloppy or incompetent way,” (4) “someone got annoyed or angry with you,” (5) “someone gossiped or talked about you behind your back,” (6) “someone teased or nagged you,” (7) “someone gave you unclear directions about work you needed to do,” and (8) “someone made too many demands on you”. The response categories for each item range from 1 = “never” to 4 = “frequently”. The Cronbach’s alpha for this index is .96.

Belief in Angelic Intervention

One item asks respondents the extent to which they agree or disagree with the following statement: “An angel has directly helped me in a time of need”. Response categories range from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”. Roughly 8 percent of respondents “strongly disagree” and 5 percent “somewhat disagree” that they received direct help from an angel in a time of need, while 34 percent “neither agree nor disagree,” 52 percent “agree,” and 1 percent “strongly agree”. Hence, responses are skewed toward the “agree” side of this continuum, which indicates the tendency of Singaporean workers to believe that they received help from angels. To ameliorate concerns about data sparseness (e.g., too few cases for “somewhat disagree” and “strongly disagree”) and focus on persons who are certain about their beliefs about angelic intervention, we recoded the variable into a binary one (1 = “somewhat agree/strongly agree” and 0 = “others”) and used them in the analyses.

Belief in Supernatural Evil

Following the prior literature (Martinez 2013), we used three questions that asked the respondents their level of belief in the devil/Satan, Hell and demons. For each item, an item asks: “In your opinion, does each of the following exist?” The response options are 1 = “absolutely not,” 2 = “probably not,” 3 = “probably,” and 4 = “absolutely”. The responses are averaged to create an index, where higher scores represent a stronger belief in the existence of supernatural evil (Cronbach’s alpha = .95).

Control Measures

The current study controls for several variables that previous studies found to be related to focal measures (Frone 2000; Spector and Jex 1998). These controls include age (in years), gender (1 = “female,” 0 = “male”), race/ethnicity (1 = “Chinese,” and 0 = “others”), marital status (1 = “married (includes being separated from the spouse due to one’s spouse being hospitalized, living in an institution, or living in another area for business reasons or to take care of others),” and 0 = “others”), educational attainment (1 = “no formal education” to 6 = “university and above”), and monthly household income (1 = “less than S\$500” to 7 = “S\$5000 and above”).

In addition to demographic controls, job characteristics such as job sector, occupation, job pressure, and job authority are associated with interpersonal conflict at work and worker well-being (Schieman and Reid 2008). Therefore, the current study adjusts for these job characteristics. For job sector, respondents were asked about the type of employment. Response options include “private for-profit company,” “nonprofit or charitable organizations,” “government/publicly owned firms,” and “self-employed”. For the sake of parsimoniousness of the models, we dichotomize the variable (1 = “private for-profit company” and 0 = “others”) and use it in

the analysis. In terms of occupations, an item asks: “What kind of work do you do? That is, what is your occupation?” Based on the open-ended information provided, we coded responses into eight main categories in line with the 2020 Singapore Standard Occupational Classification codes. These codes include: professional (professional specialty occupations), managerial (legislators, senior officials, and managerial occupations), technical (associate professionals and technicians), clerical (clerical support workers), service (service and sales workers), craft (craftsman and related trade workers), machine (plant and machine operators and assemblers), and labor (cleaners, laborers, and related workers). We use professional occupation as the reference category in our regression analyses.

Regarding job pressure, three items assess job pressure: (1) “How often did you feel overwhelmed by how much you had to do at work?” (2) “How often did the demands of your job exceed the time you have to do the work?” and (3) “How often did you have to work on too many tasks at the same time?” Responses range from 1 = “never” to 5 = “very often.” We averaged the items to create the job pressure index (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .89$). Job authority was measured using three items: (1) “Do you influence or set the rate of pay received by others?” (2) “Do you have the authority to hire or fire others?” and (3) “Do you supervise or manage anyone as part of your job?” We coded “yes” responses as (1) and “no” responses as (0). We averaged these responses to create the job authority index (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .65$).

Finally, the current study adjusts for religious involvement to ensure that our focal associations are not confounded with overall religiosity. Considering that religiosity can be divided into three dimensions—belonging, behaving, and believing (Olson and Warber 2008), the current study controls for religious affiliation (i.e., belonging), religious attendance, as well as private prayer (i.e., behaving) in order to identify the net moderating effects of belief in supernatural agents (i.e., believing). Religious affiliation was originally measured as categorical (Buddhism/Taoism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Islam, Protestantism, Other religion, and No religion). We use No religion as a reference category. Religious attendance was measured based on an item asking, “How often do you attend religious services at a place of worship?” Response categories range from 1 = “never” to 8 = “several times a week or more”. Regarding private prayer, study participants were asked about their private prayer via the following item: “About how often do you spend time alone praying outside of religious services?” Response options range from 1 = “never” to 6 = “several times a day”.

