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Identifying Individual Factors Affecting the Career Success of Female Employees at Imam Khomeini International University (IKIU)

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Article History: Received 10 December 2024 Received in revised form 14 February 2025 Accepted 5 April 2025 Available online 1 June 2025	Career success is a multidimensional construct shaped by individual, organizational and environmental factors. With the growing number of female university graduates entering the workforce, understanding what supports women's career success has become increasingly important. This study aimed to identify the individual factors associated with the career success of female staff at Imam Khomeini International University (IKIU), Iran. In this applied, descriptive–correlational study, all 100 female staff members were invited to participate (census sampling), and 74 returned completed questionnaires (response rate: 74%). Data were collected with a 146-item questionnaire assessing personality traits, self-esteem, career and public service motivation, gender-role orientation, work–family conflict and demographic characteristics. The measurement and structural models were tested using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). All factor loadings exceeded 0.50, and convergent validity, discriminant validity, composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha were within acceptable ranges. Career motivation ($\beta = 0.339$, $p < 0.001$), public service motivation ($\beta = 0.292$, $p < 0.001$), agreeableness ($\beta = 0.260$, $p = 0.005$), conscientiousness ($\beta = 0.215$, $p < 0.001$), age ($\beta = 0.184$, $p < 0.001$) and number of children ($\beta = 0.163$, $p < 0.001$) were positively associated with career success, whereas work–family conflict was negatively associated with it ($\beta = -0.148$, $p = 0.007$). Self-esteem, openness, extraversion, neuroticism, masculine gender-role orientation, marital status, education and work experience were not significant predictors. Together, the predictors explained 62.2% of the variance in career success ($R^2 = 0.622$). The findings suggest that personality and motivational characteristics play an important role in the career success of female university staff. University administrators and higher education planners may use these results to design human resource development programs that strengthen employees' career and public service motivation and help them balance work and family demands. Because the study was cross-sectional and conducted in a single university, further research in other institutions and with longitudinal designs is recommended.
Keywords: Career Success; Female Employees; Personality Traits; Career Motivation; Public Service Motivation; PLS-SEM	

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1. INTRODUCTION

In today's world, human resources constitute the most critical asset of any entity. Leading economists argue that a society's ultimate socio-economic development trajectory is dictated by its human capital rather than its financial capital. Consequently, organizations and administrative bodies dedicate substantial efforts to ensure that their workforce remains healthy, motivated, and satisfied within the workplace [1]. Specialized and skilled human resources are therefore deemed the primary capital of a society, harnessed to drive economic activity and development.

Decades of research in the field of career success demonstrate that this construct occupies a pivotal position within organizational behavior literature. Findings from these studies indicate that identifying the individual and environmental traits, as well as the conditions that precipitate career success across various industries and organizational structures, is highly beneficial for fostering career advancement [2]. Career success is a primary concern for managers and planners across various scientific, educational, commercial, and administrative institutions. They are well aware that achieving organizational goals, fostering transformation and progress across various organizational domains, and expanding the scope of organizational functioning can only be effectively realized when the workforce is successful in executing their occupational tasks and responsibilities. For this reason, management practitioners much like scholars in psychology and sociology are keen to identify the factors associated with employee career success in order to dismantle existing barriers to advancement [3]. Career advancement, or the attainment of higher hierarchical positions, signifies career success, which, in its long-term manifestation, serves as a primary indicator of career sustainability [4].

Universities and higher education systems are embedded within the macro-economic, social, cultural, and political systems of society. The university ecosystem comprises numerous subsystems characterized by complex interrelationships, the dynamics of which play a foundational role in training the technical and, in particular, managerial specialists of a nation. Given the significance and position of administrative personnel within universities, higher education planners must continuously incorporate measures for the ongoing development of this system, specifically by enhancing scientific capabilities, capacities, and professional skills [5].

Over the past three decades, we have witnessed an increasing influx of women into the labor market, driven primarily by higher levels of education and shifting societal attitudes regarding women's workplace presence [2]. Given the rising number of female graduates across various academic degrees, particularly in postgraduate education, and women's growing inclination toward social roles, the need for employment opportunities aligned with their educational attainment is imperative. Despite the potential capabilities of women, many of these talents remain unactualized in the workplace due to various impediments, preventing women from securing their well-deserved status within their respective professions [6]. From a traditional societal viewpoint, a woman's most significant responsibility is seen as fulfilling maternal and spousal roles. Consequently, women are often expected to prioritize these roles, viewing their jobs or careers as secondary pursuits that should be abandoned if they interfere with primary familial duties. This mindset hinders the utilization of women's latent capabilities and effectively sidelines a segment of the active workforce that could drive national development. As a result, despite possessing the talent and capacity for a successful career, many women yield to traditional ideologies and ultimately remain confined to lower occupational echelons. Conversely, if supportive conditions are established across different domains including the family and society to facilitate women's presence and organizational advancement, remarkable achievements can be witnessed [6].

