



The Effect of Coping Strategy on Gender Stereotype Threats in the Workplace

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Abstract. This study investigates the influence of coping strategies on stereotype threat and occupational self-efficacy among Indonesian women workers under the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). Data were collected from 400 women employees via the Populix platform, and hypotheses were tested using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The findings reveal that coping with barriers significantly reduces stigma consciousness, while both stereotype vulnerability and stigma consciousness negatively impact occupational self-efficacy. This study extends the SCCT literature by clarifying the mechanisms through which coping strategies mitigate stereotype threat and enhance women workers' self-efficacy.

Keywords: stereotype vulnerability, stigma consciousness, self-efficacy.

1 Introduction

Gender inequality remains a persistent global issue, marked by the ongoing imbalance in workplace representation and opportunities between men and women. Despite social and economic progress, women continue to occupy fewer leadership roles—only 29% of C-suite and 39% of managerial positions globally [1]. In Indonesia, women's labor force participation remains stagnant at 53%, the lowest in Southeast Asia, with a 30% gap compared to men [2]. Globally, women's labor participation has declined since 2020, and they continue to experience higher unemployment rates than men [3]. Occupational segregation also persists, with women's employment concentrated in lower-paying sectors such as healthcare and education, while men dominate higher-paying fields like engineering and finance [4].

These disparities are reinforced by various structural and psychological barriers, including stereotypes, lack of legitimacy, isolation, limited access to opportunities, masculine work cultures, and challenges in work–life balance [5], [6]. To navigate these challenges, women develop coping strategies that reflect their belief in their ability to manage obstacles effectively—a concept referred to as coping efficacy [7]. Research indicates that coping with barriers enhances self-efficacy and career motivation while reducing perceived career obstacles [8]. However, stereotype threat—manifested

through stereotype vulnerability and stigma consciousness—remains a significant barrier, undermining women’s confidence and performance in male-dominated environments [7], [9].

Occupational self-efficacy, defined as confidence in one’s job-related abilities [10], plays a crucial role in shaping women’s engagement, risk-taking, and career aspirations. Hence, low self-efficacy often limits ambition and advancement [11], [12]. Guided by the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), this study investigates how coping strategies mitigate stereotype threats and enhance occupational self-efficacy among women workers in Indonesia.

2 Literature Review

Stereotype threat is the psychological state in which individuals fear confirming negative stereotypes about their social group [13]. This threat can lead individuals to anticipate negative judgment or differential treatment based on their group identity, which in turn can heighten anxiety and diminish performance [14], [15]. Functioning at both cognitive and physiological levels, stereotype threat interferes with processes such as working memory and focus, while causing stress responses that hinder task performance. Environmental and social contexts play a pivotal role in activating stereotype threat, particularly when tasks are perceived as gendered, such as the belief that women are less competent in professional or technical roles.

Two major constructs operationalize stereotype threat in workplace and academic research are stereotype vulnerability and stigma consciousness. Stereotype vulnerability describes an individual’s susceptibility to perceiving and reacting to identity-based stereotypes [14]. Women tend to display higher stereotype vulnerability in situations emphasizing gender relevance and often perform worse when they believe tasks are gender biased. Stigma consciousness, on the other hand, captures individuals’ expectations of being judged through the lens of social stereotypes [9]. People with high stigma consciousness frequently report stronger feelings of discrimination and avoidance of stereotype-relevant situations [16]. Together, these constructs conceptualize stereotype threat as an internalized response to external biases that shape women’s psychological experiences and career outcomes [7].

Coping efficacy, or an individual’s confidence in managing situational and environmental challenges, determines whether barriers are perceived as threats or as opportunities for growth [17]. Those with high coping efficacy interpret difficulties as challenges to overcome, while those with low coping efficacy tend to view them as barriers. This perception directly affects one’s sense of control and engagement with career-related decisions [18]. Prior research shows that coping efficacy positively correlates with self-efficacy, motivation, and academic or career interest, while negatively relating to perceived barriers [19]. Moreover, coping efficacy mediates the relationship between perceived barriers and outcomes, influencing how individuals respond to contextual obstacles [20]. However, few studies have explored how coping efficacy connects the link between external barriers—such as gender stereotypes—and occupational self-efficacy, particularly among women. Understanding this connection could clarify

why some women withdraw under stereotype threat, while others transform such barriers into motivation and resilience.