Analytical Strategy

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the total sample. Table 2 shows bivariate correlations among focal variables (e.g., independent and dependent variables) in the study. Following this, we present results from the OLS regression models in Table 3. Model 1 in Table 3 regresses anxiety on interpersonal conflict at work, belief in angelic intervention, belief in supernatural evil, and demographic controls. Model 2 includes work conditions and religious measures to examine whether the association between interpersonal conflict at work and anxiety is robust to controls related to work and religion. Models 3 and 4 include an interaction term between interpersonal conflict at work and belief in angelic intervention (Model 3) and belief in supernatural evil (Model 4) to evaluate how the association between interpersonal conflict at work and anxiety is contingent upon each of these beliefs. We repeat these processes for job burnout in Table 4.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows that the mean scores for anxiety and job burnout are 1.63 and 2.38 on a 1–5 and 1–7 scale respectively, which are relatively low. Scores on interpersonal conflict at work are also relatively low, with a mean of 1.38 on a 1–4 scale. Approximately 53 percent of the sample

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for all study variables ($N = 508$)

Variables	Mean or %	SD	Range
<i>Focal variables</i>			
Anxiety	1.63	0.76	1–5
Job burnout	2.38	0.97	1–7
Interpersonal conflict at work	1.38	0.59	1–4
Belief in angelic intervention	52.90%	–	0–1
Belief in supernatural evil	3.28	0.82	1–4
<i>Control variables</i>			
Age	42.79	11.20	22–77
Female	49.80%	–	0–1
Chinese	62.40%	–	0–1
Married	60.11%	–	0–1
Education	4.75	1.27	1–6
Monthly household income	5.08	1.17	1–7
For-profit private	86.16%	–	0–1
Professional	28.01%	–	0–1
Managerial	30.37%	–	0–1
Technician	19.33%	–	0–1
Clerical	5.92%	–	0–1
Service	7.70%	–	0–1
Craftsman	2.17%	–	0–1
Machine	2.56%	–	0–1
Laborer	3.94%	–	0–1
Job pressure	2.79	1.00	1–5
Job authority	0.17	0.27	0–1
Buddhism/Taoism	32.48%	–	0–1
Catholicism	7.28%	–	0–1
Hinduism	16.14%	–	0–1
Islam	17.52%	–	0–1
Protestantism	5.90%	–	0–1
Other religion	4.92%	–	0–1
No religion	15.75%	–	0–1
Religious attendance	3.54	2.31	1–8
Private prayer	2.61	1.51	1–6

Note: Standard deviations for binary variables are excluded.

believe that they received help from angels in a time of need whereas the mean score for belief in supernatural evil is 3.28 on a 1–4 scale, which is relatively high. The average respondent is about 43 years old, and almost half of the sample are females. Approximately 60 percent of the sample are married, while nearly two-thirds of the sample are Chinese (62.4 percent). With regard to education and income, an average respondent has an educational attainment slightly less than “Junior College (JC)/Polytechnic” with a household income between “S\$3000 and S\$3999” per month. Almost 86 percent of the sample work for a for-profit private organization. The mean scores for job pressure and job authority are 2.79 and .17 on a 1–5 and 0–1 scale, respectively. On average, the respondents attend religious services between “once or twice a year” and “several times a year” whereas they engage in private prayer between “only on certain occasions” and “once a week or less”. Finally, the sample has a substantial representation of Buddhists/Taoists (32.48 percent) and smaller representations of Muslims (17.52 percent), Hindus (16.14 percent),

Table 2: Bivariate correlations for focal measures and religious controls

	Anxiety	Job burnout	Interpersonal conflict at work	Belief in angelic intervention	Belief in supernatural evil
Anxiety	—				
Job burnout	0.44***	—			
Interpersonal conflict at work	0.24***	0.25***	—		
Belief in angelic intervention	-0.01	0.09	-0.05	—	
Belief in supernatural evil	0.03	0.02	-0.04	0.22***	—

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 3: OLS regression of anxiety on interpersonal conflict at work, belief in angelic intervention, belief in supernatural evil, and interactions ($N = 508$)