Examining the employment status of women, their organizational standing, and the drivers of their career success is an imperative task; every organization seeking success must eliminate the barriers impeding its employees' progress and identify the variables that yield job satisfaction, advancement, or occupational stress. Current realities indicate that the majority of employed women occupy low-tier positions characterized by lower pay and limited authority, or belong to staff segments with negligible prospects for upward mobility [7]. In recent decades, the growing presence of women in various organizations and institutions, the rising percentage of employed women, and the investigation of factors influencing their success, satisfaction, and job performance have garnered increasing attention [3]. Career success yields various positive outcomes, including a drive for achievement, adherence to professional ethics, job commitment, and a sense of organizational belonging [8].

Therefore, given the growing importance of women's workforce participation and their vital role in societal progress, identifying the factors influencing women's career success is of particular significance. This study focuses specifically on individual factors that can play a decisive role in women's career success. Imam Khomeini International University (IKIU), as a leading higher education institution, provides an appropriate setting to investigate this phenomenon. The primary objective of this research is to identify and prioritize the most critical individual factors influencing the career success of female administrative staff at this university. Given the scarcity of comprehensive studies on this topic domestically, this research represents an important step toward addressing the existing knowledge gap. The findings of this study can assist university policymakers and administrators in better understanding the determinants of women's career success, thereby enabling them to formulate more effective strategies to support and elevate women's status within academic environments. This will not only improve individual performance but also positively impact the overall efficiency of the higher education system and, ultimately, the socio-economic development of the country.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Shafiee et al. [9] determined the relationship between personality traits and the internal organizational environment with career success using an artificial neural network approach. A holistic comparison of the examined variables revealed that among the three constructs internal organizational environment, personality types, and demographic characteristics the internal organizational environment variable held greater importance in predicting employee career success. A study by Abbasnejad, Bahri, and Banshi [10] demonstrated that continuing higher education has a significant positive relationship with perceived career success. Hemmati et al. [11] developed a model of individual and organizational facilitators and barriers to career success among female employees of the Tehran Municipality Sports Organization. Their results indicated that individual and organizational facilitators, including communication skills, socialization, and individual empowerment, exert a significant impact on the career success of female staff.

Another study analyzing the effects of educators' professional capabilities on the career success of graduates from agricultural applied science and technology higher education centers, presented by Khosravipour and Soleimanipour [12], showed that professors' academic capacity regarding course content, mastery of technical knowledge, oral and written command of the Persian language, and familiarity with diverse agricultural scientific references were significant capabilities impacting graduate career success. Similarly, Rahmani and Adampira [6] examined the factors affecting the career success of Iranian female accountants. Their findings indicated that individual factors, having a mentor, and participation in social networks were significant drivers of female accountants' career success. Conversely, work-family conflict acted as a barrier to career success, whereas social factors and career orientation did not exhibit significant relationships with career success. It was also determined that individual factors ranked highest in attaining success.

In a research study, Imani Khoshkhou, Mahmoudzadeh, and Pirmohammadi [2] investigated the factors affecting the career success of women in tourism (4- and 5-star hotels in Tehran). Based on their findings, individual factors, human capital, and individual organizational power influenced objective career success (measured by indicators such as salary, promotion rate, and span of control). Additionally, individual organizational power influenced subjective career success (measured by job satisfaction, career standing, and perceived job security). However, the other two factors human capital and individual factors had no significant impact on subjective career success. Furthermore, Gholifar, Hejazi, and Hosseini [5] conducted a factor analysis of professional skills required for career success from the perspective of faculty members in Iranian colleges of agriculture. Their results revealed that the skills necessary for the career success of these faculty members can be summarized into five factors: information technology, communication skills, content mastery, teaching and learning strategies, and professional development. In another research study within a specific military branch, career success was investigated, and the researchers found that better environmental adaptation, above-average intelligence, higher education, and older age constituted success factors [13]. A comparison of three performance groups to explain the relationship between psychological characteristics (second-order personality factors and intelligence) and job performance demonstrated that three factors adaptation, creativity, and intelligence had a significant relationship with job performance.

The results of a study on the career success of female handicraft workers indicated that competency development influences women's subjective career success, and social capital independently moderates the relationship between worker participation in competency development and perceived employability [14]. In another study, researchers found that ethnic culture and perceived support directly affect the subjective career success of female managers, with leadership competencies playing a mediating role in this relationship [15]. A study on the factors influencing nurses' career success, collecting data from 3,011 nurses across 30 hospitals in China, demonstrated that demographic characteristics, career motivation, social support, and information literacy are influential factors that must be considered in the process of enhancing nurses' career success [16].

