

# Family-friendly human resource management practices and employee performance: explaining the mediating role of psychological empowerment

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## Abstract

Modern-day scholars acknowledge that women play a critical role in organizations. However, there still needs to be more data about the contribution of family-friendly HRM to the psychological empowerment of female employees and their superior performance. Therefore, this study investigates how family-friendly human resource management (HRM) practices enhance female employees' performance directly and via psychological empowerment, using the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory. Applying partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM), suggested hypotheses were tested on data collected from 121 respondents. Findings confirm that family-friendly HRM practices positively affect female employees' performance. Findings also confirmed the significant mediating role of psychological empowerment between family-friendly HRM practices and female employees' performance. The study provides evidence to policymakers that organizations may promote female employees' psychological empowerment and performance through family-friendly HRM practices. The study also contributes to Sustainable Development Goal 5 by providing evidence that organizations may achieve gender equality in the workplace by implementing family-friendly HRM practices.

**Keywords:** Family-friendly HRM practices, psychological empowerment, employee performance, sustainable development goals

## 1 Introduction

Female are one of the crucial components of the global workforce that enable organizations to achieve superior performance (Saha, [2023](#); Triana et al., [2019](#)). Researchers argue that female employees are more productive for organizations compared to their counterparts (Yang et al., [2019](#)). Despite the sizeable contribution of women in organizations, female employees face

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different challenges such as workplace discrimination, sexual harassment, and gender biases, which negatively affect their performance (Sońta, [2023](#)). One of the main reasons is that female employees are also responsible for caring for their families, particularly their children, which impacts their performance and career growth (Heymann et al., [2023](#); Sońta, [2023](#)). In order to address this issue, scholars have developed family-friendly HRM practices to provide a supportive environment that helps female employees handle challenges that hinder their performance (Garg & Agrawal, [2020](#)). However, limited research exists on the effect of family-friendly HRM practices on female employees' outcomes (Garg & Agrawal, [2020](#); Li & Zhang, [2023](#); Memili et al., [2023](#)).

Scholars of HRM domain have emphasized that organizations strategically implement HRM systems to achieve their strategic objectives (McClean & Collins, [2019](#)). For example, Pas et al. ([2011](#)) found that family-friendly HRM practices, such as flexible work arrangements, improve the work-life balance of female employees. Moreover, Bagraim and Axis, ([2007](#)) suggest that family-friendly HRM practices enable female employees to meet their job and family-related demands, thereby promoting commitment among female employees. Ngo et al. ([2009](#)) have confirmed that family-friendly HRM practices create an enabling climate for female employees, reducing employee turnover and contributing to performance.

Though the majority of literature establishes the positive effects of family-friendly HRM practices, some studies present contradictory findings. For example, a study conducted in South Korea by Lee and Kim, ([2010](#)) showed that flexible work schedules were not effective in reducing employee turnover and even had a negative impact on labor productivity. Likewise, Amorim and Santos, ([2017](#)) conducted interviews with HR managers and employees regarding family-friendly work practices and found that the majority of organizations lack formal family-friendly HRM practices. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the effects of family-friendly HRM practices in different cultural contexts. Moreover, a recent call for papers raised a question that "to what extent HRM policies and practices may be redesigned to reduce social inequalities?" (Aust et al., [2022](#)). Thus, the primary aim of this study is to address this question by investigating the influence of family-friendly HRM practices on female employees' performance.

Previous studies have highlighted that the direct relationship between HRM systems and employee performance is not insightful and have explained various underlying mechanisms to clarify the "black box" of HRM practices-performance link (Demortier et al., [2014](#); Ramsay et al., [2000](#)). Prior literature asserts that an individual's psychological empowerment is pivotal in achieving personal and organizational goals (Cenciotti et al., [2017](#)). Psychological empowerment manifests as internal motivation for four cognitive facets: meaning, impact, self-determination, and competence (Spreitzer, [1995](#)). Thus, psychological empowerment may be more vital for women in addressing their difficulties related to work and family. Female employees with confidence in their competence may achieve assigned tasks. However, the role of psychological empowerment as an essential mechanism to describe the consequence of family-friendly HRM practices on female employees' performance is understudied (Garg & Agrawal, [2020](#)). Therefore, the second objective of this study is to examine the mediating role of psychological empowerment between family-friendly HRM practices and female employees' performance.

