

## Title Page

### The title of the article

The effects of decent work and social support on enhancing collective psychological ownership among young adult social workers

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### Authorship

Xuebing Su was responsible for designing the study, conducting data collection and data analysis, drafting and revising the article.

Victor Wong was responsible for co-designing the study, conducting data collection, and co-drafting and revising the article.

### Declaration of Conflicting Interests

There is no conflict of interest to declare.

## **Ethics approval statement & consent form**

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Hong Kong Baptist University (project code HASC/18-19/0183 approved on 25 October 2018). All participants were well informed about the objectives of the research and signed a consent form before joining the research.

## **Data availability statement**

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding authors upon reasonable request.

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## **The effects of decent work and social support on enhancing collective psychological ownership among young adult social workers**

## **Abstract**

It has been a pronounced concern for social service organizations on how to foster a sense of co-ownership among their employees. A total of 937 valid questionnaires were collected among social worker participants aged 21-29 working in three different places of China, namely, Hong Kong, Shenzhen, and Guangzhou. By confirming the hypotheses, the findings revealed that decent work and social support were positively associated with the collective psychological ownership (CPO) held by young adult social workers, and decent work enhanced CPO shared by them through an indirect mechanism of enhancing their social support at work. This is the first-ever study providing empirical evidence to support the association of decent work and social support with CPO among young adult employees in organizational context. The findings of this study can help inform the development of human resources management strategies for cultivating CPO, justify and expand

the promotion of decent work in conjunction with the framework of psychology of working theory and interpersonal perspective, and inspire relevant research and practice with regard to the personal development of young adult social workers and the sustainable development of social service organizations.

**Keywords:** collective psychological ownership, decent work, organizational development, psychology of working theory, social support, social workers

### **Teaser Text**

In the current rapidly changing world, social workers are faced with many contextual constraints which are compromising their sense of sharedness or co-ownership towards their employer organizations and driving them to consider quitting their jobs. A growing number of empirical studies have supported the positive impact of collective psychological ownership (CPO) on reducing the negative wellbeing experienced by social workers such as turnover intention, burnout and health problems, and enhancing their positive wellbeing such as work engagement. Using a cross-sectional study with a sample of 937 valid questionnaires collected among young adult social workers aged 21-29 working at different sizes of social service organizations in three places of China, this study revealed that decent work and social support at work were both positively associated with CPO, and decent work showed an indirect effect on fostering CPO through the mechanism of enhancing social support. The findings of this study are expected to inform the development of human resources management strategies for cultivating CPO, to help justify and expand the promotion of decent work in organizational contexts, and to inspire relevant research and practice with regard to the personal development of young adult social workers and the sustainable development of social service organizations.

Driven by professional values and ethics, social workers are employed to design and deliver service to diverse population groups, including children and youth in disadvantaged circumstances, adults with mental health challenges, older people with chronic illness, etc. (Mor Barak et al., 2001; Su, 2020). Situated in times of crises such as pandemic-driven hardship, social workers are suffering from increasing workload, which may amplify their likelihood of burnout and turnover intentions (Mercado et al., 2022). Recent research studies have suggested that developing a sense of collective psychological ownership (CPO) among social workers, which denotes the extent to which they jointly own their working environment, can help enhance the workplace wellbeing of social workers and sustain organizational development (Su and Ng, 2018, 2019). The term CPO highlights workers' co-ownership towards their working environment in terms of shared decision-making and shared hardship endurance (Su and Ng, 2018), which has sparked a keen research interest in studying the impact of this concept on employees' workplace wellbeing and organizational management particularly in Chinese cultures, where collective interests, cohesion, hard work, persistence, and shared values are emphasized (Arat and Kerelian, 2019; Jaw et al., 2007). Chinese cultures emphasize group orientation (Lockett, 1988) and efforts made by each individual through cooperation for yielding a collective benefit for all parties at work (Keegan, 2022). Organizational leaders are also expected to build cohesion among team members for promoting a more engaging working environment that articulates a collective purpose and mission of the organization, and promotes shared decision making in achieving shared goals (Walumba and Lawler, 2003). It echoes an old Chinese saying that "everyone gathers firewood and the flame is high". A growing number of empirical studies have supported the positive impact of CPO on reducing the negative wellbeing experienced by social workers such as turnover

intention, burnout and health problems, and enhancing their positive wellbeing such as work engagement (Ng and Su, 2018; Su et al., 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2021d).