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Focal variables</i>				
Interpersonal conflict at work (A)	0.29 (0.06)***	0.24 (0.06)***	0.38 (0.08)***	0.23 (0.06)***
Belief in angelic intervention (B)	0.01 (0.08)	0.01 (0.09)	0.00 (0.09)	0.01 (0.09)
Belief in supernatural evil (C)	0.05 (0.04)	0.04 (0.05)	0.04 (0.05)	0.04 (0.05)
<i>Interactions</i>				
A * B	–	–	–0.29 (0.13)*	–
A * C	–	–	–	–0.14 (0.08) ⁺
<i>Control variables</i>				
Age	–0.01 (0.00)	–0.00 (0.00)	–0.00 (0.00)	–0.00 (0.00)
Female	0.07 (0.07)	0.09 (0.07)	0.09 (0.07)	0.10 (0.07)
Chinese	0.13 (0.07) ⁺	–0.08 (0.16)	–0.10 (0.17)	–0.08 (0.16)
Married	0.13 (0.07) ⁺	0.12 (0.07) ⁺	0.12 (0.07)	0.12 (0.07) ⁺
Education	–0.00 (0.03)	–0.03 (0.04)	–0.03 (0.04)	–0.03 (0.04)
Monthly household income	0.00 (0.03)	–0.01 (0.04)	–0.01 (0.04)	–0.01 (0.04)
For-profit private		–0.01 (0.10)	0.00 (0.10)	0.01 (0.10)
Managerial ^a		0.08 (0.09)	0.09 (0.09)	0.08 (0.09)
Technician ^a		–0.13 (0.10)	–0.13 (0.10)	–0.13 (0.10)
Clerical ^a		–0.09 (0.15)	–0.08 (0.15)	–0.11 (0.15)
Service ^a		–0.08 (0.15)	–0.08 (0.15)	–0.09 (0.15)
Craftsman ^a		–0.11 (0.23)	–0.09 (0.24)	–0.12 (0.23)
Machine ^a		0.25 (0.23)	0.23 (0.23)	0.23 (0.23)
Laborer ^a		–0.10 (0.20)	–0.08 (0.20)	–0.12 (0.20)
Job pressure		0.13 (0.03)***	0.13 (0.03)***	0.13 (0.03)***
Job authority		–0.07 (0.13)	–0.07 (0.13)	–0.07 (0.13)
Buddhism/Taoism ^b		0.05 (0.11)	0.07 (0.11)	0.07 (0.11)
Catholicism ^b		–0.05 (0.16)	–0.04 (0.16)	–0.04 (0.16)
Hinduism ^b		–0.25 (0.21)	–0.25 (0.21)	–0.24 (0.21)
Islam ^b		–0.28 (0.22)	–0.28 (0.22)	–0.28 (0.22)
Protestantism ^b		0.02 (0.18)	0.05 (0.18)	0.03 (0.18)
Other religion ^b		0.16 (0.17)	0.17 (0.17)	0.17 (0.17)
Religious attendance		0.01 (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)
Private prayer		0.03 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)
Constant	1.65 (0.23)***	1.60 (0.35)***	1.62 (0.35)***	1.62 (0.35)***
Adjusted R^2	.06	.08	.09	.09

Note: Unstandardized coefficients are presented with standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$;

⁺ $p < .10$.

^aCompared with professional.

^bCompared with no religion.

Roman Catholics (7.28 percent), Protestants (5.9 percent), Other religionists (4.92 percent), and religious nones (15.75 percent).

Table 2 displays bivariate correlations for anxiety, job burnout, and key independent variables (e.g., interpersonal conflict at work, belief in angelic intervention, and belief in supernatural evil). Interpersonal conflict at work exhibit a positive correlation with both anxiety ($r = .24$; $p < .001$) and job burnout ($r = .25$; $p < .001$), which offer partial support to H1 and H2. Neither belief

Table 4: OLS regression of job burnout on interpersonal conflict at work, belief in angelic intervention, belief in supernatural evil, and interactions ($N = 508$)