Our study contributes to the emerging literature on family-friendly HRM practices to achieve superior performance among female employees. By responding to the recent "call for papers" (Aust et al., [2022](#)), the findings extend our understanding that adopting family-friendly HRM practices enables female employees to handle work and family-related challenges. Additionally, the study tests psychological empowerment as an underlying mechanism to transform the impact of family-friendly HRM practices on female employees' performance, substantiating the 'black

box' debate to explain the HRM-performance link (Demortier et al., [2014](#); Ramsay et al., [2000](#)). The findings also provide evidence for policymakers to implement family-friendly HRM practices to promote psychological empowerment and enhance female employees' performance. The next chapter explains the theoretical background and hypotheses. The following sections detail the methods used to collect and analyze data for testing the hypotheses. The results of the study are presented in the subsequent section. Finally, the results are discussed in comparison with previous studies, providing theoretical and practical implications.

## 2 Literature

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses Development

In line with the objectives, this study utilized the conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, [1989](#)) as a foundational theoretical framework to frame hypotheses. COR theory explores into individuals' motivations to invest in, improve and safeguard their resources to prevent loss (Hobfoll, [1989](#)). According to Hobfoll ([1989](#)), resources are defined as "objects, individual characteristics, conditions, or energies that the people values" (p. 516). COR theory further suggests that resources may exist both individual as well as organizational level (Hobfoll, [2011](#)). The organizational level resources pertain to job characteristics that facilitate the achievement of work objectives, ease stress and job pressures and raise personal and professional growth (Demerouti et al., [2001](#)). Hence, family-friendly human resource management (HRM) practices (Bagrami & Axis, [2007](#)) are organizational resources that offer support to female employees in reaching work related goals. Further, HRM practices like maternity and paternity benefits, childcare services and flexible working hours are considered organizational resources (Ngo et al., [2009](#)) that empower female employees to reduce stress related to family responsibilities. On the other hand, employee knowledge, skills, abilities, time, and energy are individual level resources (Schaufeli & Taris, [2014](#)). This reveals that family-friendly HRM practices serve as organizational level resources that act as a motivating force in addressing work and family related stress, empowering female employees to invest in resources (e.g., knowledge, skills, and energy) to achieve work related objectives. Resultantly, female employees are encouraged pool up resources through resource acquisition, construction/reconstruction, and investment/reinvestment of their resources to prevent experiencing stress related to work and family responsibilities.

### 2.2 Family-friendly HRM practices and Performance

Capitalizing on COR theory (Hobfoll, [1989](#), [2001](#)), this study argues that family-friendly HRM practices enable female employees to perform their assigned tasks. Earlier studies show that family related challenges (i.e., taking care of children and family) create a perception of resources loss. This results into female employees' reluctance to invest their resources to achieve assigned tasks. Therefore, organizations need such systems that motivate female employees to invest their current resources and acquire new ones to perform their assigned tasks. Accordingly, we argue that family-friendly HRM enhances employees' motivation to invest and acquire new resources to achieve assigned tasks (Bagrami & Axis, [2007](#)). Further, family-friendly HRM practices, i.e., providing maternity benefits to female employees to spend time with family motivates them to focus on their job performance (Regmi & Wang, [2020](#)). Similarly, family-friendly HRM provides counselling on work-life balance to female employees, childcare services for working mothers and attractive benefit plans for female employees to encourage them to invest their energies to achieve given tasks (Panda & Sahoo, [2021](#)). Henceforth, these practices serve as organizational resources that help female employees to handle family related challenges (Russell et al., [2009](#)). Female employees feel that organization is putting effort into preventing the loss of current resources and acquiring new resources that result in superior performance. The provision of flexible working arrangements, like formal job sharing, flexible working hours options for female employees, the option to avail long leaves (without pay) to undertake family obligations and reduced time work

arrangements facilitate them to fulfil their family obligations and put their efforts to achieve organizational goals.

Taking along the COR arguments, the empirical evidence also shows that implementation of family-friendly HRM practices contribute in positive employees' outcomes (Amorim & Santos, [2017](#); Garg & Agrawal, [2020](#); Lee & Kim, [2010](#); Ngo et al., [2009](#)). Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1.** Family-friendly HRM practices has a positive effect female employees' performance.