Researchers collecting field data from 560 employees across 45 hotels found that the employee-organization relationship significantly enhances employee career success [17]. Examining the factors affecting the subjective and objective career success of young technical and vocational graduates in Switzerland was the subject of another study, which revealed that young people's career progression pathways are influenced by various factors such as gender, school educational background, individual capabilities, personality, and training status [18].

A group of researchers identified the factors influencing women's career success in the Malaysian higher education sector, yielding the following results: behavioral, structural, and individual approaches are influential factors in the career success of academic members, particularly Malaysian faculty members, which are utilized by policymakers to increase the quality and efficiency of Malaysian faculty [19]. Additionally, other researchers tested the impact of individual and organizational factors on the career success of female managers in South Korea. They concluded that women's managerial career success is influenced by a blend of individual and organizational factors, such as culture and managerial practices. The findings indicate that Korean women's career success is shaped by a combination of components (not merely individual ones); in fact, organizational factors appeared to be more critical [20].

Another researcher investigated the factors affecting women's career success in the South Korean public sector [21]. Her findings showed that personal factors such as career motivation, self-esteem, public service motivation, extraversion, work-family conflict, masculinity, number of children, marital status, age, experience, and education are linked to women's career success.

In another study, researchers found that factors such as extraversion, self-esteem, agreeableness, career motivation, neuroticism, openness, and conscientiousness are positively related to career success [22]. Another study indicated that psychological capital and perceived organizational support exert a positive impact on employees' subjective career success [23]. Shrestha et al. [24], in evaluating the factors influencing women's career success in the Nepalese banking industry, found that soft skills, professional networking, and organizational support are key factors in women's career success in this sector. Zhao and Sang [25] investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and career success, revealing that higher emotional intelligence is associated with greater career success, a relationship that is moderated by job satisfaction.

A review of the literature indicates that career success is a multidimensional construct shaped by numerous individual, organizational, and environmental variables. Studies conducted in Iran and internationally demonstrate the significance of factors such as communication skills, individual capabilities, organizational support, work-life conflict, and human capital in shaping career outcomes. Furthermore, recent research underscores the growing importance of variables like emotional intelligence, career flexibility, and adaptability to technological transformations. Table 1 presents the individual factors influencing career success that have been examined in prior research.

Table 1. Individual Factors Influencing Career Success Extracted from the Literature Review

Factor	Shafiee et al. (2020)	Abbasnejad et al. (2019)	Adamita & Rahmani	Eskandari et al. (2010)	Wu et al. (2022)	Hofmann et al. (2021)	Rowley et al. (2016)	Choi (2015)	Ramli et al. (2016)	Rostyslav & Vsevolod (2024)
Extraversion	*					*		*	*	*
Neuroticism	*					*		*	*	*
Openness	*					*			*	*
Agreeableness	*					*	*		*	*
Conscientiousness						*			*	*
Self-Esteem	*					*	*	*	*	*
Masculinity	*					*	*	*	*	
Career Motivation					*		*	*		*
Public Service Motivation							*	*		
Work-Family Conflict			*			*	*	*		
Number of Children	*		*		*	*	*	*	*	
Marital Status	*		*		*	*	*	*	*	
Age	*		*		*	*	*	*	*	*
Education	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Experience	*		*		*	*	*	*	*	

However, despite the extensive body of existing literature, significant research gaps remain. Most studies in Iran have concentrated on specific industries or narrow occupational groups, while comprehensive investigations into women's career success within university environments are limited. Furthermore, few studies have explored gender-based differences in the drivers of career success within the Iranian academic context. Additionally, the impact of recent workplace transformations such as remote work and digitalization on the career success of women in Iran has received insufficient attention.

Consequently, conducting the present study with a focus on identifying the individual factors affecting the career success of female employees at Imam Khomeini International University (IKIU) is deemed essential. This study aims to bridge existing gaps in the literature and provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics of women's career success within Iranian academic settings. The findings of this research may facilitate the development of effective policies and strategies to elevate the professional standing of women in universities and other higher education institutions across Iran.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In terms of its objective, the present study is classified as applied research, as its findings can be utilized to resolve practical administrative and executive issues [26]. In other words, following the implementation of statistical tests and subsequent discussion, the individual factors influencing the career success of female staff at Imam Khomeini International University can be identified and prioritized.

Regarding its nature and research approach, this study employs Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). In terms of data collection methods, it is categorized as descriptive-survey (non-experimental) research. Table 2 presents the list of individual factors affecting career success, along with the number of items used for evaluation and the source of each measurement scale.