Faced with increasing challenges imposed on sustainable organizational development, social service organizations desire for evidence-based knowledge and skillset to promote CPO among their younger social worker employees (Jiang and Jiang, 2022; Liang et al., 2021) in particular, who are largely placed in a relatively weaker position as compared with their senior counterparts (Su et al., 2022a). The rise of a psychological construct of decent work (Duffy et al., 2016, 2017), which highlights an aspired and favorable working environment in terms of five dimensions, namely, safe working conditions, healthcare access, adequate compensation, free time and rest, and complementary values, may help fill in this research gap. The promotion of decent work contexts characterized by both security and inclusiveness may be conducive to sustaining both personal and organizational development and enhance workers' intention to develop a sense of sharedness (Duffy et al., 2017; International Labour Organization, 1999). Decent work may also lead to positive effects on interpersonal relationship, such as enhancing people's social connection, which may further foster their positive work behaviours (Allan et al., 2020; Su et al., 2022a). Informed by the lens of decent work and the interpersonal perspective, this study aims to examine how decent work and social support in social service organizations may foster the cultivation of CPO among young adult social workers.

### **Collective psychological ownership held by young adult social workers**

The term collective psychological ownership (CPO) has recently attracted growing academic attention in organizational studies (Pierce and Jussila, 2010; Ng and Su, 2018; Su and Ng, 2018). There existed two streams of studies on CPO, namely, territorial notion versus non-territorial notion. Territorial psychological ownership theory denotes that people formulate

individual or collective sense of ownership over a target of possession (Pierce and Jussila, 2010). Such a territorial notion may lead to territorial behaviours such as groupthink, avoidance of innovation, and injustice (Pierce and Jussila, 2010; Su et al., 2021b). To counteract the negative effects of territoriality, Su and Ng (2018) have incorporated a sharedness perspective (Schmid et al., 2013) to redefine CPO as a sense shared by co-workers that they jointly own their working units, groups or organizations. This refined CPO is operationalized by a statistically sound bifactor model with a general factor of co-ownership and two specific factors of shared decision-making and shared hardship endurance (Su and Ng, 2018). According to Su et al. (2021b), on the conceptual level, such a non-territorial notion of CPO can be a drive for sustainable organizational development in different cultural contexts under the condition that a ‘non-exclusionary sharedness’ (Schmid et al., 2013) or participatory management (Grille et al., 2015) is valued or aspired in these contexts. Su and her colleagues have initiated a new stream of studies regarding the effects of CPO, and confirmed the potentials of CPO on enhancing employees’ wellbeing in the cultural contexts where collective values are highly valued such as mainland China (Ng and Su, 2018; Su, 2020; Su and Ng, 2018, 2019) and in those contexts where there is a fusion of both individualistic and collectivistic cultures, such as Macau and Hong Kong, two special administrative regions of China (Su et al., 2021a, 2022b). Their empirical findings have revealed that CPO can enhance work engagement (Ng and Su, 2018; Su and Ng, 2019; Su et al., 2021a), foster job satisfaction (Su et al., 2021b), reduce burnout (Su and Ng, 2019; Su et al., 2020), and decrease turnover intention (Su, 2020; Su et al., 2021c) among social workers. Moreover, they have revealed that CPO has positive effects on reducing turnover intention of social workers at both individual (Su et al., 2021c) and group levels (Su et al., 2021d).

Although young adult social workers are the future hope of social service organizations and the social work profession, they nonetheless take most of the frontline service workload, earn less, and face more unsatisfactory working conditions (Su and Ng, 2019; Su et al., 2020, 2021a). Nevertheless, they are still showing their strong desire to aspire for accomplishments and exercise their professionalism (Loughlin and Barling, 2001; Su et al., 2022a). To aspire for a sustainable career, a strong sense of CPO shared by young adult social workers with their co-workers may be favorable for enhancing their teamwork and work commitment (Su et al., 2021d). To cultivate a high level of CPO is deemed important for sustaining their personal development, promoting organizational development, and ensuring the delivery of quality service. Yet, the issue of studying the antecedents of CPO is still under-examined in existing literature. Taking the lens of decent work, the interpersonal perspective and the non-territorial notion of CPO can help fill in this research gap.