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Focal variables</i>				
Interpersonal conflict at work (A)	0.41 (0.07)***	0.37 (0.07)***	0.46 (0.10)***	0.35 (0.07)***
Belief in angelic intervention (B)	0.07 (0.10)	0.11 (0.10)	0.10 (0.12)	0.10 (0.10)
Belief in supernatural evil (C)	0.03 (0.06)	0.03 (0.07)	0.03 (0.07)	0.04 (0.07)
<i>Interactions</i>				
A * B	–	–	–0.20 (0.16)	–
A * C	–	–	–	–0.23 (0.10)*
<i>Control variables</i>				
Age	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Female	0.04 (0.08)	0.06 (0.09)	0.06 (0.09)	0.07 (0.09)
Chinese	–0.02 (0.09)	0.06 (0.21)	0.04 (0.21)	0.05 (0.21)
Married	0.12 (0.09)	0.10 (0.09)	0.09 (0.09)	0.09 (0.09)
Education	–0.01 (0.04)	–0.02 (0.05)	–0.02 (0.05)	–0.03 (0.05)
Monthly household income	–0.02 (0.04)	–0.01 (0.05)	–0.01 (0.05)	–0.01 (0.05)
For-profit private		0.00 (0.13)	0.01 (0.13)	0.03 (0.13)
Managerial ^a		–0.11 (0.11)	–0.10 (0.11)	–0.11 (0.11)
Technician ^a		–0.14 (0.13)	–0.14 (0.13)	–0.14 (0.13)
Clerical ^a		–0.09 (0.20)	–0.09 (0.20)	–0.14 (0.19)
Service ^a		0.04 (0.19)	0.04 (0.19)	0.02 (0.19)
Craftsman ^a		–0.33 (0.30)	–0.32 (0.30)	–0.34 (0.30)
Machine ^a		0.39 (0.29)	0.39 (0.29)	0.37 (0.29)
Laborer ^a		0.12 (0.26)	0.13 (0.26)	0.09 (0.25)
Job pressure		0.16 (0.04)**	0.16 (0.04)***	0.16 (0.04)***
Job authority		0.17 (0.16)	0.17 (0.16)	0.17 (0.16)
Buddhism/Taoism ^b		–0.02 (0.15)	–0.01 (0.15)	0.00 (0.15)
Catholicism ^b		–0.02 (0.21)	–0.02 (0.21)	–0.01 (0.21)
Hinduism ^b		0.12 (0.27)	0.12 (0.27)	0.13 (0.27)
Islam ^b		0.13 (0.28)	0.13 (0.28)	0.14 (0.28)
Protestantism ^b		0.19 (0.24)	0.21 (0.24)	0.21 (0.23)
Other religion ^b		0.00 (0.22)	0.01 (0.22)	0.02 (0.22)
Religious attendance		–0.04 (0.03)	–0.04 (0.03)	–0.04 (0.03)
Private prayer		–0.01 (0.04)	–0.01 (0.04)	–0.01 (0.04)
Constant	2.19 (0.30)***	1.80 (0.45)***	1.81 (0.45)***	1.83 (0.45)***
Adjusted R^2	.06	.07	.07	.08

Note: Unstandardized coefficients are presented with standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < .05$;

** $p < .01$;

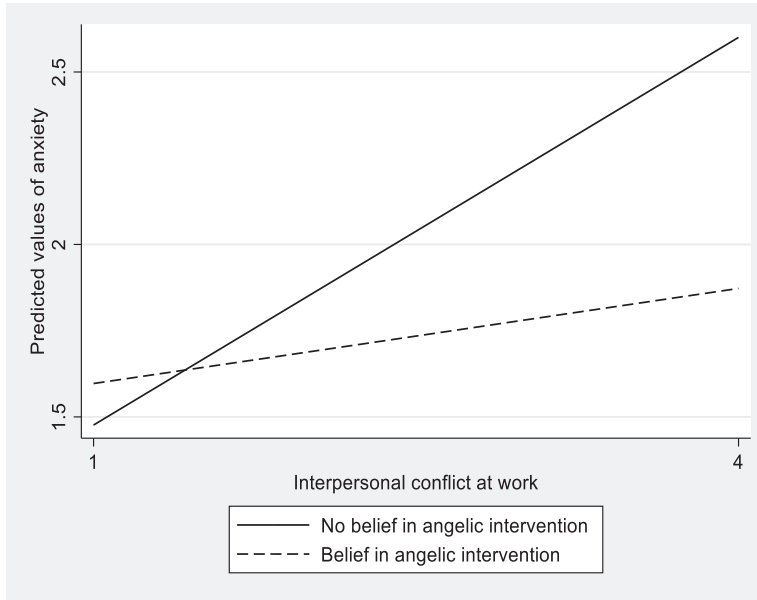
*** $p < .001$; $p < .10$.

^a Compared with professional.

^b Compared with no religion.

in angelic intervention nor belief in supernatural evil is associated with the worker well-being measures. Moreover, these beliefs do not show a significant correlation with interpersonal conflict at work. Finally, belief in angelic intervention is positively correlated with belief in supernatural evil ($r = .22$; $p < .001$). Taken together, these observations demonstrate that interpersonal conflict at work has a weak, positive association with anxiety and burnout.