Table 2. Individual Factors Influencing Career Success and Measurement Instruments

Variable	Number of Items	Source
Career Success	8	Gattiker & Larwood [27]
Personality		
↳ Extraversion	12	Garousi Farshi [28]
↳ Neuroticism	12	Garousi Farshi [28]
↳ Openness	12	Garousi Farshi [28]
↳ Agreeableness	12	Garousi Farshi [28]
↳ Conscientiousness	12	Garousi Farshi [28]
Self-Esteem	10	Rogelberg [29]
Masculinity	20	Bem [30]
Motivation		
↳ Career Motivation	15	Hackman & Oldham [31]
↳ Public Service Motivation (PSM)	24	Perry [32]
Family Environment		
↳ Work-Family Conflict	9	Carlson, Kacmar, & Williams [33]
↳ Number of Children	1	3-choice researcher-designed item
↳ Marital Status	1	2-choice researcher-designed item
Demographics		
↳ Age	1	4-choice researcher-designed item
↳ Education	1	4-choice researcher-designed item
↳ Experience	1	4-choice researcher-designed item

The statistical population of this study comprises the female administrative staff of Imam Khomeini International University (IKIU). Given the limited size of the population and to ensure adequate sample representation, a total census approach was implemented, and 100 questionnaires were distributed among the employees. Following the collection and review of the returned instruments, and after eliminating incomplete or distorted responses, 74 valid questionnaires were retained for final analysis (response rate: 74%).

In this study, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was initially performed to identify the latent variables. Subsequently, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to verify the goodness-of-fit of the empirical data with the conceptual variables and their respective components. These data analyses were executed using SPSS and partial least squares (SmartPLS) software. To establish the construct validity of the research instrument, both convergent validity and discriminant validity were assessed. Instrument reliability was evaluated using two rigorous metrics: composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The analytical sample collected for this study consists of 74 female employees at Imam Khomeini International University (IKIU). Regarding the demographic profile of the respondents, the highest age frequency was observed in the 31 to 40 age bracket (45.9%), while individuals over 50 years of age represented the lowest frequency (5.4%).

In terms of education, the highest frequency was observed among individuals holding a Master's degree (54.1%), whereas those with a Ph.D. constituted the lowest frequency (2.7%).

Regarding work experience, employees with 11 to 20 years of service represented the highest frequency (47.3%). For organizational roles, administrative experts/specialists (Karshenas) made up the largest segment (81.1%), while deputy directors represented the lowest frequency (4.1%). In terms of employment status, permanent civil servants (Rasmi-Ghat'i) held the highest frequency (37.8%), whereas corporate contract workers represented the lowest (8.1%). Furthermore, 86.5% of the female employees were married. Finally, regarding family size, individuals with either no children or one child accounted for the highest frequency (36.5%).

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was applied to analyze the impact of individual factors on the career success of female administrative staff. In the first step, the factor loadings of the questionnaire items were evaluated. The results indicated that the factor loadings for all examined variables exceeded the recommended threshold ($\lambda > 0.50$), indicating adequate indicator reliability. Convergent validity and construct reliability were then examined using the AVE, composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha (Table 4). In the subsequent step, a Pearson correlation matrix was generated to assess the relationships between the research variables (Table 3). As illustrated, the dependent variable, career success, exhibits a statistically significant correlation with both career motivation and public service motivation.

Table 3. Correlation Coefficients Matrix Among Research Variables

Variable	Career Success	Conscientiousness	Agreeableness	Openness	Neuroticism	Extraversion	Career Motivation	Work-Family Conflict	Self-Esteem	Public Service Motivation	Masculinity
Career Success	1.000										
Conscientiousness	0.163	1.000									
Agreeableness	0.184	0.125	1.000								
Openness	0.209	0.163	0.209	1.000							
Neuroticism	-0.105	-0.095	-0.113	-0.087	1.000						
Extraversion	0.111	0.086	0.108	0.099	-0.104	1.000					
Career Motivation	0.497*	0.271*	0.119	0.107	-0.102	0.107	1.000				
Work-Family Conflict	-0.118	0.209	-0.129	-0.207	0.202	-0.118	-0.061	1.000			
Self-Esteem	0.051	0.187	0.077	0.309	-0.147	0.226	0.172	0.228*	1.000		
Public Service Motivation	0.353*	0.153	0.115	0.218	-0.212	0.302	0.276*	-0.062	0.213	1.000	
Masculinity	0.037	0.218	0.206	0.102	-0.145	0.246	-0.058	-0.049	0.190	0.373*	1.000

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

To evaluate convergent validity, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each variable was computed. For reliability assessment, both composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach's alpha coefficients were utilized. Based on the data compiled in Table 4, the indices for Average Variance Extracted, composite reliability, and Cronbach's alpha for all latent constructs within the model fall within the thoroughly optimal and acceptable academic thresholds.

