

An Empirical Structural Model of Queen Bee Syndrome: Psychological Well-Being as a Mediator of Female Subordinates' Job Performance

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Abstract: This study explores the relationship between Queen Bee Syndrome, psychological well-being and job performance among female subordinates working under women leaders. Drawing on demand, resources, model and conservation of resources theory, the study proposes that Queen Bee syndrome operates as a workplace stressor that undermines psychological well-being and affects job performance. Both directly and indirectly, data were collected from corporate professionals working under female leaders through a cross-sectional survey. Establish scale measures of Queen Bee syndrome, psychological well-being and job performance and five-point Likert scale responses. Partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was employed using SmartPLS 4. Following a two-stage approach that assessed the measurement model and structural model. The finding shows that psychological well-being has a strong positive influence on job performance, while syndrome exerts a significant negative influence on both job performance and psychological well-being. And indicate a pattern of complementary partial mediation. These findings extend the predominantly qualitative Queen Bee syndrome literature by offering robust quantitative evidence of its psychological and performance-related consequences, and they identify psychological well-being as a key intervening mechanism linking intra gender workplace hostility to performance outcomes. The study contributes theoretically by integrating Queen Bee syndrome within a well-being and performance framework and offers practical implications for organisations, including psychologically safe workplace practices, inclusive leadership, and development and mentoring initiatives aimed at mitigating the adverse effects of behaviour on female employees and, more broadly, on organisational effectiveness.

Keywords: Queen bee syndrome, psychological well-being, job performance, workplace

1. INTRODUCTION

Women constitute a substantial share of the global workforce. However, despite gender, equality, policy and diversity initiatives, their representation and senior leadership remain Limited (Mavin 2008). Barriers such as a sticky floor and a glass ceiling continue to restrict women's career advancement. Alongside these structural barriers, queen bee syndrome has emerged as an important intra gender workplace phenomenon.

Queen bee syndrome refers to the situation in which Senior women, particularly in a male-dominated organisational environment, distance themselves from, compete with or restrict the advancement of Junior women (Grangeriro et al., 2023). Such behaviour may undermine our subordinates' sense of belonging, career, respiration, and organisational outcomes (Ellemers et al., 2011; Faniko et al., 2021; Kremer et al., 2021). Despite growing interest, empirical research remains limited, particularly regarding the direct effect of Queen Bee syndrome on job performance and the mechanism underlying this relationship

Although psychological well-being is positively associated with job performance (Elizabeth, Yang) and adverse workplace experiences can undermine well-being (Arshad et al., 2025), its mediating role between Queen syndrome and job performance remains unexplored. Accordingly, this is a study of exam syndrome, psychological well-being



and job performance among female employees working under a female leader, focusing on whether psychological well-being mediates the effect of going on job performance. The relationship is theoretically grounded on the job, demand, resource model and conservation of resources theory. From the job demand resource perspective, QBS can function as a social job demand through reduced support, interpersonal distancing and discriminatory treatment, thereby increasing psychological strain and reducing psychological well-being. (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023). Conservation of resource theory suggests that such experience may deplete valuable psychological and social resources, including confidence, belonging, and emotional energy (Hobfoll, 1989). Consequently, diminishing well-being may translate into poor job performance, providing a theoretical basis for the mediating role in the Queen Bee performance relationship.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *Queen Bee Syndrome and Its Consequences*

The concept of **Queen Bee Syndrome (QBS)** was introduced by Staines, Tavis, and Jayaratne (1974) to describe situations in which senior women distance themselves from, compete with, or restrict the advancement of junior women. Subsequent research has shown that QBS is particularly relevant in male-dominated organisational contexts, where women may perceive other women as competitors or threats to their status (Johnson & Mathur-Helm, 2011; Apaydin et al., 2021). Rather than being solely an individual disposition, contemporary research increasingly views QBS as a **context-dependent response** shaped by gender inequality, tokenism, perceived threat, and organisational structures (Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014).

Empirical evidence indicates that QBS can adversely affect female subordinates. It has been associated with reduced organisational belonging, lower leadership aspirations, diminished career development, and greater turnover intentions (Kremer et al., 2021). Similarly, research suggests that Queen Bee behaviours may undermine subordinate confidence, professional development, and organisational outcomes (Harvey, 2018; Sobczak, 2018). Recent scale-development research further identifies ineffective mentoring, constrained development, and unsupportive supervisory relationships as important manifestations of perceived QBS (Chan & Uen, 2024). These findings indicate that QBS may extend beyond interpersonal conflict to influence employees' psychological and work-related outcomes.

