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THE CONTIGUITY BETWEEN WORK HASSLE AND CAREER PLATEAU WITH THE MEDIATING ROLE OF CAREER RESILIENCE AMONG SALES REPRESENTATIVES

S. Suganya Bharathi^{1*}, G.H. Kerinab Beenu², P. Priyadarsini³, I.M. Christina Febiula⁴, Dr. Sasikala R⁵, M. Lishmah Dominic⁶

¹Assistant Professor, School of Law, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Kattankulathur, Chengalpattu District, Tamil Nadu, India, Email Id: suganyas5@srmist.edu.in, Orcid: 0000-0003-2715-2357

²Professor, Department of Management Sciences, Velammal Engineering College, Ambattur- Chennai- 66, Email Id: kerinabbeenu@velammal.edu.in, Orcid: 0000-0001-5759-0089

³Professor & Head, Department of Management Studies, Tagore Engineering College, Tamil Nadu, Email Id: hod.mba@tagore-engg.ac.in, Orcid: 0000-0003-2784-8733

⁴Associate Professor, School of Management, S.A. College of Arts & Science, Chennai, Email: christinafebiulaim@sacas.ac.in, Orcid: 0000-0002-8293-3204

⁵Professor & HOD, Department of MBA, Prathyusha Engineering College, Poonamallee -Tiruvallur High Road, Aranyoyal Kuppam, Thiruvallur, Chennai, India Email: r.sasikala151272@gmail.com, Orcid: 0000-0002-9351-1488

⁶Assistant Professor, Department of Management Studies, PSNA College of Engineering and Technology, Dindigul, Email: lishmahdominicm@psnacet.edu.in, Orcid Id: 0009-0002-6463-7951

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Corresponding Author: S. Suganya Bharathi
(suganyas5@srmist.edu.in)

ABSTRACT

In the age of reengineering, career advancement is frequently halted by organizational restructuring, which results in stress, professional plateaus, and deteriorating performance. Because there aren't any new contributions, plateaued personnel are under more strain, which worries management. This study looks at resilience as a mediator in stress management and how career plateaus affect occupational stress in sales officers. The research study was selected via convenience sampling, and 390 responses were received from salespeople. The findings reveal a significant correlation between job stress and career plateau, with a correlation value of 0.295. The professional plateau is the only one that has a weak association with job stress. The mediator's career resilience acts as a partial mediator in the study. The research provides useful information regarding the potential applications of equity theories to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and the long-term lifespan of employees. To put it short, this study intends to improve our comprehension of the nuances related to career plateaus in the workplace by offering useful data that will support both theoretical developments and long-term workplace well-being. Our research suggests that career plateaus exert a less adverse effect on employees' views of organizational fairness and their stress levels at work coupled with a robust resilience ability. Thus, via training and mentorship, organizations may aid employees who have encountered a professional plateau in restoring their confidence and formulating career

strategies. Positive career resilience quantifies an employee's capacity to contribute additional value to the organization.

KEYWORDS: Stress, Hierarchical Plateau, Job Content Plateau, Professional Plateau, Organisational Plateau, sales officers.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Savickas et al. (2009), companies under the contemporary employment model periodically remodel and trim their workforces to be flexible and responsive to shifts. Numerous interwoven aspects, such as the unstable economy, improved technology, and a more diversified workplace, have combined to create what has been called a chaotic, unpredictable, and complex professional environment. Employees are more frequently confronted with the real-world issues of the sole vector for advancement, limited room for expansion, and limited mobility in the slow-moving market environment brought on by COVID-19. Employees are more likely to experience the phenomena of a career plateau as a result of these challenges and roadblocks in their professional growth path (Yang et al., 2019). Employees who work repetitious duties and spend a long period in the same position are not developing their careers. Workers will perform worse at work if they feel that the company is unable to provide them with the right treatment, position, or even growth room (a hierarchical plateau). Staffers who have held an identical role for an extended period may become burnt out due to the work content (also known as the content plateau) that results from the growing division of labor in contemporary production. Employees who meet the requirements for the desired position but have little opportunity for promotion (organizational plateau) and those with an absence of workplace difficulties and a lack of learning opportunities that might reduce a person's employability and professional growth (professional plateau).