Table 4. Composite Reliability, Average Variance Extracted, and Cronbach's Alpha of the Research Constructs

Construct	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
Career Success	0.746	0.616	0.765
Conscientiousness	0.847	0.556	0.765
Agreeableness	0.833	0.514	0.834
Openness	0.871	0.693	0.833
Neuroticism	0.902	0.699	0.762
Extraversion	0.862	0.612	0.815
Career Motivation	0.809	0.526	0.761
Work-Family Conflict	0.739	0.516	0.765
Self-Esteem	0.798	0.714	0.769
Public Service Motivation	0.831	0.696	0.861
Masculinity	0.792	0.567	0.722

To assess the discriminant validity of the measurement model, the Fornell-Larcker criterion was applied. Table 5 presents the discriminant validity evaluation matrix. The entries in this matrix contain the absolute values of the correlation coefficients between the constructs, with the square root of the Average Variance Extracted for each specific construct positioned along the main diagonal. Given that the values on the main diagonal are consistently greater than the corresponding off-diagonal correlation values in the lower triangle of the matrix, the discriminant validity of the structural model is confirmed.

Table 5. Discriminant Validity of Constructs via the Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Construct	Career Success	Conscientiousness	Agreeableness	Openness	Neuroticism	Extraversion	Career Motivation	Work-Family Conflict	Self-Esteem	Public Service Motivation	Masculinity
Career Success	0.784										
Conscientiousness	0.163	0.745									
Agreeableness	0.184	0.125	0.717								
Openness	0.209	0.163	0.209	0.832							
Neuroticism	-0.105	-0.095	-0.113	-0.087	0.836						
Extraversion	0.111	0.086	0.108	0.099	-0.104	0.782					
Career Motivation	0.497	0.271	0.119	0.107	-0.102	0.107	0.725				
Work-Family Conflict	-0.118	0.209	-0.129	-0.207	0.202	-0.118	-0.061	0.718			
Self-Esteem	0.051	0.187	0.077	0.309	-0.147	0.226	0.172	0.228	0.844		
Public Service Motivation	0.353	0.153	0.115	0.218	-0.212	0.302	0.276	-0.062	0.213	0.834	
Masculinity	0.037	0.206	0.218	0.102	-0.145	0.246	-0.058	-0.049	0.190	0.373	0.752

Note: The bold values on the main diagonal represent the square root of the Average Variance Extracted ($\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$) for each construct, while the off-diagonal elements indicate the absolute values of the correlations between the constructs.

Once the statistically significant path loadings of the measurement items onto their respective factors, the internal correlations among observations, the reliability of the measurement models, and the discriminant validity of the constructs were successfully validated, we proceeded to analyze the relationships between the constructs.

Specifically, the impact of individual-level factors on career success was evaluated within the structural model. Figure 1 illustrates the standardized path coefficients (β) indicating the magnitude and direction of the effect of each independent variable on the dependent variable (career success). Additionally, Figure 2 displays the calculated test statistics (t-values) used to evaluate the statistical significance of each path coefficient.

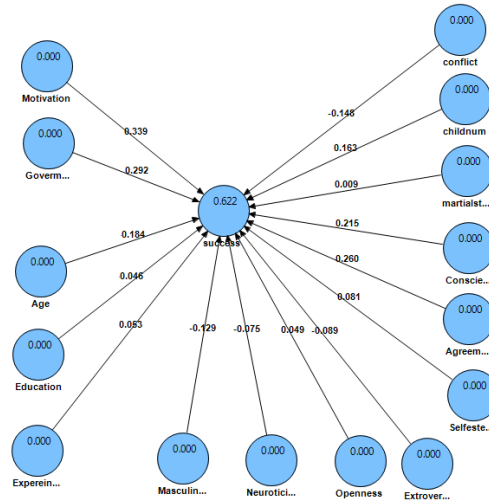


Fig. 1. The Structural Model of the Research (Path Coefficients)

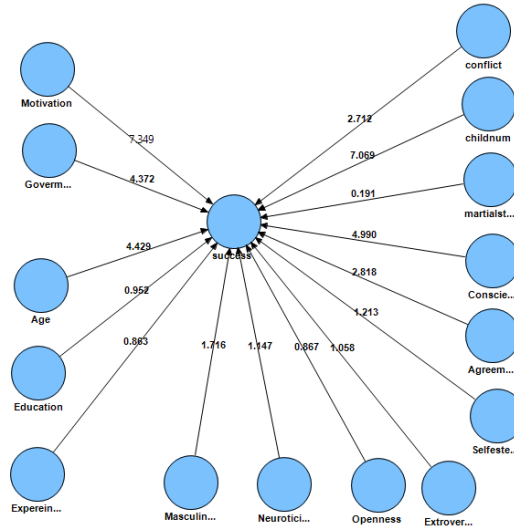


Fig. 2. The Structural Model of the Research (t-Values / Significance Levels)

Table 6 presents the values obtained from the structural model regarding the assessment indices for goodness-of-fit (GoF) and predictive relevance, alongside their respective academic thresholds. Based on the derived index values, the proposed structural model demonstrates robust goodness-of-fit as well as satisfactory predictive power.