Figure 1
The association between interpersonal conflict at work and anxiety by belief in angelic intervention

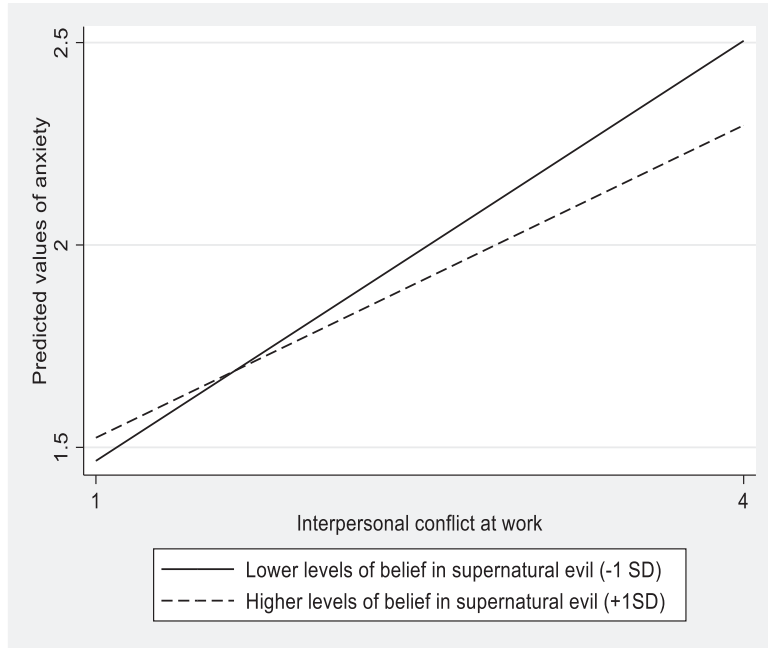


Note: The lines represent predicted values of anxiety while statistically controlling for all other variables in Model 3 of Table 3.

Model 1 of Table 3 demonstrates that interpersonal conflict at work is positively associated with anxiety ($b = .29; p < .001$), net of demographic controls. However, neither belief in angelic intervention nor supernatural evil is associated with anxiety. Model 2 shows that interpersonal conflict at work continue to have a positive association with anxiety ($b = .24; p < .001$), adjusting for work characteristics and religious involvement. These observations lend support to H1. Yet, the inclusion of work and religious measures reduces the magnitude of the association between interpersonal conflict at work and anxiety, indicating that these variables may partially explain the link between interpersonal conflict at work and anxiety. Although peripheral to focal associations, the married exhibit marginally higher levels of anxiety than their nonmarried counterparts. In addition, job pressure is positively associated with anxiety.

Model 3 reveals that the interaction term between interpersonal conflict at work and belief in angelic intervention has a significant and negative coefficient ($b = -.29; p < .05$). Figure 1 graphically shows this interaction effect: The positive association between interpersonal conflict at work and anxiety is weakened among individuals who report the belief in angelic intervention compared to individuals who do not report the belief in angelic intervention. These observations are consistent with H3, suggesting that belief in angelic intervention acts as a buffer against the harmful effects of interpersonal conflict at work on anxiety. Similarly, Model 4 shows that the coefficient for the interaction term between interpersonal conflict at work and belief in supernatural evil is marginally significant and negative ($b = -.13; p < .10$). Figure 2 provides a graphic illustration of this contingent relationship: The positive association between interpersonal conflict at work and anxiety is attenuated among individuals who exhibit higher levels of belief in supernatural evil (e.g., one standard deviation above the mean) compared to individuals who exhibit lower levels of belief in supernatural evil (e.g., one standard deviation below the mean). Taken together, these findings suggest that higher levels of belief in supernatural evil serves as a buffer, mitigating

Figure 2
The association between interpersonal conflict at work and anxiety by levels of belief in supernatural evil



Note: The lines represent predicted values of anxiety while statistically controlling for all other variables in Model 4 of Table 3.