### **2.3 Family-friendly HRM practices, Psychological Empowerment, and Performance**

Psychological empowerment is considered a motivational construct that is manifested in four interrelated conditions known as meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact (Spreitzer, [1995](#)). The meaning refers to aligning personal values, beliefs, and behavior with the requirements of a work role (Brief & Nord, [1990](#)). Individuals assess the value of their work goals and the purpose of their value system or standards. The competence is referred as an individual's belief in his or her capability to perform work tasks with mastery as per expectations (Bandura, [1989](#)). Self-determination is an individual's autonomy in initiating and regulating actions or work behaviors (Deci et al., [1989](#)).

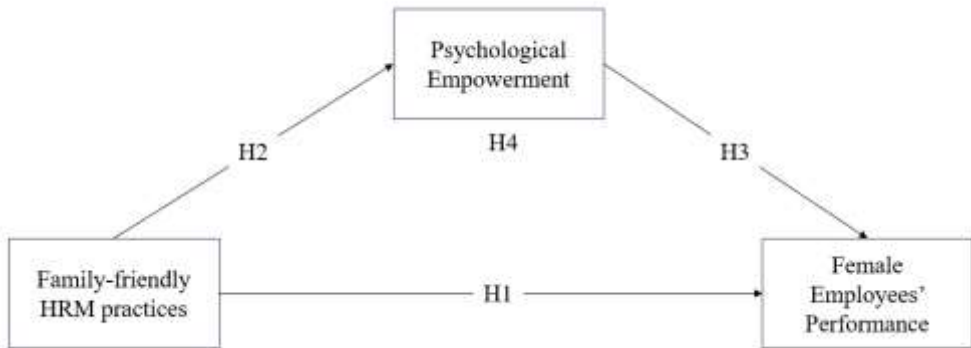
Building on COR theory's assumptions (Hobfoll, [1989](#), [2001](#)), this study argues that family-friendly HRM practices promote psychological empowerment, resulting in the superior performance of female employees. We also suggest that family-friendly HRM practices enhance female employees' psychological resources and reduces resource loss (Hobfoll, [2011](#)), which results in a higher psychological resource pool to meet their family-related obligations. According to theory, in the presence of a higher psychological resource pool, female employees will invest their resources for achievement of their assigned tasks (Li et al., [2015](#)). Family-friendly HRM, e.g., flexible work arrangement promotes female employees' competence to handle work and family related challenges (Russell et al., [2009](#)). For female employees, maternity leaves also promote self-determination and competence of female employees to fulfil their family related obligations (Regmi & Wang, [2020](#)). Flexible work arrangements help female employees to create work life balance that contribute in positive employees' perception such as meaning and impact (Giannikis & Mihail, [2011](#)). In addition, the provision of childcare facilities for female employees by organization (Kimmel, [2006](#)) promote meaning and self-determination among female employees to invest their resources to achieve assigned tasks. It is expected that family-friendly HRM practices promote impact, meaning, self-determination, and competence among female employees. Self-determination as key to achieve organizational goals and competence to handle difficult situations, significantly contributes to the psychological empowerment of female employees. As a result, a higher level of psychological empowerment enhances female employees' performance (Hechanova et al., [2006](#); Kundu et al., [2019](#)). So, the fit between work goals and personal values, beliefs on their skills and autonomy to make work decisions and impact on work outcomes enable female employees to handle challenge and hindrance stressors (both job and family-related) (Min et al., [2015](#)), lead to superior performance. Based on the COR theory assumptions and previous literature, we propose that:

**Hypothesis 2.** Family-friendly HRM practices has a positive effect on psychological empowerment of female employees.

**Hypothesis 3.** Psychological empowerment has a positive effect on female employees' performance.

**Hypothesis 4.** Psychological empowerment plays a mediating role between family-friendly HRM

practices and female employees' performance.