H1a: Coping with barriers negatively affects stereotype vulnerability

H1b: Coping with barriers negatively affects stigma consciousness

Occupational self-efficacy refers to confidence in one's ability to perform work tasks effectively [10]. High occupational self-efficacy fosters work engagement, defined as a state of vigor, dedication, and absorption in one's job [21]. Employees with strong self-efficacy demonstrate persistence, resilience, and motivation, leading to superior performance and goal attainment [22]. In contrast, low self-efficacy results in passivity and early disengagement [23]. Although professional growth opportunities enhance engagement, women often encounter barriers such as undermined competence and limited recognition [24]. Consequently, this study emphasizes the interrelation among coping efficacy, stereotype threats, occupational self-efficacy, and work engagement as critical determinants of women's career aspirations and advancement in the workplace.

H2a: Stereotype vulnerability negatively affects occupational self-efficacy

H2b: Stigma consciousness negatively affects occupational self-efficacy

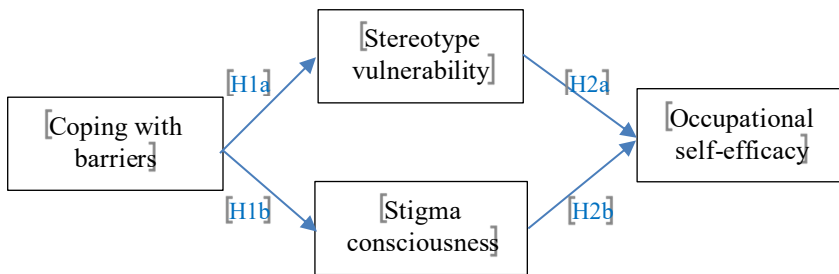


Fig. 1. Research Model

3 Methodology

To test the proposed hypotheses, we collected quantitative data from women workers in Indonesia through the PopSurvey service from Populix. All variables were measured using a five-point Likert scale based on items adopted from previous studies [9], [25], [26], and [27].

4 Result

The online survey collected 400 full responses; however, after screening for straight-line answers (respondents answering the same way to all questions), 340 responses remained for analysis. Our respondents are dominated by the younger age

group, with 52.1% between 29 and 38 years of age. Most respondents (61.8%) had a bachelor’s degree, approximately 69.4% were employed in permanent or full-time positions, and 90.5% had less than 11 years of work experience. In terms of income, 32.1% reported earning between five and eight million Indonesian Rupiah per month (equivalent to approximately 300–500 USD). In comparison, nearly 30% were employed in the manufacturing sector, 17% in the science and education sector, and 13% in the financial sector.

Overall, the respondents demonstrated a strong ability to manage gender- or sexuality-related barriers in the workplace (mean > 4), relatively low stereotype vulnerability (mean score below 3), with low up to medium level of stigma consciousness (mean score between 2.1 and 3.8), and high occupational self-efficacy, work engagement, and career aspiration (mean score > 4) (see Table 1).

Before testing the hypotheses, we conducted a measurement model assessment to assess validity and reliability. Due to the reflective nature of the model, excluding measurement items is possible because they are interchangeable and can be omitted without altering the meaning of the construct [30]. Overall, five items were dropped due to low factor loadings (SC1, SC3, SC8, SC9, SC10) to achieve the required Cronbach’s Alpha, CR, and AVE score (see Table 1). After excluding items with low loadings, the model yielded Cronbach’s Alpha above 0.7, AVE above 0.5, and CR above 0.8, meeting the minimum standards [31]. In terms of discriminant validity, all remaining items passed the HTMT, Fornell-Larcker’s, and cross-loading assessment.