According to earlier research, there may be a strong correlation between a career plateau and persistent mental hardship (e.g., sadness, fatigue, anxiousness, or emotional exhaustion), which might endanger workers' well-being at work (Hu et al., 2022; Lin et al., 2018; Nachbagauer et al., 2002; Yang et al., 2018). The topic of employee well-being at work has received a great deal of scholarly interest, particularly in the wake of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) being announced (Kobal Grum et al., 2022; Campos-García et al., 2024; Grum et al., 2020; Chams et al., 2019)

Workplace features are easily linked to the psychological suffering that results from reaching a career plateau. The equity theory was put out by Adams in 1965, and it describes equity as a form of justice predicated on offerings or competence" (Adams., 1965). According to equity theory, people are worried about the justice of their social

interactions and assess justice by observing if the proportion of their contribution to their reward has changed. A feeling of unfairness impacts the disposition and output of an individual at work; if they believe their incentives are unfair, they will become stressed and attempt to make changes to make things more equitable. Researchers have started to focus on how individuals use a sense of fairness to create their group status in a particular circumstance (Adams., 1965; Lind., 2001). Within the work environment, the elements of employee perception are involved, such as seniority, education, work, experience, disposition, intellectual aptitude, originality, devotion to the group, and competencies. Perceived reward factors include seniority advantages, intrinsic incentives (such as a sense of proficiency and/or direction), ancillary benefits, status markers, work stability, professional growth, acknowledgment, a chance for personal growth, and involvement in significant choices) (Disley., 2009).

When it comes to organizational management, unjust procedures, and allocations first violate the rights of employees, and after that, they foster a feeling of unfairness by "comparing others," a persistently bad outcome that lowers performance and causes stress (Pritchard., 1969). Employees on a career plateau are dissatisfied with their current role within the company, the title they possess, and the work that they are qualified for. They experience a sense of injustice when they believe that their efforts and abilities are not valued, which eventually manifests itself in their slack behavior and negative work attitudes. Therefore, examining career plateaus from the standpoint of equity theory may help to clarify the intricate influencing process.

The study also looks at the integral role that professional resilience plays as a mediator in the direct association that exists between career plateau and occupational stress. The necessity of comprehending how people manage the complexities and difficulties that come with navigating their professional paths motivates research into the mediating mechanism of career resilience in the case of sales representatives. By viewing career resilience through the prism of the transactional theory of stress and coping (TTSC), one may examine in further detail how salespeople deal with the pressures that come with their line of work and get insight into the adaptive mechanisms that support long-term professional success.

Two important contributions are made by this study: it looks at the mediation mechanism and investigates the border conditions between career plateaus and workers' occupational stress. the initial

goal of this study is to investigate how employees' job stress is affected by four different types of career plateaus: hierarchical, job content, professional, and organizational. It offers insightful information about how the theories of equity might be applied to UN Sustainable Development Goals and endured longevity of employees. Secondly, the study methodically looks at how stressful work conditions and occupational stalemate are mediated by career resilience. In perspective, briefly, this study aims to enhance our understanding of the subtleties associated with career plateaus in the workplace by providing insightful information that will have practical applications in fostering long-term well-being at work as well as theoretical advancements.

1.1. Significance of the study

The world of sales is frequently fast-paced, stressful, and unexpected. Sales employees view promotions and moving up the corporate ladder as signs of achievement, however owing to certain conditions, this is not true for all organizations such as flattening hierarchies and haphazard career management in the workplace can result in career stagnation. When sales employees experience a career plateau, they lose their motivation to work in identical roles for lengthy periods. This may cause a salesperson to become less involved in the company, reduce productivity, show a lack of dedication to their work and career, decrease work engagement, and reduce sales which would be detrimental to the organization as a whole. Naturally, a career plateau will result in increased occupational stress, decreased job performance, burnout, and the decision to leave the company. Therefore, the reason for conducting this research was to gauge how salespeople regarded career plateaus and how they related to their level of workplace stress.

Recent data indicates that a major factor in salespeople's turnover is a lack of opportunity for professional growth and a general lack of appreciation. A fascinating piece regarding the relationship between turnover and a lack of opportunity for career advancement was published by Forbes a few years ago in 2017. They stated, "66% of employees say that if they didn't feel valued at work, they would probably quit." and there weren't enough opportunities for career development." In 2022, the percentage of salespeople stating they will resign due to a lack of professional advancements has increased to 79%.