### **Developing decent work with an interpersonal perspective for enhancing CPO**

Some studies suggested that developing favorable job-related conditions such as enhancing job resources, fostering job autonomy, developing friendly atmosphere, providing positive feedback, and offering opportunities for promotion may enhance the CPO held by social workers (Ng and Su, 2018; Liang et al., 2021; Su et al., 2021a). Informed by a person-job fit perspective, these studies emphasize the effects of the congruence between employees' personal characteristics and job-related characteristics (i.e. job demands and job resources) on employees' organizational behaviours, yet under-addresses the constraining effects of contextual and structural factors (Autin and Duffy, 2019). The rise of the lens of decent work can help address the impact of working conditions on employees with due emphasis given to a psychosocial perspective, and offer space to discuss the exercise of personal agency in negotiating the contextual constraints and practicing

the visions and missions of the organizations (Su et al., 2022a). The decent work notion was originally proposed by the International Labour Organization (1999, 2012) as a multidimensional lens for reviewing whether working conditions are decent including union density, occupational safety, legal protection for workers, availability of social security, etc. Nowadays, the decent work notion is enlisted as one of the important goals to call for global actions to promote sustainable development in accordance with the Decent Work Agenda (DWA) and realize four main values underlying the ILO's actions, namely, freedom, equity, security, and human dignity (International Labor Organization, 1999:3). In addition to reviewing the current state of working conditions, the decent work notion also highlights the importance of co-constructing aspired working conditions for promoting the main values advocated by ILO (Webster et al., 2015).

The decent work notion has been further refined by Duffy (2016), who has developed the Decent Work Scale (DWS) to measure aspired working conditions from the viewpoints of employees, which consists of five dimensions mentioned above (Duffy et al., 2016, 2017). Duffy's decent work notion was later incorporated into the psychology of working theory (Duffy et al., 2016, 2017; Blustein et al., 2019), which turns out to expand the psychosocial lens of decent work that highlights the subjective experiences and perceptions of employees. The psychology of working theory centralizes the role played by the five decent work dimensions in relation to counteracting the constraining effects of contextual and structural factors such as economic constraints and marginalization, satisfying various needs of workers, and enhancing employees' workplace wellbeing and self-fulfillment (Blustein et al., 2019; Duffy et al., 2016, 2019). Embedded in the psychology of working theory, Duffy's decent work notion has sparked a keen academic interest in investigating the influences of decent work on employees' work-related psychological state and behaviours in diverse cultural contexts, ranging from western societies,



including United States (e.g. Allan et al., 2020), European countries (e.g. Di Fabio et al.2021), and Australia (e.g. McIlveen et al., 2021) to non-western societies, including Korea (e.g. Kim et al., 2019), India (e.g. Kashyap et al., 2022) and China (e.g. Wang et al., 2019).

Theoretically speaking, the promotion of decent work with a psychosocial perspective is conducive to cultivating a non-territorial notion of CPO among young adult social workers. First, the decent work notion developed by Duffy emphasized the element of inclusiveness at work, which is consistent with ‘non-exclusionary sharedness’ (Schmid et al., 2013; Su et al., 2021b) and with the non-territorial notion of CPO. Second, people working in a favorable working environment may be more likely to develop a sense of co-ownership, as such an environment can empower them to participate and share experiences. For example, a recent study (Sheng and Zhou, 2021) conducted in mainland China has revealed that decent work can enhance the voice behavior among a group of employees from different types of business organizations in terms of an increased sharing of their ideas, opinions and information. Another empirical study conducted in United States (Duffy et al., 2019) has revealed that decent work strongly predicted a diverse group of employees’ self-determination needs satisfaction by offering them a sense of autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Conceptually speaking, voice behavior and self-determination needs satisfaction are related to CPO, as these concepts all favor the exercise of employees’ exercise of personal agency in organizational contexts, although CPO emphasizes more about the exercise of employees’ collective agency in relation to sharing responsibilities and showing commitment among co-workers.