2.2 *Psychological Well-Being and Job Performance*

Psychological well-being is an important personal resource that enables employees to maintain motivation, resilience, and effective functioning at work. Research has consistently demonstrated a positive association between employee well-being and job performance. Obrenovic et al. (2020) found that psychological resources such as optimism, self-esteem, and self-efficacy contribute to improved task and contextual performance. Similarly, Kundi et al. (2021) reported a significant positive relationship between psychological well-being and job performance. Recent empirical evidence from different organisational contexts further supports this relationship, showing that psychological well-being enhances employee performance directly and through related mechanisms such as empowerment and job satisfaction (Elizabeth et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2024). Thus, employees with higher psychological well-being are more likely to remain motivated, engaged, and effective in performing their job responsibilities.

H1: Psychological well-being has a positive direct effect on job performance.

The negative consequences of QBS may also extend directly to job performance. By restricting career development, weakening communication, reducing support, and creating stressful interpersonal environments, QBS may limit employees' ability to perform effectively (Harvey, 2018; Sobczak, 2018). Although existing literature provides theoretical and qualitative evidence of these consequences, quantitative research examining the direct relationship between QBS and job performance remains limited. This study, therefore, addresses an important empirical gap.

H2: Queen Bee Syndrome has a negative direct effect on job performance.

2.3 *Queen Bee Syndrome and Job Performance*

QBS may adversely affect employees not only through career-related barriers but also through psychological mechanisms. Unsupportive supervision, exclusion, interpersonal hostility, and restricted developmental opportunities can reduce employees' confidence, belonging, and emotional resources (Harvey, 2018; Sobczak, 2018). Research on QBS similarly indicates negative consequences for female employees' psychological and professional experiences (Grangeiro et al., 2023; Poyraz&Kilic, 2023). From the Job Demands–Resources and Conservation of Resources perspectives, QBS can be viewed as a social stressor that consumes psychological resources and reduces access to essential workplace resources such as supervisory support and social belonging. Consequently, greater exposure to QBS is expected to undermine psychological well-being.

H3: Queen Bee Syndrome has a negative direct effect on psychological well-being.

2.4 Mediating Role of Psychological Well-Being

The preceding literature suggests that QBS may influence job performance partly by undermining employees' psychological well-being. QBS can deplete psychological and social resources, while reduced well-being can subsequently impair motivation, engagement, and work effectiveness. Although previous studies have separately established the negative effects of adverse workplace experiences on well-being and the positive relationship between well-being and performance (Obrenovic et al., 2020; Kundi et al., 2021; Arshad et al., 2025), the mediating role of psychological well-being in the relationship between QBS and job performance remains insufficiently examined. Accordingly, this study proposes that psychological well-being serves as an intervening mechanism through which QBS affects employee performance.

H4: Psychological well-being mediates the relationship between Queen Bee Syndrome and job performance.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

3.1. Research design: the study employed across sectional survey of corporate professionals, working under female leaders. Data were collected through a structured, self-administered questionnaire, distributed electronically and in hard copy as well. A total of 385 valid responses were obtained, providing adequate statistical power for PLS-SEM ANALYSIS

3.2. Measures and instruments : established and validated scales are adopted from prior literature. All constructs are measured using five point likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

1 Queen Bee Syndrome: The QBS is measured using a 19-item scale developed by Celen and Tuna (2021).

2 Psychological Well-Being: The PWB is measured with a 14-item scale developed by Ryff, C. D. 1989.

3 Job Performance: The JP is measured with an 11-item Scale developed by Williams & Anderson (1991).

3.3. Data analysis: the conceptual framework was evaluated using PLS SEM in SmartPLS4, selected for its suitability for productive and exploratory analysis, complex mediation model and minimal reliance on multivariate normality assumptions. The analysis followed a two-stage approach, first is measurement model assessment, examining internal consistency, reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity, and second, structural model assessment using 5000 bootstrap resamples to estimate path coefficients, standard errors, T-statistics and P-values for direct and indirect effects.

Multicollinearity was assessed using VIF (<3). Given the self-reported cross-sectional design, common method bias was assessed through procedural control and full collinearity diagnostics. Model fit was additionally evaluated using SRMR (<0.08).

4. RESULT ANALYSIS

To understand the characteristics of the target population, descriptive frequency is used. Analysis is conducted on a sample size of N = 385 respondents. The demographic variable analysed, including age, education, qualification, work, experience, marital status, and tenure at the current organisation under a women leader.