2. HYPOTHESIS FRAMEWORK AND THE LITERARY REVIEW

2.1. Career Plateau and Occupational Stress

Yang (2019) conducted a literature study that revealed that prior research had concentrated mostly on two types of plateaus: hierarchical plateau and job content, or a combination of both with their effects on work performance, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, career intention, career stage, and intention to leave. Given the aforementioned limitations in the career plateau literature review, this study attempts to investigate career-related outcomes such as occupational stress under the influence of hierarchical plateau, job content plateau, and professional, and organizational plateaus. It also attempts to determine which plateau causes the greatest amount of stress in sales representative employees.

A career plateau occurs when there is very little chance of advancement through the ranks shortly. Feeling trapped in a position or work, feeling unfulfilled and bored all the time are signs of a professional plateau. Career plateau consists of different types according to Yang, (2019) out of which hierarchical plateau, job content, professional, and organizational plateau are explored in this study.

1. Hierarchical Plateau: According to Eisenberger et al (1986), people contribute at work with the hopes of receiving rewards like promotions. Promotional opportunities are less likely for staff members who are at the top of the hierarchy. The staff will feel that their efforts are not valued or acknowledged by the company if there is no opportunity for promotion.
2. Job Content Plateau: Employees experiencing a job content plateau may believe that their organizations are not providing enough demanding work, are unable to impart new information and skills, or are not living up to their expectations of having influence over choices and the environment. As a result, the mutually beneficial connection breaks down, and staff members feel abandoned by the company.
3. Professional Plateau: Employees experience a professional plateau where employment difficulties and an inability to acquire new skills would improve one's employability and professional growth in the future.
4. Organisational plateau: Employees under an organizational plateau feel an absence of professional growth opportunities and

employment difficulties that might dwindle a person's future employability.

Stress at work is a growing occupational health issue, but it can also lead to subtle signs of illness that affect personal health and productivity. There are many definitions of occupational stress. For example, occupational stress is the lack of harmony between an environment's demands (stresses) and an individual's ability to meet those demands. An occupational stressor is a stressor in the workplace that causes strain, psychological health issues, or overall well-being issues. Some of the sources of stress in the job are work connections (harmful or unfriendly interactions with colleagues, work and life balance, Isolation & unfair treatment, Overload (when workloads are excessive and time constraints are imposed) Job security (when you fear losing your job or it will become obsolete) Control (when you have no control over the way work is done) Resources & Communication (when you have the right training, equipment and resources) Pay & Benefits (when you benefit from the financial benefits of work) Stress has adverse health consequences. However, poor health is not always a symptom of stress in the workplace.

According to some research, a person's capacity to minimize the gap between their aspirations for their ideal work and the reality of their existing career is a key component of career happiness (Mihal et al., 1984). A person will get dissatisfied if they believe that expectation and reality differ. Furthermore, the higher the disparity, the higher the probability that the person may have intense stress responses (Janis & Mann, 1977). According to this definition of stress, a career plateau would result in stress if it was seen to pose a risk to a result (such as career development) that the person in question valued highly and sought (Elsass & Ralston, 1987). A career plateau is a vague condition. At what point does mobility in the future become unlikely? One argument is that a plateau eventually becomes apparent. Accordingly, persistent exposure to a perceived career gap will cause the perception of a career plateau and stress to progressively worsen (Elsass & Ralston, 1987). When someone is rejected for a promotion, they might first experience disappointment or worry, which would lead to stress. that stressful situation won't always last, and it will often end with a promotion or some other period. But if the person is consistently passed over for advancements, the stress levels can rise once more. Stress levels may rise with every incident that the person believes is impeding organizational growth, eventually leading to coping mechanisms like job switching, long-term depression, or

psychological disengagement. Once an employee reaches the career plateau, they will experience a lack of accountability, support, and a sense of belonging from the company.

In light of the aforementioned logic, the following hypotheses are put forth in this paper.