Third, according to the psychology of working theory, decent work conditions may lead to positive effects on interpersonal relationship in organizational contexts, which may further substantiate the positive impact of decent work on people’s organizational behaviours and

wellbeing (Blustein et al., 2017, 2019). For example, decent work can satisfy employees' needs for social connection, which may further enhance their sense of sharedness (Autin et al., 2021; Masdonati et al., 2021). This argument is supported by some recent studies which revealed that people working in decent work conditions are more likely to enjoy more social connection and thus show more positive work behaviors (Allan et al., 2020; Su et al., 2022a). In the social work profession, the influence of social support as a mechanism for manifesting the effects of decent work on cultivating CPO may be particularly obvious, as social support among co-workers and between supervisors and supervisees is highly valued in this profession and taken as an important lever for reducing the negative state and maintaining the positive state of social workers at work (Collins, 2008; Su et al., 2020). However, empirical study is still needed to confirm the direct effects of decent work on enhancing CPO among young adult social workers and its indirect effects through the mechanism of increasing social support. The research hypotheses of the study were thus formulated as follows:

- H1. Decent work is positively associated with CPO among young adult social workers
- H2. Social support is positively associated with CPO among young adult social workers
- H3. Decent work influences CPO through an indirect mechanism of enhancing social support among young adult social workers

## **Method**

### **Sample**

Table 1 presents the sociodemographic information of the participants, who were young adult social workers aged 21-29, among which 36.83% working in Hong Kong as a special administrative region of China, and 30.74% and 32.44% in Shenzhen and Guangzhou respectively.

which are two southern coastal cities of the Guangdong Province, China. The gender imbalance of participants with 81.1% female workers and 18.9% male workers was consistent with the fact revealed by a nationally representative sample of social workers in China (Su et al., 2021b). The mean age was 25.91 years ( $SD=2.32$ ) and 59.5% of participants had a bachelor or master's degree. Regarding job position rank, 69.4% of the participants reported their job positions as junior rank and 29.2% as middle rank. The distribution of the job positions undertaken by young adult social workers in the current study was also consistent with that revealed in a large-scale study with a nationally representative sample of social workers in China (Su et al., 2021b). The participants were serving in diverse fields, including youth service (17.7%), elderly service (16.8%), family service (11.3%), and community service (10.2%).

<Insert Table 1 about here>

## **Instruments**

Decent work was measured by the 15-item Decent Work Scale developed by Duffy et al. (2017) and validated by Su et al. (2022) in Chinese contexts, which consists of aforementioned five factors, and each factor was measured by three items. Responses to these 15 items were collected by a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). The Cronbach's alpha for the 15 items was .84. Social support was measured by eight items with the first set of four items measuring social support from supervisors and the second set measuring social support from co-workers, which were developed and validated in Chinese by Su et al. (2021a). The Cronbach's alpha for the eight items was .93. Collective psychological ownership was measured by the seven-item Chinese version of a bi-factor scale developed and validated by Su and Ng (2018), which consists of a general factor of a sense of co-ownership, and two specific factors of shared decision-making and shared hardship endurance. The general factor

has one item and each of the two specific factors has three items. Participants were asked to respond by a four-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (I hardly feel this way) to 4 (I strongly feel this way). The Cronbach's alpha for the CPO scale was .92.

The scales used in this study are epistemologically coherent for two reasons. First, all three scales highlight the subjective experience and personal perceptions of participants in organizational contexts. The five decent work dimensions operationalize the participants' aspired working conditions. Social support items measure the participants' perceived social support they receive from supervisors and co-workers. The collective psychological ownership scale assesses the participants' perceived sharedness in relation to decision-making and hardship endurance among co-workers. Second, the three concepts, namely decent work, social support, and CPO, all conceptually promote the exercise of employees' shared agency for constructing an enabling and empowering working environment and enhancing their workplace wellbeing. In addition, we controlled some covariates which were suggested to influence the CPO held by social workers (Su et al., 2021a), including gender, age, educational attainment and job position. We classified job positions into four ranks, namely junior rank (1), middle rank (2), senior rank (3), and chief executive officer or equivalent position (4).

## **Data collection**

This is a cross-sectional study using cluster sampling procedures at organizational level, which was conducted from June to December 2021 in three places of China, namely, Hong Kong, Shenzhen, and Guangzhou. Hong Kong has developed the social work profession since the 1960s (Lai and Chan, 2009), and thus the development of this profession in this place is more mature than other parts of China. Although not as mature as Hong Kong, the social work profession in Shenzhen and Guangzhou has been developing fast in the past decade and enjoying more resources

than other places of mainland China. In terms of cultural background, although three selected places are all Chinese societies, this study still covers a variety of cultures, as Shenzhen and Guangzhou are dominated by collectivistic cultures (Cai et al., 2018) whereas Hong Kong is characterized by a fusion of individualism and collectivism (Hui and Villareal, 1989).