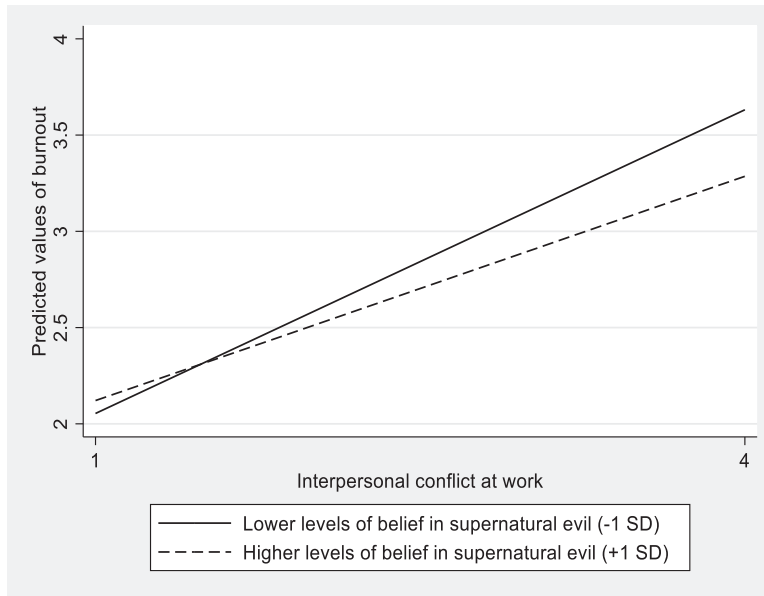
the deleterious effects of interpersonal conflict at work on anxiety. Hence, H5a receives empirical support, not H5b.

Model 1 of Table 4 shows that interpersonal conflict at work is positively associated with job burnout ($b = .41$; $p < .001$), adjusting for demographic controls. However, neither belief in angelic intervention nor supernatural evil is associated with job burnout. Model 2 demonstrates that interpersonal conflict at work continue to have a positive association with burnout ($b = .37$; $p < .001$), net of work characteristics and religious involvement. Therefore, H2 garners empirical support. Yet, the inclusion of measures of work and religion diminishes the magnitude of the association between interpersonal conflict at work and job burnout, suggesting that these variables may partially account for the link between interpersonal conflict at work and job burnout. Although not central to our focal associations, job pressure is positively associated with job burnout.

Model 3 demonstrates that the coefficient of the interaction term between interpersonal conflict at work and belief in angelic intervention is not significant, meaning that belief in angelic intervention does not moderate the association between interpersonal conflict at work and job burnout. Therefore, H4 does not receive empirical support. By contrast, Model 4 shows that the coefficient for the interaction term between interpersonal conflict at work and belief in supernatural evil is significant and negative ($b = -.23$; $p < .05$). Figure 3 graphically shows this interactive pattern: The positive association between interpersonal conflict at work and job burnout is attenuated among individuals who report higher levels of belief in supernatural evil (e.g., one standard deviation above the mean) compared to individuals who report lower levels of belief in supernatural evil (e.g., one standard deviation below the mean). These findings are congruent with H6a, indicating that higher levels of belief in supernatural evil buffer against the detrimental effects of interpersonal conflict at work on job burnout.

Figure 3

The association between interpersonal conflict at work and job burnout by levels of belief in supernatural evil



Note: The lines represent predicted values of job burnout while statistically controlling for all other variables in Model 4 of Table 4.

DISCUSSION

Interpersonal conflict at work is one of the most prevalent stressors in the workplace that has harmful consequences for the health and well-being of workers (Frone 2000; Nixon et al. 2011). Given the detrimental effects of interpersonal conflict at work on well-being, we investigated how religious factors (i.e., belief in angelic intervention and belief in supernatural evil) modified this association. Using data from a nationwide sample of workers in multi-religious Singapore ($N = 508$), our analyses show that interpersonal conflict at work is positively associated with anxiety and job burnout. In addition, the positive association between interpersonal conflict at work and anxiety is attenuated among those who report a belief in angelic intervention. In a similar vein, higher levels of belief in supernatural evil weakens the positive association of interpersonal conflict at work with anxiety and job burnout. Collectively, these findings indicate that belief in supernatural agents acts as a buffer against the deleterious effects of interpersonal conflict at work on worker well-being.

Several contributions emerge from the findings. First, our analysis of a national sample of Singaporean workers reveals that interpersonal conflict at work is associated with higher levels of anxiety and job burnout. These observations are consistent with the JD-R model, indicating that interpersonal conflict at work is a potential work stressor that has deleterious consequences for worker well-being (Karasek 1979; Meier, Semmer, and Gross 2014). Our main contribution goes further to answer the following question: Does belief in supernatural agents moderate the association between interpersonal conflict at work and worker well-being? Considering that individuals may differ in their responses to interpersonal conflict at work, previous literature has investigated a range of factors that moderate its effects (Dijkstra et al. 2009; Ilies et al. 2011; Thomas, Bliese, and Jex 2005). For example, research shows that the relationship between interpersonal conflict at work and negative affect varies according to personality and social support (Ilies et al. 2011). Yet,

few studies have examined the role of religion in shaping individuals' reactions to interpersonal conflict at work. To address this lacuna, we focus on how belief in supernatural agents—beliefs about angelic interventions and the existence of evil supernatural deities, entities, or places—moderate the relationship between interpersonal conflict at work and worker well-being. Taken together, this study advances our knowledge about the individual factors that matter for workplace interpersonal conflict and worker well-being.