**Figure I.** Research Model

### 3 Methods

Study adopted a positivist philosophy, deductive reasoning and a quantitative method, which are considered appropriate philosophical and methodological approaches to explain the impact or causal relationships among factors or to test theory driven hypotheses, using numerical data. Positivism is a leading philosophy in HRM theory and practice (Primecz, 2020), which offers valuable insights by providing the foundation for the HRM system and empirically observing its impact on performance outcomes. The conservation of resources (COR) theory was applied as the underlying theoretical perspective to explain the effect of family-friendly HRM practices on female employee performance directly and through psychological empowerment.

#### 3.1 Sample and Data Collection

Data collection was done from female employees working in educational institutions of Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan. For collection of data from the respondents, self-administered questionnaire was used. According to the nature of the study and respondents, purposive sampling techniques was used. Personal contacts were used to approach the respondents. Questionnaire was administered in English language as the respondents were well versed in English. Prior studies also used questionnaire developed in English language to collect data from respondents (Ali et al., 2020; Naseer et al., 2016). First part of the questionnaire comprises the confidentiality statement and purpose of the study. The questionnaire was distributed to 300 female employees and received 127 responses, yielding a response rate of 42 %, which is consistent with earlier studies done in Pakistan (Rasheed et al., 2017). Six (6) questionnaires were dropped due to incomplete information and remaining 121 responses were used to test hypotheses.

#### 3.2 Measures

All understudy variables in the model were measured through established and well-validated scales. An expert panel of two academics and one industry professional was formed to review, validate and approve the questionnaire. After finalization, respondents were asked to rate their responses on a 5-point Likert-type scale, where 1 represented “to a little extent” and 5 “to a great extent,” unless mentioned otherwise.

##### *Family-friendly HRM practices.*

Already developed and validated measure by Wood and DeMenezes, (2010) was adopted to capture family-friendly HRM practices. The nine items scale shows acceptable reliability as the

value of composite reliability (CR) is higher than 0.70 (CR= 0.91) (Hair et al., [2019](#)).

### ***Psychological empowerment.***

The psychological empowerment was measured by using 12 items scale of Spreitzer ([1995](#)). The value of composite reliability (CR) of psychological empowerment confirms acceptable reliability (CR=0.92) as CR is higher than the minimum threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., [2019](#)).

### ***Female employees' performance.***

We measured employee performance using a seven-item scale adopted from Babin and Boles ([1998](#)). The value of composite reliability (CR=.90) shows acceptable reliability.

### **3.3 Common Method Bias**

Scholars highlighted that single-source data collection or cross-sectional research design may lead to common method bias (CMB) that may artificially articulate the results (Podsakoff et al., [2003](#)). To confirm the non-presence CMB, we used the variance inflation factors (VIFs) criterion. The values of VIF are less than 3.3, confirming there is no issue with CMB (Kock, [2015](#)).

### **3.4 Data Analysis and Results**

Partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) in Smart-PLS was used to test the proposed model. PLS (variance-based approach) has been preferred over covariance-based methods (e.g., AMOS, LISREL) as PLS can simultaneously handle complex models with multiple indicators and constructs, does not impose sample distribution (normality) and rigorous sample size (Hair et al., [2019](#)).

#### ***Measurement model.***

The PLS algorithm was used to confirm the measurement scales' internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Convergent validity is established using factor loadings, composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) criteria. Results in Table I show that all constructs' loadings, CR, and AVE values are higher than the minimum threshold level (Hair et al., [2019](#)), so establishing the convergent validity.

**Table I.** Factor Loadings, Reliability and Convergent Validity

Constructs	Items	Loadings	CR	AVE
Family-friendly HRM practices	Item 1	0.75	0.91	0.59
	Item 2	0.79		
	Item 3	0.82		
	Item 4	0.77		
	Item 5	0.82		
	Item 6	0.66		
	Item 7	0.82		
	Item 8	0.74		
	Item 9	0.71		
Female employees' performance	Item 1	0.87	0.90	0.64
	Item 2	0.91		
	Item 3	0.91		
	Item 4	0.79		
	Item 5	0.86		
	Item 6	0.86		
	Item 7	0.87		
Psychological empowerment	Item 1	0.82	0.92	0.76
	Item 2	0.93		

Item 3	0.91
Item 4	0.91
Item 5	0.91
Item 6	0.87
Item 7	0.89
Item 8	0.91
Item 9	0.90
Item 10	0.88
Item 11	0.90
Item 12	0.91

Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of the correlation test is used to establish discriminant validity, which provides more consistent results as compared to Fornell and Lacker's test (Henseler et al., 2015). The HTMT values of all the variables (Table II) were less than the .85 threshold, confirming discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015).