TABLE -1

PARTICULARS		FREQUENCY	PERCENT
AGE	Below 25	61	15.84
	Between 31 and 40	137	35.58
	Between 41 and 50	117	30.39
	51 and above	54	14.03
	Total	385	100
EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION	Diploma	9	2.3
	Graduation	149	38.7
	Post- Graduation	185	48.1
	Above Post-Graduation	42	10.9
	Total	385	100
WORK EXPERIENCE	Up to 5	140	36.4
	Between 6 and 10	109	28.3
	Between 10 and 15	55	14.3
	Above 15	81	21
	Total	385	100
MARITAL STATUS	Single	128	32.2
	Married	245	63.4
	Divorced/Separated	5	1.3
	Widowed	5	1.3
	Prefer not to say	2	0.5
	Total	385	100
	Less than 1 year	64	16.6
	1–3 years	111	28.8

TENURE AT CURRENT ORGANIZATION UNDER WOMEN LEADERS	4–6 years	87	22.6
	7–10 years	46	12
	More than 10 years	77	20
	Total	385	100

According to Table 1, the sample was predominantly mid-career, with 65.97% of respondents aged 31–50 years (n=254), indicating a relatively experienced workforce. Respondents below 25 years and those aged 51 years and above constituted smaller proportions (15.84% and 14.03%, respectively). The sample was also highly educated, with 48.1% holding postgraduate qualifications, 38.7% graduate degrees, and 10.9% qualifications beyond postgraduate level. Overall, 97.7% held a university degree or higher.

Regarding professional experience, 36.4% had up to 5 years, 28.3% had 6–10 years, 14.3% had 10–15 years, and 21.0% had more than 15 years of experience. Thus, 63.6% had over five years of professional experience, reflecting a diverse mix of early-, mid-, and senior-career professionals.

The respondents were predominantly married (63.4%, n=245), while 32.2% were single; divorced/separated, widowed, and undisclosed categories accounted for the remaining 3.1%. This distribution is consistent with the relatively mature age profile of the sample.

Regarding organisational tenure, 28.8% had worked for 1–3 years, 22.6% for 4–6 years, 12.0% for 7–10 years, and 20.0% for more than 10 years. Employees with less than one year of tenure constituted 16.6%. Overall, 54.6% had more than four years of organisational tenure, indicating substantial familiarity with their organisational environment and leadership structures.

Overall, the 385 respondents represent a predominantly married, well-educated, mid-career workforce with considerable professional and organisational experience, providing an appropriate respondent profile for examining experiences under female leadership.

4.1 Measurement model assessment

To assess the suitability of the reflective measurement model, the constructs job performance, psychological well-being, and QueenBee Syndrome were evaluated for internal consistency and convergent validity. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, while convergent validity was examined using Average Variance Extracted (AVE).

Table 2 (Reliability)

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
JP	0.937	0.943	0.947	0.642
PWB	0.932	0.943	0.942	0.540
QBS	0.940	0.968	0.945	0.523

1. Internal Consistency Reliability

Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.932 (PWB) to 0.940 (QBS), with job performance at

0.937. All values exceed the recommended 0.70 threshold, confirming strong internal consistency and reliability without evidence of excessive item redundancy.

2. Convergent Validity

Convergent validity was assessed using Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The AVE values were 0.642 for job performance, 0.540 for psychological well-being, and 0.523 for QBS. As all values exceed the recommended 0.50 threshold, convergent validity is established for all constructs.

3. Discriminate validity - Discriminant validity was assessed using the HTMT ratio and Fornell-Larcker criterion. All

HTMT values were below the conservative 0.85 threshold (JP-PWB = 0.626; JP-QBS = 0.359;

PWB-QBS = 0.266), confirming that the constructs are empirically distinct.

Table -3Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) – Matrix

	JP	PWB	QBS
JP			
PWB	0.626		
QBS	0.359	0.266	

Evaluation via the Fornell-Larcker criterion -

The Fornell-Larcker criterion was also satisfied, as the square root of AVE for each construct

(JP = 0.801; PWB = 0.735; QBS = 0.723) exceeded its correlations with other constructs. Overall,

both tests confirm adequate discriminant validity and indicate no substantial construct redundancy.

Table – 4 Fornell-Larcker criterion

	JP	PWB	QBS
JP	0.801		
PWB	0.591	0.735	
QBS	-0.393	-0.278	0.723

These two tests provide convergent proof of robust discriminant validity for the reflective outer model . The latent constructs job performance, psychological well-being, and QueenBee syndrome represent genuinely distinct or structural concepts, verifying that the data set is free from multicollinearity or construct redundancy issues.