Table 6. Fit and Predictive Power Indices of the Structural Model

Index	Threshold Value	Obtained Value	Fit & Predictive Status
SPR (Simpson's Paradox Ratio)	> 0.70	0.805	Optimal
RSCR (R-Squared Contribution Ratio)	> 0.90	0.926	Optimal
NLBCDR (Non-Linear Bivariate Causality Direction Ratio)	> 0.70	0.871	Optimal
SSR (Sign Significance Ratio)	> 0.70	0.811	Optimal
GOF (Goodness of Fit)	> 0.36	0.497	Optimal
R²	> 0.33	0.622	Optimal

Table 7 displays the direct effects and statistical significance of the independent variables on the dependent variable within the finalized model.

Table 7. The Effects of Independent Variables on the Dependent Variable (Career Success)

Hypothesized Path	Path Coefficient (β)	t-Value	Hypothesis Result
The effect of Conscientiousness on female employees' career success	0.215	4.990	Supported (Significant)
The effect of Agreeableness on female employees' career success	0.260	2.818	Supported (Significant)
The effect of Self-Esteem on female employees' career success	0.081	1.213	Not Supported (No Effect)
The effect of Openness on female employees' career success	-0.089	1.058	Not Supported (No Effect)
The effect of Extraversion on female employees' career success	0.049	0.867	Not Supported (No Effect)
The effect of Neuroticism on female employees' career success	-0.075	1.147	Not Supported (No Effect)
The effect of Masculinity on female employees' career success	-0.129	1.716	Not Supported (No Effect)
The effect of Career Motivation on female employees' career success	0.339	7.349	Supported (Significant)
The effect of Public Service Motivation on female employees' career success	0.292	4.372	Supported (Significant)
The effect of Work-Family Conflict on female employees' career success	-0.148	2.712	Supported (Significant)
The effect of Number of Children on female employees' career success	0.163	7.069	Supported (Significant)
The effect of Marital Status on female employees' career success	0.009	0.191	Not Supported (No Effect)
The effect of Age on female employees' career success	0.184	4.429	Supported (Significant)
The effect of Education on female employees' career success	0.046	0.952	Not Supported (No Effect)
The effect of Work Experience on female employees' career success	0.083	0.883	Not Supported (No Effect)

Note. Two-tailed p values computed from the bootstrap t values: conscientiousness $p < 0.001$; agreeableness $p = 0.005$; self-esteem $p = 0.225$; openness $p = 0.290$; extraversion $p = 0.386$; neuroticism $p = 0.251$; masculinity $p = 0.086$; career motivation $p < 0.001$; public service motivation $p < 0.001$; work-family conflict $p = 0.007$; number of children $p < 0.001$; marital status $p = 0.849$; age $p < 0.001$; education $p = 0.341$; work experience $p = 0.377$. Paths with $|t| > 1.96$ are significant at $p < 0.05$.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Based on the empirical findings and statistical evaluations of this study, the following insights are presented:

Conscientiousness exerts a direct and positive impact on the career success of female administrative staff. This finding is aligned with the study by Ramli et al. [19], which demonstrated that conscientiousness plays a significant and substantial role in driving career success. This underscores the critical importance of individual-level conscientiousness in professional advancement. High-conscientiousness individuals typically exhibit traits such as accountability, orderliness, perseverance, and trustworthiness. These attributes are highly valued in administrative environments and frequently yield superior task performance, heightened productivity, and consecutive career progress. For instance, a highly conscientious employee is more likely to deliver projects on schedule, maintain rigorous quality standards, and secure management trust, directly translating into promotion opportunities, salary increments, and upward career mobility. Furthermore, strong conscientiousness fosters a positive professional reputation, which is vital for long-term career path sustainability.

Agreeableness significantly influences the career success of female employees, consistent with the findings reported by Ramli et al. [19]. This outcome highlights the value of inter-individual harmony in professional settings. It demonstrates that the capacity to collaborate effectively with others, express empathy, and maintain interpersonal flexibility is critical for women's career advancement. In contemporary knowledge environments where collaboration and teamwork are paramount, highly agreeable individuals excel at building and maintaining constructive relationships with peers, executives, and clients. This capability fosters stronger professional networking, smoother cross-functional collaboration, and effective conflict resolution all of which serve as major catalysts for career advancement. Moreover, in organizational cultures that place a premium on institutional harmony and interpersonal dynamics, agreeableness plays an even more profound role in predicting career success.