**Table II.** Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (Discriminant Validity)

Constructs	1	2	3
1. Female employees' performance	-		
2. Psychological empowerment	0.72	-	
3. Family-friendly HRM practices	0.63	0.71	-

### 3.5 Hypotheses testing.

On the line of guidelines of Hair et al. (2019), the structural model was assessed using the PLS bootstrapping methods to measure the model's predictive relevance and explanatory power, which are explained by R2 and Q2, respectively (Hair et al., 2019). The values of R2 show that family-friendly HRM practices explain 45% and 48% of the variance of psychological empowerment and female employees' performance, respectively. The values of Q2 show medium predictive relevance.

As per the recommendations of Hair et al. (2019), path analysis was conducted through the bootstrapping method with 10000 re-sampling iterations. Accordingly, p-values confirm a significant relationship, i.e., a p-value less than 0.05 is considered significant at a 95 per cent confidence interval (Greenland et al., 2016). The results are displayed in Table III, where the path coefficients and significance level are presented. Results confirm that family-friendly HRM practices have a positive effect on female employees' performance ( $\beta=0.33$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), confirming hypothesis 1. Results of direct effect show that family-friendly HRM practices have a statistically significant and positive effect on psychological empowerment ( $\beta=0.53$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), which confirms hypothesis 2. Findings also highlight that psychological empowerment has a positive and statistically significant effect on female employees' performance ( $\beta=0.45$ ;  $p<0.05$ ); thus, hypothesis 3 is supported. Results of the indirect effect confirm that psychological empowerment has a significant and positive mediating role between family-friendly HRM practices and female employees' performance ( $\beta=0.24$ ;  $p<0.05$ ), supporting hypothesis 4.

**Table III.** Hypotheses Testing

Structural Path	Path coefficient	t value (bootstrap)	Conclusion
H1: FFHRMp and Female Employees' Performance	0.33***	5.62	Accepted
H2: FFHRMp and Psychological Empowerment	0.53***	16.40	Accepted
H3: Psychological Empowerment and Female Employees' Performance	0.45***	9.72	Accepted
H4: Mediating Role of Psychological Empowerment	0.24***	7.69	Accepted



**Note.** n=121. FFHRMp: family-friendly HRM practices. Bootstrap confidence intervals were constructed using 10,000 resamples. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

#### 4 Discussion

Taking the lens of COR theory (Hobfoll, [1989](#)), the main objective of this research was to examine the direct and indirect impact of family-friendly HRM practices on female employees' performance using psychological empowerment. The finding discloses that family-friendly HRM practices have a positive effect on achieving superior performance among female employees. This is consistent with COR's assumptions that organizational resources (Hobfoll, [2011](#)), such as family-friendly HRM practices, help female employees handle their family-related challenges and put their energies into achieving their organizational goals. Earlier studies also support our finding that family-friendly HRM practices positively contribute to female employees' performance (Lee & Kim, [2010](#); Wood & de Menezes, [2010](#)). Findings also highlighted that family-friendly HRM practices make female employees perceive that the organization is committed to their family-related obligation, which promotes a sense of meaning, impact, competence and self-determination (psychological empowerment). This is in line with prior studies that family-friendly HRM practices i.e., work-life balance, flexible work arrangements significantly contribute in psychological empowerment (Panda & Sahoo, [2021](#); Yaghi, [2016](#)). Likewise, we also found a positive effect of psychological empowerment in enhancing fe, i.e., work-life balance and flexible work arrangements, significantly contribute to male employees' performance, which is consistent with prior studies that highlight the important contribution of psychological empowerment in employees' performance (Hechanova et al., [2006](#); Li et al., [2015](#)). Lastly, our findings suggest that psychological empowerment serves as a mediating mechanism between family-friendly HRM practices and female employees' performance, which supports COR theory (Hobfoll, [1989](#)) assumption that organizational resources such as family-friendly HRM practices promote a sense of resource gain in a shape of psychological empowerment that result in the investment of energies to achieve assigned tasks.