In Hong Kong, there are two types of social service organizations employing social workers, namely non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the Social Welfare Department (SWD), a government department of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. Based on the membership list of NGOs available from the Hong Kong Council of Social Service, we categorized all NGOs into three types in accordance to the number of social workers employed, i.e., small- (1–30), medium- (31–99), and large- ( $\geq 100$ ) size organizations. We randomly selected 40% of each category of NGOs for inviting their social workers to join the study. We also invited the biggest social workers association with their members working in the Social Welfare Department to support this study. In Guangzhou and Shenzhen, the organizations in these two places employing social workers to provide services are all called social service organizations (SSOs). By the end of 2018, we retrieved the lists of SSOs in Guangzhou and Shenzhen from the government website using the software called Python. In June 2021, we reviewed the lists by deleting those closed-down organizations and adding newly established organizations accordingly. All listed SSOs were categorized into, small- (1-30), medium- (31-99), and large- ( $\geq 100$ ) size organizations in terms of manpower size. Through random sampling, 40% of each category of SSOs was sampled for invitation for joining the study.

With the consent of sampled organizations, young adult social workers aged 21–29 were invited to fill in an online questionnaire. Based on voluntary individual participation, written informed consent was collected from each participant via the Qualtrics system in a confidential

manner. To ensure that the data collected from large-size organizations including the SWD in Hong Kong would not dominate the results, a ceiling of 20 completed questionnaires was set for each of sampled organizations. In total, we received 974 questionnaires among which 937 were valid questionnaires without containing any missing data in the items measuring CPO. Prior research ethics approval was granted by the research ethics committee of the university where the second author is affiliated with.

### **Data analyses**

We conducted Harman's single-factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003) to statistically assess the extent to which common method variance may be a problem. To gain a preliminary understanding of how the variables (i.e., decent work, social support, and CPO) related to each other, we conducted Pearson's correlation analyses among the participants. We next used the PROCESS macro in SPSS developed by Hayes (2017) to test the hypotheses and in particular the significance of social support as a psychological mechanism in the relationship between decent work and CPO. Following the procedures outlined by Hayes (2017), the 5000 bootstrapping resamples were used to test the effects of decent work on CPO, both directly and indirectly through social support. According to Hayes (2017), indirect effect is considered significant if the 95% bias corrected and accelerated CI for the indirect effect do not include zero.

### **Results**

The results of Harman's single factor test showed no problem with common method bias in this data since the total variance extracted by one factor is 35.27% and it is less than the recommended threshold of 50%. Table 2 shows the results of Pearson's correlation analyses. The results of bi-variate correlations suggested that decent work was positively and moderately correlated with social support and CPO. Besides decent work, social support was also positively

and moderately correlated with CPO. Besides decent work and social support, CPO was positively but weakly correlated with job position, and also negatively but weakly correlated with educational attainment.

<Insert Table 2 about here>

Bootstrap test results are presented in Table 3. Decent work was a significant predictor of social support ( $a=.41$ ,  $SE=.02$ ,  $p<.001$ ) after controlling for sociodemographic characteristics and job position. The coefficient  $a$  reflected the direct effect of decent work on social support within the path model. In the pathway process, both decent work ( $c'=.08$ ,  $SE=.01$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and social support ( $b=.21$ ,  $SE=.02$ ,  $p<.001$ ) were significant predictors of CPO after controlling for sociodemographic characteristics and job position. The coefficient  $c'$  reflected the direct effect of decent work and  $b$  reflected the direct effect of social support on CPO within the path model. The indirect effect of decent work on CPO through the mechanism of social support was tested by using bootstrap standard errors and confidence intervals (CI). Zero does not fall between the lower and upper bound of the 95% CI (lower 95% CI=.07 and upper 95% CI=.09). The indirect effect of decent work ( $ab$ ) on CPO was .09, while the total effect ( $c=ab+c'$ ) was .17. Therefore, the proportion of indirect effect of decent work on CPO through the mechanism of enhancing social support, named as the variance accounted for (VAF) was 53%, which was larger than 20% (Hair et al., 2016). Collectively the results supported for the existence of an indirect effect for the hypotheses. Figure 1 presents the regression coefficients for the different relationships in the pathway model.