Career Motivation demonstrates a statistically significant positive effect on the career success of female staff, confirming the patterns observed by Choi [21]. This finding emphasizes the vital role of intrinsic and extrinsic drive in career progression. Individuals possessing high career motivation consistently invest greater effort, commit to longer operational hours, and demonstrate superior resilience when facing systemic challenges. Additionally, heightened career motivation is closely tied to an ongoing proactive stance toward continuous learning and skill acquisition. Motivated employees typically formulate precise professional objectives and implement structured plans to achieve them, which naturally enhances job satisfaction, elevates overall performance, and ensures objective career success.

Public Service Motivation (PSM) significantly impacts the career success of female administrative personnel, matching the conclusions drawn by Choi [21]. This relationship can be attributed to several factors:

- **Organizational Goal Alignment:** In public or state-affiliated institutions, individuals driven by a strong desire to contribute to society show a natural alignment with the core mission and values of the organization.
- **Organizational Commitment:** High levels of public service motivation reinforce psychological commitment to the institution, leading to increased discretionary effort and subsequent career recognition.
- **Intrinsic Rewards:** Staff who perceive their daily tasks as a meaningful contribution to societal welfare experience superior internal job satisfaction, which acts as a buffer against burnout and drives high performance.

Work-Family Conflict exerts a significant negative effect on women's career success. This finding corroborates an extensive body of literature establishing that women facing higher degrees of friction between their professional obligations and domestic roles are considerably less likely to achieve optimal career advancement [34, 21, 20]. This negative dynamic stems primarily from an asymmetric distribution of domestic and familial responsibilities, often forcing women to make restrictive trade-offs between family maintenance and career growth. Female employees experiencing high work-family conflict perceive it as an ongoing barrier that impedes their promotion velocity. Consequently, institutional leaders must establish supportive environments to mitigate this friction, while female employees must be supported in achieving a healthy integration between their career and personal lives to maximize their advancement potential.

Number of Children and Age were found to have significant positive effects on the career success of female employees. These findings match the empirical patterns documented by Ramli et al. [19], Choi [21], and Rowley et al. [20]. Interestingly, an increase in the number of children positively affected women's career success in this

context. This can be attributed to the fact that family responsibilities can heighten the motivation to secure professional stability and advancement. Some demographic studies also indicate that women managing larger households can experience high career success due to highly developed time and resource management capabilities [35]. Marital status, by contrast, was not significantly related to career success ($\beta = 0.009$, $p = 0.849$). One likely reason is the limited variability of this variable, as 86.5% of the participants were married; the potential benefits of spousal and family support reported in previous studies [36] may therefore not have been detectable in this sample. Furthermore, advancing age positively correlates with career success, corroborating foundational human capital models [37] that link mature age with accumulated institutional wisdom, tacit knowledge, and refined job-specific competencies.

Conversely, Neuroticism did not demonstrate a statistically significant effect on female employees' career success, consistent with Ramli et al. [19] and Choi [21]. This lack of significance points to several organizational realities:

- **Compensatory Mechanisms:** Individuals with higher neuroticism traits often develop deliberate cognitive or behavioral coping strategies to manage stress and anxiety within the workspace.
- **Institutional Support Systems:** The presence of formalized or informal mental wellness support within the university may successfully buffer the potential negative impacts of emotional instability.
- **Objective Success Criteria:** When career success is evaluated through rigid, objective benchmarks (such as administrative output or fixed promotions) rather than personal affective states, the direct influence of neuroticism is minimized.

Openness to Experience showed no significant relationship with the career success of female staff, diverging from the findings of Ramli et al. [19]. This discrepancy is highly dependent on:

- **Job Nature:** If the administrative roles under evaluation are routine-driven and require adherence to standardized protocols rather than continuous creative innovation, openness loses its predictive power for success.
- **Organizational Culture:** In bureaucratic institutions that prioritize structural stability and strict rule compliance, highly non-conforming or overly innovative behaviors associated with high openness may not be heavily rewarded.

Extraversion similarly failed to exhibit a significant impact on women's career success, contrasting with Ramli et al. [19]. This lack of effect can be explained by:

- **Role Diversity:** Administrative environments require a balance of analytical, focused tasks (which favor introverted traits) and public-facing interactions (which favor extraverted traits), meaning neither profile holds an absolute advantage.
- **Workplace Virtualization:** The rapid growth of digital communication channels and remote processing options has reduced the reliance on traditional, face-to-face extraverted dominance in contemporary workspaces.