Second, our analyses document the relevance of religious beliefs as a moderating influence in the link between interpersonal conflict at work and worker well-being. Specifically, belief in angelic intervention attenuates the deleterious association between interpersonal conflict at work and anxiety. Belief in angels and their interventions in the world may be construed as a form of religious social support (Jung 2022). It may help individuals bolster positive self-feelings such as self-esteem. Moreover, when individuals feel that angels aid them in their hardships, they may develop a stronger sense of personal empowerment to overcome stressful conditions. With greater confidence that one can control things, individuals believing in angelic intervention may concentrate on forging a reasonable plan of action to solve the problem. These theoretical mechanisms may offer potential explanations for how belief in angels serves as an effective coping resource in the face of workplace interpersonal conflict. Future research may benefit from elaborating on the specific pathways via which beliefs about angelic interventions provide buffering effects.

Third, another main contribution of our study involves the discovery of the moderating role of belief in supernatural evil, indicating that belief in supernatural evil weakens the detrimental association between interpersonal conflict at work and worker well-being. If the devil, demons, and hell exist in a world, that world might be full of uncertainty and chaos. If believers in supernatural evil perceive the world as inherently risky, unpredictable, and potentially threatening, they may accept interpersonal conflict at work as “normal operations” in social life. This normalization of negative life experiences may cushion the blow of workplace interpersonal conflict. Moreover, individuals who believe in supernatural evil may be vigilant in developing various strategies to protect themselves against potential assaults from evil forces. Thus, supernatural evil belief may have a positive toughening effect whereby individuals learn how to deal with life stressors (Kok et al. 2021; Seery, Holman, and Silver 2010). Further, seeing supernatural evil forces as playing a role in workplace interpersonal conflict may help better explain the negative event and inspire meaningful actions (Wilt, Tongeren, and Exline 2023). This in turn may alleviate stress reactivity and mitigate the deleterious consequences of interpersonal conflict at work. In this regard, having conflictive social relationships at work might be less harmful to those who report firmer belief in supernatural evil.

Fourth, this research offers a more balanced view of the health implications of supernatural evil belief. A substantial body of work on the religion-health connection shows that religion tends to be beneficial for health and well-being (Green and Elliott 2010; Koenig, King, and Carson 2012). Yet, a burgeoning literature focuses on a dark side of religion, highlighting the ways that religion is bad for health (Ellison and Lee 2010). Previous work using a nationally representative sample of American adults demonstrates that supernatural evil belief is positively associated with general anxiety and paranoia, reinforcing a claim that certain aspects of religion may undermine well-being (Jung 2020). By contrast, however, this study documents that belief in supernatural evil might be beneficial for worker well-being by mitigating the noxious health effects of workplace interpersonal conflict at work. Taken together, these findings suggest that while belief in supernatural evil might be detrimental among the general population, it may be helpful for those workers who suffer from conflictive social relationships at work. Future research may consider delving more deeply into the ways that belief in supernatural evil influences individual health and well-being.

Fifth, this study contributes to the literature by examining previously understudied aspects of religion in the JD-R model (e.g., belief in angelic intervention and belief in supernatural evil) and underscoring its consequences for worker well-being. Despite the importance of religion for

health and well-being among workers (Achour, Nor, and Yusoff 2016; Noor 2008), social science perspectives on this topic using the JD-R model has been underdeveloped. Scattered studies did cast light on the role that religion plays in the model (Abualigah and Koburtay 2023; Jung, Soo, and Ang 2023; Schreurs et al. 2014; Selvarajan, Singh, and Stringer 2020). For example, religiosity is positively associated with work engagement (Abualigah and Koburtay 2023), and it mitigates the positive relationship between spousal demands and family-to-work conflict (Selvarajan, Singh, and Stringer 2020). These studies highlight the ways that religiosity acts as a resource in the JD-R model. By contrast, divine struggles amplify the negative association between interpersonal conflict at work and job satisfaction (Jung, Soo, and Ang 2023) and religiosity exacerbates the negative association between job insecurity and burnout (Schreurs et al. 2014). These findings underscore how religion serves as a demand that makes a bad situation worse. The current study adds to this literature by bringing relatively understudied dimensions of religion—belief in angelic intervention and belief in supernatural evil—to the foreground and illuminating their health implications. Given the findings that belief in both angelic intervention and supernatural evil reduce the deleterious health effects of interpersonal conflict at work, these religious beliefs may be considered as a *resource* in the JD-R model.