##### 4.1 Theoretical Implications

This study provides four significant contributions. Firstly, it examines the importance of family-friendly HRM practices in achieving the superior performance of female employees. Addressing recent 'call for papers' (Aust et al., [2022](#)), findings extend our understanding that adopting family-friendly HRM practices provides a supportive environment for female employees to handle family-related challenges. Secondly, the research exhibits the significance of investigating the influence of psychological empowerment on female employees' performance, an essential outcome of family-friendly HRM practices, including flexible work arrangements, childcare facilities and family assistance programs. Although earlier studies have found that psychological empowerment is a crucial resource in HRM practices and employee' performance relationships, it has received less attention from the female employee's perspective.

COR theory assumes that female employees subjected to resourceful work environments assess resources based on how well they help them achieve their goals or meet their psychological needs (Halbesleben et al., [2014](#)). As a result, job resources provided by organizations in the shape of family-friendly HRM practices are perceived as essential resources, and their effect on female employee's performance will be long-lasting. Consistent with research that individual resources intervene between job resources and valuable worker consequences. Henceforth, psychological empowerment as a work-related individual resource is crucial in connecting family-friendly HRM practices with female employees' performance. Further, this research verifies the 'black box' debate to explain HRM-performance link (Demortier et al., [2014](#); Ramsay et al., [2000](#)). Fourthly, our research contributes to the sustainable development goals literature particularly "goal 5 - achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls".



## 4.2 Practical Implications

Despite their numerous roles, both at home and at workplace, females have long been discriminated against and regarded as "second citizens". This discrimination towards females also continues in the modern business environment, producing a "glass ceiling" restricting female's access to equal opportunities to achieve organizational goals and progress in their careers. It is hard to thrive in the fast-paced business environment without utilizing this skill pool. There is enough data to demonstrate that women are heavily involved in the workforce. However, widespread prejudice makes the difficulties that women face in that workplace, such as unequal opportunities for advancement, an obsolete male network, a lack of skills, and inadequate training and pay (Khan et al., [2021](#)). It also lessens their commitment to their professional objectives. As a result, this study highlights the value of family-friendly HRM practices in creating a workplace that respects gender equality. Since family-friendly HR strategies lessen workplace prejudice and assist women in achieving their professional goals, (Khan et al., [2021](#)). As this study highlighted that the performance of female employees can be enhanced by implementing family-friendly management practices in firms, organizations may adopt family-friendly HRM practices that support female employees' performance and psychological empowerment by assisting them in rearranging their family responsibilities. Furthermore, organizations may allocate additional resources to help women achieve a better work-life balance by offering childcare benefits, onsite maternity nurseries, and free or subsidized childcare. Organizational management must improve gender parity and shatter the glass ceiling in order to create a more inclusive workplace. Thus, senior management and HR professionals must develop and put into place HRM practices that support female employees in fulfilling their family responsibilities and achieving superior performance, which in turn leads to sustained competitive advantage for organizations (Saha, [2023](#); Triana et al., [2019](#)).

## 4.3 Limitations and Future Directions

Despite its valuable contributions, this study has many limitations. Firstly, the cross-sectional design of the study can impose inferential limitations. It is advised to conduct longitudinal research in which the performance of female employees and family-friendly HRM practices are assessed at various intervals. Secondly, this study examined psychological empowerment as the operationalized underlying mechanism in the relationship between female employees' performance and family-friendly HRM practices. Future research on this process may consider additional mediating variables, including psychological capital, psychological safety, and knowledge exchange. Future research may also consider women's leadership styles and core self-evaluation as boundary conditions. The third limitation pertains to the small sample size in the study, hence limiting its generalizability to different types of organizations. Future research may address this issue with a bigger sample size. Finally, the data may not be as applicable to male employees as it was only gathered from female employees. Future research may gather information from male and female workers and perform comparison analysis to determine how family-friendly HRM policies affect both types of workers

## 4.4 Conclusion

This study investigated the direct and indirect effects of family-friendly HRM practices on female employees' performance through psychological empowerment by applying the COR theory. The results verify that family-friendly HRM policies help female employees fulfill their commitments to their families and focus on completing their jobs. Additionally, our research indicates that HRM policies that support families help female employees feel more psychologically empowered, improving performance.

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