H1: There is a statistically significant impact of the career plateau on job stress

H1a: There is a statistically significant impact of the Hierarchical plateau on job stress

H1b: There is a statistically significant impact of the Job content plateau on job stress

H1c: There is a statistically significant impact of the profession plateau on job stress

H1d: There is a statistically significant impact of the organization plateau on job stress

2.2. The Contribution of Career Resilience in Mediation

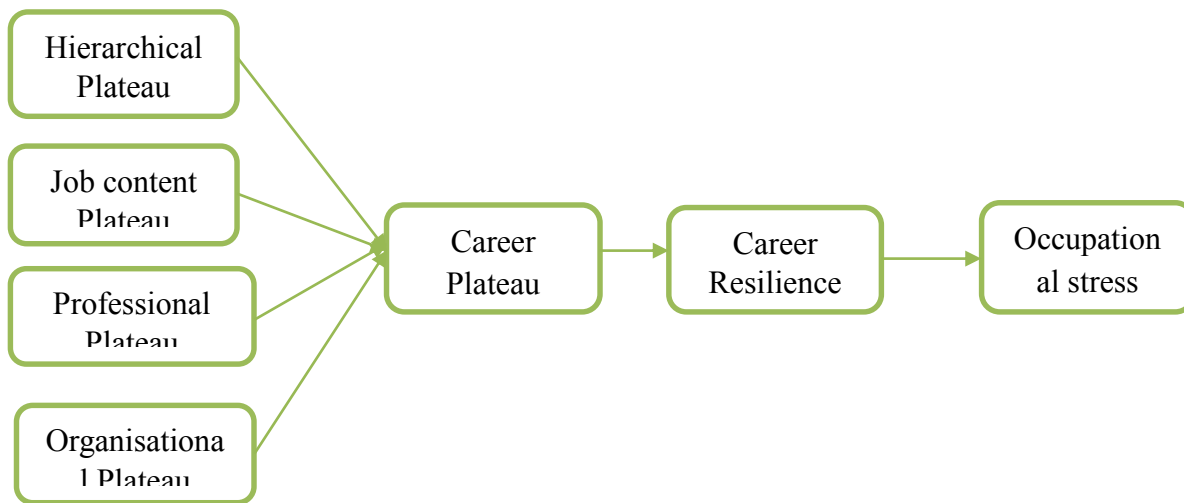
In a literal tandem between career plateau and occupational stress, the study looks at the mediating role that career resilience plays. The power to positively respond to unfavorable events, setbacks, and uncertainties in one's job (Brewer et al., 2019) is referred to as career resilience. This skill is crucial in determining an individual's ability to overcome setbacks and maintain a successful professional path (Su et al., 2022). Understanding career resilience is crucial, particularly for sales employees, as the job is extremely competitive and the environment changes quickly (Zeng et al., 2022). Theoretically, a platform for exploring the complexities of professional resilience is provided by the transactional theory of stress and coping (TTSC). According to Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) theory of transference of psychological capital, people are constantly interacting with their surroundings, evaluating and reevaluating stresses, and using coping strategies to deal with the difficulties they face.

A detailed investigation of how sales representatives deal with the pressures associated with their career stuck is made possible by viewing career resilience through the prism of this theoretical framework, which also throws light on the adaptive mechanisms that support long-term career success. A comprehensive view of the dynamic interaction of these elements in the particular setting of sales employee's career and professional development may be obtained by looking at the mediating function of career resilience in the link between career plateau and occupational stress.

H2: The hyperlink between job distress and career plateau is mediated by Career Resilience

In a nutshell, the study's theoretical model

framework is displayed in Fig.1.



*Figure 1: Proposed model for the research
Source: Author's Conceptual Framework.*

3. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

3.1. Subject and Method of the Research

Sales employees are the research subject in this study. The questionnaire was designed to make it clear that it was only being used for scientific research in order to prevent the influence of social approval on the questionnaire objects. Additionally, the anonymous collection was chosen to minimize the concerns of the questionnaire objects and allow them to respond to the questions more freely. The official survey was completed by online Google form. Employees must assess career plateau, occupational stress, career resilience, and personal information in the questionnaire provided. Questionnaires that had missing data were eliminated and finally, valid responses of around 390 were considered for the analysis.

3.2. Research Designs:

Achyutha & Suneetha (2024) state that a descriptive inquiry structure was proposed by utilizing a quantitative investigation technique.

3.3. Sampling Approach:

Convenience sample selection was used to choose the research study attendees. This suggests that the selection of attendees is predicated on their appropriateness and availability for the research. The online survey was sent to participants in and around Chennai in January 2024. In all, almost 15 companies in the surrounding city of Chennai provided 390 replies from sales employees.