<Insert Table 3 about here>

<Insert Figure 1 about here>

## Discussion

Based on a cross-sectional study with a sample of 937 valid questionnaires collected among young adult social workers aged 21-29 working at different sizes of social service organizations in three places of China, this study confirmed the three hypotheses and revealed that decent work and social support at work were both positively associated with CPO, and decent work showed an indirect effect on fostering CPO through the mechanism of enhancing social support. The findings of this study are expected to inform the development of human resources management strategies for cultivating CPO, to help justify and expand the promotion of decent work in conjunction with the framework of psychology of working theory and a non-territorial notion of psychological ownership theory in organizational contexts, to enhance social support at work for substantiating the effects of decent work on CPO, and to inform relevant research and practice with regard to the personal development of young adult social workers and the sustainable development of social service organizations.

First, the findings revealed the positive effects of promoting decent work and enhancing social support on cultivating CPO among young adult social workers, which will inform social service organizations and the social work profession to develop new policies and strategic measures for enhancing CPO shared by social workers. This study addresses the concern of social service organizations regarding how to cultivate a non-territorial notion of CPO characterized by shared decision-making and shared hardship endurance. The findings will suggest active actions to be planned and taken to promote decent work and enhance social support enjoyed by workers in general and young frontline social workers in specific for cultivating their CPO. This study advances our understanding derived from some recent studies (Jiang and Jiang, 2022; Liang et al., 2021), which focused on studying the positive effects of job resources and person-organization



value congruence on CPO. The findings of these existing studies however confined the development of CPO to the person-job-fit perspective and may thus under-address the exercise of ‘personal and shared agency’ in organizational contexts (Autin and Duffy, 2019). The findings of the present study may instead empower the social service organizations to think and act beyond the traditional person-job-fit perspective. As the promotion of decent work aims to call for collective action to create an inclusionary working environment with an emphasis placed on global values, including freedom, equity, security, and human dignity (ILO, 1999), to cultivate CPO conceptualized and practiced in a non-territorial manner, which is aligned with the notion of decent work and the interpersonal mechanism of social support, are expected to enhance the personal and shared agency of workers in organizational contexts.

Second, the findings of this study are conducive to cementing the link between the development of social service organizations and the Decent Work Agenda, which will inform the formulation of effective organizational strategies for promoting the sustainable organizational development. In the current rapidly changing world, social workers are faced with many contextual constraints manifested in different forms such as ethical challenges, policy shortcomings, resources inadequacy, work injustice, excessive workload, and economic constraints, etc., which are compromising their sense of sharedness or co-ownership towards their employer organizations and driving them to consider quitting their jobs (Agnimitra and Sharma, 2022; Golightley and Holloway, 2020). The promotion of decent work together with an interpersonal mechanism of social support may provide an alternative pathway for enhancing collective psychological ownership shared by social workers and support the sustainable development of social service organizations. To interpret the findings on the other way around, this study also helps justify the promotion of decent work in social service organizations. In view that developing CPO in

organizational contexts characterized by shared responsibilities and commitment held by employees towards their working environment is highly likely to be welcomed by the employer organizations, the findings of this study will help strengthen the rationale for promoting decent work in organizational contexts in relation to enhancing the CPO held by workers.

Third, the findings showed that social support can function as an indirect mechanism through which decent work can enhance CPO. So far, most of the existing studies on the effects of decent work were focused on the indirect effect of decent work on people's workplace wellbeing and self-fulfillment through personal mechanisms such as career adaptability and work volition understood as psychosocial or psychological resources beheld by individuals (Duffy et al., 2016; Savickas and Porfeli, 2012). By integrating the decent work notion with social support for enhancing CPO, this study advances our understanding in this area with empirical findings in the following ways. Decent work may lead to positive organizational outcomes by cultivating mutual support in interpersonal relationships at work, and the mutual support work climate will turn out promoting the cultivation of sharedness among co-workers. This finding is consistent with a pioneering study regarding social connection as an indirect mechanism that links up decent work with positive outcomes (Allan et al., 2020). This finding will also help expand the impact of the psychology of working theory on organizational development (Duffy et al., 2016), which centralizes the role played by decent work for enhancing workplace wellbeing and self-fulfillment of employees through promoting changes in employees' own career adaptability and work volition. The findings of this study suggest leading changes in organizations at interpersonal level, by means of enhancing social support as an alternative pathway for substantiating the positive impact of decent work. To emphasize the role of social support for promoting decent work in organizational contexts is in line with the Decent Work Agenda (International Labor Organization, 1999), which

highly values inclusiveness at work. Future empirical studies may consider incorporating social support as an interpersonal mechanism or as a mediator that links up decent work with positive work-related outcomes.