Common method bias –

Before assessing the structural model, collinearity was examined using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) to identify potential multicollinearity and common method bias. All inner VIF values were below the conservative threshold of 3.0, indicating no significant collinearity among the predictor constructs. Thus, the structural path estimates are considered stable and free from substantial multicollinearity concerns.

Table - 5

	VIF
PWB -> JP	1.084

QBS -> JP	1.084
QBS -> PWB	1.000

5. Model Fit

The model fit was assessed using the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SMR). The SRMR value was 0.080 for both the saturated and estimated models, meeting the commonly accepted threshold of ≤ 0.08 . This indicates an acceptable model fit and supports the adequacy of the proposed PLS-SEM model.

Model fit		
	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.080	0.080

4.2 Structural model assessment

Following confirmation of the measurement model, the structural model was assessed using PLS-SEM with 5,000 bootstrap resamples to test the hypothesised relationships.

Table – 6 (Direct Effect)

Path coefficients, STDEV, T values, p values				
	Original sample (β)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics	P values
PWB -> JP	0.523	0.055	9.488	0.000
QBS -> JP	-0.247	0.048	5.158	0.000
QBS -> PWB	-0.278	0.054	5.109	0.000

Here, Table -6 shows that Psychological Well-Being $\rightarrow$ Job Performance: A significant positive effect was observed ($\beta = 0.523$, $t = 9.488$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that higher psychological well-being is associated with better job performance. The hypothesis is supported.

QueenBee Syndrome $\rightarrow$ Job Performance: QBS had a significant negative effect on job performance ($\beta = -0.247$, $t = 5.158$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that greater exposure to QBS is associated with lower performance. The hypothesis is supported.

QueenBee Syndrome $\rightarrow$ Psychological Well-Being: QBS significantly negatively affected psychological well-being ($\beta = -0.278$, $t = 5.109$, $p < 0.001$), confirming that greater exposure to QBS is associated with poorer psychological well-being. The hypothesis is supported.

Mediation analysis

As per table -7, the indirect effect of QBS $\rightarrow$ Psychological Well-Being $\rightarrow$ Job Performance was significant and

negative ($B = -0.145$, $t = 3.927$, $p < 0.001$). This confirms that psychological well-being

significantly mediates the relationship between QBS and job performance. Since the direct effect of QBS on job performance also remains significant, the findings indicate complementary partial mediation.

Table -7 (Mediation Analysis (Specific Indirect Effect))

	Original sample (β)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics	P values
QBS -> PWB -> JP	-0.145	0.037	3.927	0.000

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From the Above results, Psychological well-being has a significant positive effect on job performance ($\beta = 0.523$, $M = 0.524$; $SD = 0.055$; $t = 9.488$; $p = 0.000$). This indicates that psychologically healthy workers function better. This validates a previous study that indicated psychological well-being improves employee performance. Obrenovic et al. (2020) say psychological well-being boosts self-esteem, optimism, and self-efficacy, enhancing performance. Kundi et al. (2021) linked employee well-being to performance. A recent study shows that Psychological Well-Being boosts job performance. Researchers found that it enhances task and context will performance (Yang et al., 2024; Elizabeth, 2023; Wang, 2017). It also observed that psychological resources minimise stress and weariness, enhancing performance. This supports hypothesis 1 that psychological factors will determine employee success.

Hypothesis -2, It is proposed that Queen Bee syndrome negatively affects job performance, and the finding supports this relationship ($\beta = -0.247$, $M = -0.249$; $SD = 0.048$; $t = 5.158$; $p = 0.000$). This shows that higher-behaviour workers do worse. A previous study has indicated that Queen Bee behaviour is hazardous. Harvey 2018 said Queen Bee dynamics hurt businesses. Sobczak (2018) claimed that such conduct lowers subordinate confidence and career development, which may impair performance, and that stress and uneven work environments damage women (Javed, 2025). Queen Bee behaviour directly influenced employee performance, according to this study. Queen Bee syndrome's direct effect suggests it may hinder communication, development, and psychological well-being.

Hypothesis 3, demonstrate that Queen Bee syndrome has a significant negative effect on psychological well-being ($\beta = -0.278$, $M = -0.284$; $SD = 0.054$; $t = 5.109$; $p = 0.000$). The results revealed that female subordinates with more behaviour exposure had lower psychological well-being.