3.4. Research Instrument:

Samples of sales representatives employed by private companies were obtained via the use of standard questionnaires.

3.5. Measuring Tools:

The variables used in this investigation originated from recognized scales. For each component, a scale made up of five Likert points was employed under research to efficiently record participants' replies. With scores ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree), participants were able to indicate how much they agreed to disagree with the statement.

We employed a 16-item, multifaceted Milliman (1992) scale to assess career plateaus. Examples included the statement, "Whether my career succeeds or fails, I am responsible for it" (for job-content plateaus, with six items). "There are not many prospects for me to advance in my current position" (for hierarchical plateaus, with six items) and "Possibilities for my own development and progress in my job" (for organizational plateau). A set of three criteria was developed by Chang Boon Lee, P. (2003) to gauge professional plateau sample items including "My job provides opportunities for me to keep up to date in my profession".

Occupational Stress: Data collection for this study was conducted using a five-point Likert-type scale. From 1 for strongly disagree to 5 for strongly agree, the options were labelled. Nine items were used to measure the stress variable with two measured variables as Role overload, Role stagnation, and Physical Environment, and the sample items include

"I find it challenging to manage the vast array of tasks I have to do" (for Role overload) and "I believe that all I've been doing is repeating myself" (for Role stagnation).

Career Resilience: The notion of professional resilience was developed using the career commitment measure developed by Carson and Bedeian (1994). A five-point Likert scale, with 1 denoting strongly disagreeing and 5 denoting strongly agreeing, was asked of the respondents. The four items on the scale are: "The expenses of my area of work/career often seem excessive; considering the issues I face in my sector, I occasionally question whether I get enough out of it; Considering the problems I face in my field of employment, I occasionally question whether the personal cost is worthwhile; and numerous research about career have previously employed and verified the scale (Lyons et al., 2015; Arora and Rangnekar, 2015; Arora and Rangnekar, 2016).

3.6. Statistical Analysis:

For the lowest SEM model, 250 occurrences should be the absolute sample size, per statistical computing norms, according to (Christopher Westland, 2010). Therefore, our 390-question sample size satisfies the minimal requirements needed for sampling acceptability. Initially, the validity of the questionnaire was evaluated using the Cronbach's alpha test. Following that, descriptive statistics were used to analyze the research sample and its measures. Regression analysis was utilized to predict the impact of an independent variable on a dependent variable. Correlation coefficients are used to assess the direction and degree of linear relationships between pairs of variables. Finally, model fit was determined and ideas were explored using Smart PLS structural equation modelling. The Smart PLS 4 program's bootstrap approach has 5000 trials and a 95% confidence interval was employed. This method is used to examine the statistical significance of path coefficients, the overall accuracy of the model, and mediation implications, among other PLS-SEM outcomes.

4. RESULTS:

4.1. Cronbach's Alpha Test

To evaluate the reliability of the study instrument, Cronbach's alpha tests were employed. For Job stress, Cronbach's alpha values vary from 0.767 to 0.703. while the coefficients for the hierarchical plateau range from 0.710 to 0.707, the job content plateau ranges from 0.693 to 0.701, the professional plateau ranges from 0.763 to 0.721, and the

organizational plateau ranges from 0.783 to 0.690, the career resilience coefficients vary from 0.812 to 0.768. given that every coefficient is more than 0.7, the questionnaire may be considered reliable and internally consistent (George and Mallery, 2003).

4.2. Characteristics of the Survey Subjects

The demographic data of the respondents consists of 295 males and 95 females, or 75.6%, and 24.4% were present. Out of the 390 responders in total, 215 held undergraduate degrees and 175 held postgraduates. Every respondent was divided into roles. Of the sales representatives, 238 were married, while the remaining were single. In addition, four categories based on their levels of job experience were created: 115 employees, or 29.49% have worked for 1-3 years, 104 employees, or 26.67% have worked for 4-6 years, 122 sales employees, or 31.28% have worked for 7-8 years and 49 employees, or 12.56% have worked experience of above 10 years.

4.3. Results of Correlation Effect of Career Plateau on Job Stress

Descriptive statistics and correlations for every research variable are shown in Table 1, after analyzing the interconnections between different types of career plateaus and job stress. A strong link exists between career plateau and job stress with correlation coefficients of 0.746. Among the different types of career plateaus, the connections between professional plateau and job stress are found to have a weak correlation whereas hierarchical plateau, Job content plateau, and organizational plateau have a strong correlation with job stress.