Fourth, the findings of this study shed new lights on supporting the development of young adult social workers in diverse social service organizations. As young employees may desire for more interaction and collaboration experiences at work, such as social connection, social recognition, and social support, it is deemed particularly important to promote decent work with an interpersonal perspective (Su et al., 2022a). The findings of this study may draw more insights for the social service organizations to develop management strategies targeting these social workers who are largely placed at the frontline. Besides promoting the five dimensions of decent work, social service organizations can also train up the staff with management roles to provide more support to their young frontline colleagues and to cultivate the organizational climate of working together. As young employees, such as nurses, teachers, counselors, etc. may similarly occupy less privileged positions in organization contexts, future studies are needed to verify the direct and indirect effects of decent work on a wide spectrum of young helping professionals.

Finally, the findings of this study will inform the future theoretical development of non-territorial ownership theory, the lens of decent work, and the interpersonal perspective and their integrated application to the social work profession and other human helping professions irrespective of age and rank differences, and also shed new lights on a new pathway for supporting the sustainable development of individual employees and the organizations. Future research studies are suggested to investigate the impact of promoting decent work on cultivating CPO through the mechanism of enhancing social support, and examine some other interpersonal

dimensions other than social support such as teamwork (Tortia et al., 2022) and social recognition (Honneth, 2012), which may play a mediating role between decent work and CPO.

### **Limitations**

There are some limitations of this study that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the findings of the study are drawn from a sample collected in a cross-sectional survey in three selected places of China and thus the representativeness of the sample for the social work profession in Chinese contexts is compromised although random sampling procedures were used at organizational level. Second, the scales used to measure the major variables in the study were self-reported tools, which may lead to common method bias in the findings. Although Harman's single-factor test was adopted to assess the extent of common method variance of the study, yet the sensitivity of the test is still doubted (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Third, additional data for differentiating the results for three places are lacking in the current study. Fourth, although this study on social work profession was conducted in two cities in mainland China dominated by collectivistic cultures and in Hong Kong, a society characterized by a fusion of individualistic and collectivistic cultures, the findings are still confined to Chinese contexts, which will limit the generalizability of the findings to other human helping professions and to other cultural contexts. Therefore, future empirical studies are needed to investigate whether decent work can enhance CPO through the interpersonal mechanism of social support with longitudinal data collected from multiple nationally representative samples.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, by confirming the hypotheses, the results of the current study revealed that decent work and social support were positively associated with the collective psychological ownership held by young adult social workers, and decent work can enhance CPO through the

indirect mechanism of social support. The findings of this study can inform the development of human resources management strategies for cultivating CPO, justify and expand the promotion of decent work in organizational contexts, and inform relevant research and practice with regard to the personal development of young adult social workers and the sustainable development of social service organizations. More relevant studies are suggested to conduct in social work and other human helping professions by integrating the application of the non-territorial ownership theory, the lens of decent work, and the interpersonal perspective.

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**Figure 1.** The indirect effect of decent work on CPO through social support

**Table 1**

Sociodemographic information of participants ( $N=937$ ).