Like other studies, there are several limitations worth mentioning. First, the data employed in the study are cross-sectional, indicating that we are unable to establish a causal order among the focal variables. Although we believe that our interpretations of the findings are reasonable, it is certainly possible that worker well-being (e.g., anxiety and job burnout) may influence the frequency of interpersonal conflict at work. However, our theoretical arguments are predicated upon a dominant view in occupational stress research that considers workplace interpersonal conflict as a job stressor influencing worker well-being (Karasek 1979; Nixon et al. 2011). Hence, it appears mostly likely that causality runs primarily from interpersonal conflict at work to anxiety and job burnout. Yet, we acknowledge that longitudinal analyses are needed to better address this concern. Second, the current study was not able to adequately assess how the findings in the study differ by social status (e.g., socioeconomic status, race, gender) because of small sample size. Future research using data with high cell size for social status may consider evaluating how the interrelationships among workplace interpersonal conflict, religion, worker well-being operate differently across different social groups. Third, the concept of angels, devil/Satan, hell, and demons may have different meanings to survey respondents in different religious traditions. To produce more reliable results, one should minimize construct bias. The current study partially confronts this issue by adjusting for a series of dummy variables for religious affiliation in the analyses. However, we acknowledge that our treatment is not enough to fully address the issue of construct equivalence.

Finally, previous literature illuminates various aspects of workplace interpersonal conflict and their associations with worker well-being. For example, research documents that conflict with coworkers tends to be associated with personally relevant outcomes (e.g., psychological distress and self-esteem) whereas conflict with supervisors tends to be predictive of organizationally relevant outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction) (Frone 2000). Moreover, prior studies distinguish between disputes over task-related issues (task conflict) and disagreements stemming from personal values (relationship conflict) and show that task conflict may sometimes be functional whereas relationship conflict generally undermines worker well-being (de Dreu, van Dierendonck, and Dijkstra 2004). In addition, scholars focus on the intensity and frequency of conflict, demonstrating that more frequent mild task conflict may potentially lead to job satisfaction whereas more frequent intense task conflict may result in negative outcomes (Todorova, Bear, and Weingart 2014). However, due to data limitations, our study is not able to address these complexities in the analysis. Future research may consider examining how different types of workplace conflict have different associations with worker well-being and how religious beliefs moderate those associations.

CONCLUSION

A growing body of work examines a connection between religion and work (Chen 2022; Lynn, Naughton, and VanderVeen 2011). While some research highlights a dark side of religion (Berkelaar and Buzzanell 2015; Schreurs et al. 2014), others document positive implications of religion for worker well-being (Kent, Bradshaw, and Dougherty 2016; Neubert and Halbesleben 2015). In particular, recent evidence suggests that religion is beneficial for worker well-being by mitigating the harmful mental health consequences of various work-related stressors including job insecurity (Upenieks, Schieman, and Bierman 2022), work-family conflict (Upenieks, Schieman, and Ellison 2023), perceived underpay (Upenieks and Schieman 2023), and workplace discrimination (Scheitle et al. 2023). The current study augments this strand of research by demonstrating that although interpersonal conflict at work undermines worker well-being, it is less detrimental for workers who believe in angelic intervention and report firmer belief in supernatural evil. In this sense, our results expand upon the JD-R model by identifying belief in supernatural agents as a potential resource that might buffer the harmful effects of a critical job stressor—interpersonal conflict at work. Broadly, these observations add to a large body of work showing that religion provides a buffering effect in the context of stressful conditions (Koenig, King, and Carson 2012; Pargament 2001). Future research may benefit from extending our findings beyond the workplace, illuminating how belief in supernatural agents serves as a protective factor against the deleterious mental health consequences of other stressors.

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Data Availability Statement

As the Singaporean government funded the project, the data are highly restricted. To use the data to replicate the findings in the article, a special permission should be obtained from the Singapore government (e.g., Ministry of Education).

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors have no relevant financial or nonfinancial interests to disclose.

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