Table 1: Correlation Coefficient of career plateaus and Job stress.

Independent variable	Dependent variable	Hypothesis	Correlation coefficient between two variables	Association
Career Plateau	Job stress	Main	0.746	Exists (Strong)
Hierarchical Plateau	Job stress	Secondary	0.801	Exists (Strong)
Job content Plateau	Job stress	Secondary	0.805	Exists (Strong)
Professional Plateau	Job stress	Secondary	0.295	Exists (weak)
Organizational Plateau	Job stress	Secondary	0.823	Exists (Strong)

Source: Author's Calculation.

4.4. Regression Analysis

After the outcome of the analysis using multiple regression, the main hypothesis (Career Plateau has a statistically significant impact on job stress) was accepted with an R square value of 71% which is a globally fit index to confirm the model, and the p-value is found to be significant.

Table 2. Regression analysis of career plateau and job stress.

Independent variable	Dependent variable	Hypothesis	R ² value	F test		
				F value	P value	Test result
Career Plateau	Job stress	Main	71%	35.747	0.000	Hypothesis Accepted
Hierarchical Plateau	Job stress	Secondary	62.30%	103.16	0.000	Hypothesis Accepted
Job content Plateau	Job stress	Secondary	61.45%	110.13	0.000	Hypothesis Accepted
Professional Plateau	Job stress	Secondary	12.40%	10.32	0.000	Hypothesis Rejected

Organisational Plateau	Job stress	Secondary	63.60%	113.52	0.000	Hypothesis Accepted
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Source: Author's Calculation.

Among the different types of plateaus hierarchical plateau, Job content plateau, and organizational plateau have significant impacts on job stress, and the hypothesis for the same relationship is accepted whereas the relationship between the professional plateau and job stress is very weak and the R2 value is found to be R2=12.40% which is very less, it shows that the professional plateau is not accountable for dependant variable. Hence the hypothesis H4 is rejected. The value of R square (Coefficient of determinants) is a Global Fit Index to compare the model which is accepted if the R-square value is above 50%.

4.5. Testing Measurement Model using Structural Equation Modelling

Finally, the study research has to test the mediating relationship of career resilience between career plateau and job stress. Smart PLS were used to test the mediating effect and to check the model fitness.

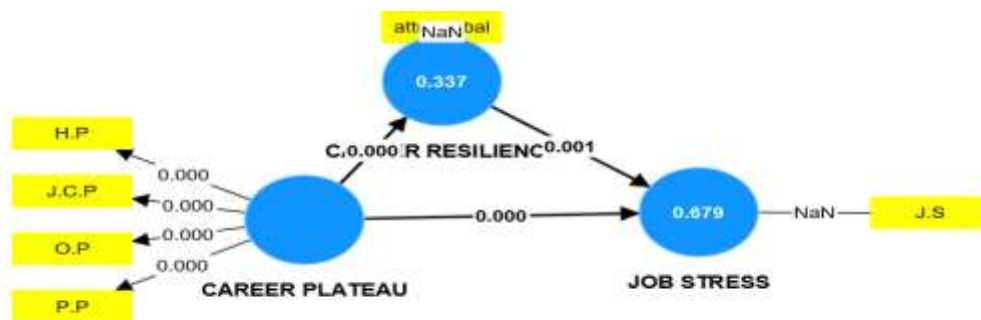
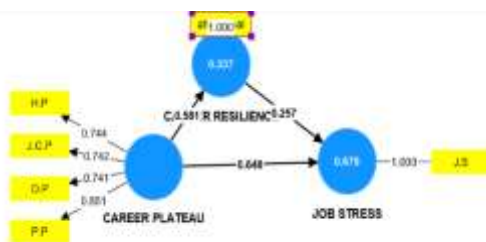


Figure 2: Path coefficients and p values

Source: Author's analysis.

Source: Author's analysis.

Figure 3: Structural Model



PLS-SEM is used to examine career resilience's mediating role between career plateau and job stress. By looking at the mediator variable's interactions with the other constructs, one can find evidence for the mechanisms behind the cause-and-effect link between an external construct and an endogenous construct.