The findings confirm prior conceptual empirical investigations that indicated Queen Bee activity negatively influences employees' confidence and drive, undermines younger women's self-esteem and career prospects, derives from perceived danger, and typically entails repressing other women in the workplace. This supports workplace bullying and employee well-being studies. Workplace bullying generates stress and reduces employee well-being, say Arshad et al. (2025). Faniko et al. (2016) discovered that female leaders from other women may diminish subordinates' social support and belonging. Current research suggests royal behaviour increases workplace stress that damages employees' Psychological Well Being.

Queen Bee syndrome and job performance are influenced by Psychological Well Being (Preacher & Hayes, 2008; Zhao et al., 2010). QBS $\rightarrow$ PWB $\rightarrow$ JP had an indirect influence of -0.145, with a sample mean of -0.150, SD of 0.037, t-statistic of 3.927, and p-value of 0.000 (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). The bootstrapping-derived t-statistic of 3.927 surpasses the 2.58 significance threshold at the 0.001 level, indicating the indirect influence is statistically robust (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Zhao et al. (2010) revealed substantial direct and indirect impacts of Queen Bee syndrome on occupational performance and psychological well-being, suggesting complementary partial mediation.

Queen Bee Syndrome reduces job performance (Derks et al., 2011; Harvey, 2018). First, it reduces employees' Psychological Well Being, which affects performance (Kundi et al., 2020; Obrenovic, 2020; Yang, 2024). Second, it impairs performance through non-psychological processes (Harvey, 2018; Kremer et al., 2021). Queen Bee conduct may be mitigated by employee support programs, mentorship, and psychological safety measures. Since direct influence remains strong, the business should improve leadership, accountability, communication, and workplace cultures to overcome structural issues. (Obrenovic, 2020)

Psychological well-being somewhat explains Queen Bee syndrome and work performance. This suggests that the workplace effects of Queen Bee Syndrome require psychological and organisational consideration. Overall, the findings demonstrate that psychological well-being explains part, but not all, of the relationship between Queen Bee syndrome and job performance. This highlights the importance of considering both psychological and organisational factors when addressing the adverse effects of Queen Bee syndrome in the workplace

6. THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATION

The research on Queen Bee syndrome, psychological well-being, and professional performance now includes quantitative data. Previous research employed qualitative approaches and descriptive analysis (Derks et al., 2011; Harvey, 2018; Kremer, 2021), but our study empirically confirms these connections using a comprehensive structural model. Queen Bee syndrome becomes a theoretical notion in organisational behaviour research.

The study ties Queen Bee syndrome to psychological well-being and job performance to better understand its consequences on employees. The study suggests Queen Bee behaviour influences organisational performance beyond interpersonal relationships.

The research on intra-gender supervisory relationships enriches psychological well-being literature (Derks et al., 2011; Hoobler, 2011). Psychological well-being influences job performance (Kundi et al., 2022; Obrenovic, 2020; Yang, 2024). Bad leadership behaviours affect performance through psychological well-being (Kundi et al., 2022; Obrenovic, 2020).

The study combines Queen Bee syndrome, psychological well-being, and job performance into a unified framework to better understand the psychological and behavioural implications of Queen Bee activity in the workplace.

Improving employees' Psychological Well Being promotes job performance (Kundi et al., 2022; Yang, 2024). Companies should practise psychologically safe work and balance employee support with supervisor-coordinator relationships (Obrenovic et al., 2020; Yang, 2024).

The findings suggest monitoring leaders' Queen Bee behaviour more closely (Derks et al., 2011; Harvey, 2018; Kremer, 2021). Businesses should promote women into leadership roles, but leadership development must also emphasise inclusive leadership and positive mentoring.

7. CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study demonstrates that psychological well-being is a strong positive driver of job performance, whereas Queen Bee Syndrome negatively affects both well-being and performance, directly and indirectly, by reducing well-being. Thus, QueenBee syndrome represents a measurable organisational stress rather than an interpersonal phenomenon.

The findings extend existing research by providing quantitative evidence of the mechanism by which intra-gender workplace dynamics influence employee outcomes. They also highlight that increasing women's representation in leadership alone is insufficient. Organisations must promote psychological safety, inclusion, leadership, supportive cultures, and accountability to prevent the reproduction of gender-based place barriers.

This study also has some limitations that need to be acknowledged. It's a cross-sectional design limit, causal inference. Reliance on self-reported data may introduce common method bias, as well as social desirability bias. Future research, employee, longitude and tea source design and examine potential mode factors such as organisational culture, leadership style, general composition, and individual differences to develop a context-sensitive understanding of QueenBee syndrome.

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