Self-Esteem had no significant direct impact on the career success of the sampled female personnel, a finding that stands in contrast to Ramli et al. [19] and Rowley et al. [20]. This variation likely stems from distinct cultural and structural dynamics:

- **Cultural Nuances:** In certain cultural contexts, overt displays of high self-esteem may be misconstrued as self-aggrandizement or a lack of humility, potentially straining peer relationships and slowing career advancement.
- **Performance-Centric Metrics:** The institution's promotion criteria may focus strictly on concrete outputs rather than individual self-confidence.
- **Interaction Effects:** Self-esteem may operate as an indirect variable that functions primarily when interacting with primary traits like conscientiousness or agreeableness, rather than acting as an isolated direct driver.

Masculinity traits did not yield a significant effect on female career success, contrasting with Ramli et al. [19] and Rowley et al. [20]. This non-significance reflects a progressive shift in workplace gender role expectations:

- **Cultural Evolution:** The university environment appears to be transitioning toward an inclusive culture that values traditional "feminine" traits (e.g., collaboration, empathy) equally alongside "masculine" traits (e.g., assertiveness).
- **Leadership Style Diversification:** The widening acceptance of transformational and participative leadership frameworks ensures that aggressive or highly masculine traits are no longer a prerequisite for administrative progress.

Surprisingly, Education and Work Experience did not display significant direct effects on women's career success. This stands in contrast to classic human capital theories and the empirical findings of Ramli et al. [19] and Rowley et al. [20], which position education and experience as core pillars of career growth. This divergence may be due to structural ceilings or highly homogenized educational backgrounds within the specific institution studied. Moreover, formal education represents only an initial entry barrier; its direct influence on promotions tends to depreciate over time relative to ongoing professional skill updates [38]. The lack of direct impact from work experience can also be explained by the rapid obsolescence of legacy skills in the face of sudden technological changes and digitalization in higher education. Under these modern conditions, agile upskilling and current specialized technical knowledge hold greater weight than simple organizational tenure. Furthermore, individual capability profiles and demographic factors (such as age) can absorb or overshadow the isolated effects of work experience.

6. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT

Based on these conclusions, the following strategic interventions are recommended for university administrators and policymakers:

- **Work-Life Integration Policies:** Implement institutional frameworks that allow female staff to effectively balance professional and familial duties. This should include formalized options for remote work, telecommuting, and flexible flextime scheduling.
- **Trait-Based Reward Structures:** Systematically incentivize high conscientiousness by designing performance-appraisal systems that explicitly recognize and reward accountability, meticulousness, and sustained project discipline.
- **Interpersonal Competency Training:** Provide targeted professional development programs centered on emotional intelligence, advanced communication, and collaborative team-building to leverage the positive impact of agreeableness.
- **Career Path Clarification:** Enhance career motivation by establishing transparent, objective progression pathways, setting clear milestones, and offering robust institutional mentorship.
- **Public Service Orientation:** Nurture public service motivation through values-driven leadership, internal recognition programs, and both tangible and intangible rewards that celebrate contributions to the academic community.
- **Family Support Infrastructure:** Mitigate work-family friction for mothers by providing structural support, such as on-site or subsidized childcare facilities and parental leave accommodations.
- **Mental Health and Well-being Initiatives:** Establish comprehensive institutional wellness programs, including confidential stress-management counseling and psychological support, to mitigate workplace anxiety and promote emotional stability.

7. LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study focused on a specific subset of individual-level characteristics within a single institution. Its cross-sectional design does not permit causal conclusions, so the reported paths should be interpreted as associations. In

addition, all variables were measured by self-report, the response rate was 74%, and the sample of 74 participants is modest for a model with 15 predictors, which may limit statistical power and the stability of the estimates. Future research should expand the empirical scope by examining organizational structure variables, macroeconomic factors, and specific technical skill sets. Longitudinal and cross-organizational comparative studies across different universities or international boundaries would greatly enrich the generalizability of these dynamics. Finally, future researchers are encouraged to conduct post-implementation evaluations of family-supportive policies to empirically measure their direct efficacy in enhancing the objective and subjective career success of female academic and administrative professionals.

Authors' Contributions

All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Declaration of Generative AI Use

During the preparation of this work, the authors used AI to improve the language and readability of the manuscript. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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Declaration of Competing Interests

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Ethics Considerations

This study was a non-interventional, anonymous questionnaire survey of university staff and did not involve any clinical procedures or the collection of identifying or sensitive personal data; therefore, formal approval from an ethics committee was not obtained. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Participation was voluntary, all participants were informed of the aims of the study and gave informed consent before completing the questionnaire, and they were free to withdraw at any time. The questionnaires were completed anonymously, the confidentiality of the data was maintained, and the results were reported only in aggregate form.

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