Subsequently, it was suggested that the relationship between career plateau and job stress is mediated by career resilience among sales representatives. In the analysis, the mediator's

strength is described by the overall effects. After adding the mediator career resilience to the model, the path coefficients were utilized to investigate the relative importance of direct and indirect effects. The mediation process outlined by Zhao et al. (2010) indicates that if the condition is satisfied, the significance value of p_3 is tested; in this case, all of the P values are significant, as shown in Fig 2. The significance values of p_1 and p_2 were evaluated first and found to be significant. Consequently, Partial mediation plays a role in this paradigm; career plateau and job stress have an effect when the mediating variable of career resilience plays a role.

4.6. Findings

1. The results of the study indicate a significant correlation between career plateau and job stress with a correlation value of 0.745 which shows a strong relationship exists between the two variables.
2. The study explores four sorts of career plateaus that might affect job stress: hierarchical, job content, professional, and organizational. The professional plateau is the only plateau with a weak relationship with job stress, with a correlation coefficient of 0.295.
3. Through regression analysis the level of accountability of the independent variable to predict the dependent variable is examined. Through which the R^2 value decides the acceptance percentage of the hypothesis. The R^2 value for the hierarchical plateau is 62.30%, the job content plateau is 61.45% and the organizational plateau is 63.60% which fits with the acceptable value of above 50%. Hence these are accountable for affecting the dependent variable of job stress. The professional plateau with an R^2 value of 12.45% is rejected which is less than the accepted level and hence doesn't account for changes in the dependant variable job stress of sales employees.
4. In this study, the mediation effect of career resilience plays a partial mediation role.

4.7. Discussion

Businesses throughout the world have had to dismantle their organizational systems in order to adapt to the disruptive effects of the COVID-19 epidemic. Even more common is the phenomenon of career plateaus, which makes it more difficult to attain long-term well-being at work. The following three areas comprise the study's theoretical contributions: the present investigation contributes to the extant body of research by elucidating the

deleterious attributes of a career plateau and its ensuing influence on job stress. one of the main mediating effects to attaining worker's lasting well-being at work is career resilience. This study identifies positive career resilience as a mediator in the context of social sustainability and the UNSDGs, providing crucial insights into the implementation of the equity theory.

5. CONCLUSION

The career plateau phenomenon is explained by a mediation model that this study builds using the viewpoints of equity theory. When workers hit a professional ceiling, they tend to view things negatively within the company and compare their successes and failures with a pessimistic outlook, which makes them feel unfairly treated. Employees subsequently get stressed, perform worse, and progressively distance themselves psychologically from the company, in the long term, this detrimental effect can be compounded. However, people with high resilience levels have a reduced negative impact from career plateaus. This study provides insights for future research and initiatives aimed at better understanding employees' sustained well-being at work in the context of career plateaus.

Employees' skills and capacities; conduct stress audits at all organizational levels to identify stress areas; improve working environment; and reduce job stress. Finally, further study is required to comprehensively understand the genuine nature, complicated causes, and consequences of career plateau on occupational stress. This study will inspire managers to create effective coping strategies for stress and career stagnation.

5.1. Implications

This study has two applications in real life. First, research indicates that organizational fairness may have a role in the detrimental consequences of career plateau on job stress. consequently, organizations must focus on developing an equitable work environment. For instance, in order to mitigate the detrimental impact of career plateaus and improve employee perceptions of fairness, organizations should continue to implement a transparent and equitable performance management system. Furthermore, implementing a job rotation system allows staff members to work in a variety of roles within the company and be exposed to a range of job-related tasks. This can help them develop their knowledge and abilities more thoroughly and lessen the burnout that comes with doing the same thing over and over again for an extended period. Rotating

between jobs gives workers the chance to move into other roles and broadens their employment variety, which helps to lessen their impression of “job stagnation”. In certain situations, workers may be inspired to do their duties more successfully.

Second, our research indicates that career plateaus have a less detrimental impact on employees' perceptions of organizational fairness and their stress level on the work when combined with positive resilience capacity. Consequently, via training and mentorship, organizations may assist staff members who have reached a career plateau in regaining their confidence and making career plans. Positive career resilience is a measure of an employee's ability to offer more to the company. As such, employers should focus on developing their talent pool of high-resilience personnel. These proactive measures may lessen the negative consequences that career plateaus have on workers' stress and increase well-being.

5.2. Research Limits and Future Studies

Conflicts of interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

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