	<b>ALL participants <math>N=937</math></b>	<b>Participants from Hong Kong <math>n=345</math> (36.82%)</b>	<b>Participants from Shenzhen <math>n=288</math> (30.74%)</b>	<b>Participants from Guangzhou <math>n=304</math> (32.44%)</b>
<b>Gender</b>				
<i>Female</i>	760 (81.1)	252 (73.0)	235 (81.6)	273 (89.8)
<i>Male</i>	177 (18.9)	93 (27.0)	53 (18.4)	31 (10.2)
<b>Age</b>				
<i>21</i>	34 (3.6)	6 (1.7)	15 (5.2)	13 (4.3)
<i>22</i>	49 (5.2)	9 (2.6)	20 (6.9)	20 (6.6)
<i>23</i>	85 (9.1)	26 (7.5)	30 (10.4)	29 (9.5)
<i>24</i>	96 (10.2)	32 (9.3)	27 (9.4)	37 (12.2)
<i>25</i>	146 (15.6)	51 (14.8)	46 (16.0)	49 (16.1)
<i>26</i>	117 (12.5)	37 (10.7)	35 (12.2)	45 (14.8)
<i>27</i>	111 (11.8)	40 (11.6)	39 (13.5)	32 (10.5)
<i>28</i>	140 (14.9)	67 (19.4)	40 (13.9)	33 (10.9)
<i>29</i>	159 (17.0)	77 (22.3)	36 (12.5)	46 (15.1)
<b>Educational attainment</b>				
<i>Secondary school or below</i>	11 (1.2)	0 (0)	2 (.7)	9 (3.0)
<i>Associate degree</i>	369 (39.4)	91 (26.4)	108 (37.5)	170 (55.9)
<i>Bachelor's degree</i>	472 (50.4)	184 (53.3)	169 (58.7)	119 (39.1)
<i>Master's degree</i>	85 (9.1)	70 (20.3)	9 (3.1)	6 (2.0)
<b>Position rank</b>				
<i>Junior</i>	650 (69.4)	190 (55.1)	231 (80.2)	229 (75.3)

<i>Middle</i>	274 (29.2)	151 (43.8)	52 (18.1)	71 (23.4)
<i>Senior</i>	7 (.7)	3 (.9)	0	4 (1.3)
<i>CEO</i>	6 (.6)	1 (.3)	5 (1.7)	0
<b>Fields of service</b>				
Family service	106 (11.3)	56 (16.2)	11 (3.8)	39 (12.8)
Elderly service	157 (16.8)	67 (19.4)	29 (10.1)	61 (20.1)
Disability service	47 (5.0)	14 (4.1)	9 (3.1)	24 (7.9)
Woman service	24 (2.6)	3 (.9)	17 (5.9)	4 (1.3)
Child service	81 (8.6)	52 (15.1)	13 (4.5)	16 (5.3)
Youth service	166 (17.7)	83 (24.1)	36 (12.5)	47 (15.5)
Corrective service	23 (2.5)	0	23 (8.0)	0
Drug rehabilitation services	39 (4.2)	2 (.6)	27 (9.4)	10 (3.3)
Community service	96 (10.2)	0	52 (18.1)	44 (14.5)
Medical service	42 (4.5)	30 (8.7)	8 (2.8)	4 (1.3)
Others*	156 (16.6)	38 (11)	63 (21.9)	55 (18.1)

Note. \* In Hong Kong, other fields of service included services for ethnic minorities and mental rehabilitation; in Shenzhen and Guangzhou, other fields of services included rescue service, corporate services, special care and placement service, and services for evaluating and supporting the development of social service organizations.

**Table 2**

Intercorrelations for the variables under study ( $N=937$ ).

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.Decent work (15-105)	1						
2.Gender (0=female)	-.01	1					
3.Age (years)	.01	.04	1				
4.Educational attainment (1-5)	.00	-.03	.27***	1			
5.Position (1-4)	.05	.05	.27***	.20***	1		
6.Social support (8-56)	.55***	.02	.02	.07*	.05	1	
7.CPO (6-24)	.43***	.02	-.00	-.09**	.11**	.51***	1

Note. \* $p<.05$ , \*\* $p<.01$ , \*\*\*  $p<.001$ .

**Table 3**

Model coefficients for testing the indirect effect of decent work on CPO through social support ( $N=937$ )

Consequent	
M (Social Support)	Y (CPO)

Correlates		Coefficient	SE	p		Coefficient	SE	p
X (Decent work)	a	.41	.02	<.001	c'	.08	.01	<.001
Social Support		—	—	—	b	.21	.02	<.001
Covariates								
Gender		.60	.58	.30		.03	.30	.92
Age		-.03	.10	.80		-.01	.02	.89
Educational attainment		.88	.36	<.05		-.88	.19	<.001
Job position		.15	.45	.74		.82	.24	<.001
				R <sup>2</sup> =.56				
				F (5, 931)=84.12				
				p<.001				