Table 1. Reliability and Validity

Construct	Items	Means	Loadings	Cronbach’s Alpha	CR	AVE
Coping with Barriers [25]	CB1	4.13	0.689	0.858	0.891	0.538
	CB2	4.17	0.746			
	CB3	4.23	0.705			
	CB4	4.22	0.787			
	CB5	4.10	0.753			
	CB6	4.17	0.729			
	CB7	4.33	0.721			
Occupational Self-efficacy [27]	OS1	4.09	0.677	0.924	0.936	0.595
	OS10	4.43	0.725			
	OS2	4.18	0.736			
	OS3	4.30	0.816			
	OS4	4.33	0.820			
	OS5	4.19	0.786			
	OS6	4.28	0.795			
	OS7	4.31	0.753			
	OS8	4.29	0.807			
Stigma Consciousness [9]	SC2_rev	2.65	0.615	0.901	0.913	0.568
	SC4_rev	2.47	0.674			

Construct	Items	Means	Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Stereotype Vulnerability [26]	SC5_rev	2.32	0.753	0.765	0.842	0.519
	SC6_rev	2.63	0.752			
	SC7_rev	2.42	0.792			
	SV1	2.40	0.727			
	SV2	2.17	0.734			
	SV3	3.74	0.829			
	SV4	2.29	0.831			
	SV5	2.25	0.795			
	SV6	2.39	0.680			
	SV7	2.22	0.737			
	SV8	3.83	0.678			

Notes: bold items are reverse-coded

The structural model analysis provides support for H1 (partially) and H2. In terms of explanatory power, coping with barriers (Adj. R Sq < 0.25) could weakly explain variations in stereotype vulnerability, similar to stereotype threat's ability to explain occupational self-efficacy (Adj. R Sq 0.258). In terms of effect size, all relationships exhibit moderate or weak effects.

Table 2. Hypotheses Testing

	Original Sample (O)	T Statistics	P Values
Coping with Barriers → Stereotype Vulnerability	-0.094	1.278	0.202
Coping with Barriers → Stigma Consciousness	-0.371	6.216	0.000
Stereotype Vulnerability → Occupational Self-efficacy	-0.169	3.478	0.001
Stigma Consciousness → Occupational Self-efficacy	-0.480	10.205	0.000

4.1 Discussion

This study examines the complex relationships among coping with barriers, stereotype threats, and occupational self-efficacy among Indonesian women workers. Using the SCCT framework, it explores how women's ability to manage workplace challenges influences their psychological experiences and professional motivation.

Stereotype threats in the workplace manifest primarily through stereotype vulnerability—the anticipation of being judged according to gender stereotypes—and stigma consciousness, or the awareness of potential negative judgments based on one's social identity. The analysis reveals that coping with barriers does not significantly influence stereotype vulnerability, suggesting that women's ability to address workplace obsta-

cles does not necessarily reduce their sensitivity to gender-based stereotypes. This finding contrasts with the existing research [7], which identified a negative relationship between coping with barriers and stereotype vulnerability.

In the Indonesian context, this difference can be explained by the persistence of patriarchal social structures, where men traditionally occupy positions of authority and privilege [32]. Such cultural conditioning may normalize gendered hierarchies to the extent that women perceive stereotypes as a permanent feature of social and professional life, rather than something they can eliminate through personal coping strategies. Consequently, even when women effectively manage workplace challenges, their perception of stereotype vulnerability remains largely unchanged because the source of bias lies in deeply rooted societal norms rather than in individual capacity. [This argument aligns with the SCCT, which holds that efficacy is strongly affected by the environment beyond individual cognitive processes. Patriarchal culture encompasses both environmental and internal cognitive factors because it shapes how a person perceives their environment or injustice.](#)

Conversely, coping with barriers exerts a significant negative effect on stigma consciousness. Women who demonstrate higher coping efficacy report less concern about being stigmatized or judged negatively due to gender. This finding aligns with a previous study [7], reinforcing the notion that effective coping mechanisms help individuals reinterpret potentially stigmatizing experiences as less personally threatening. High coping ability strengthens a sense of control and autonomy, allowing women to maintain a positive self-concept despite social bias [33]. In this context, self-perceived competence acts as a buffer against gender stigma, suggesting that psychological resilience can mitigate, though not fully eliminate, the effects of social stereotypes.

The study also finds that both stereotype vulnerability and stigma consciousness have negative and significant effects on occupational self-efficacy. Women who experience persistent stereotype threats tend to exhibit lower confidence in their professional abilities. This result corroborates previous findings [34] and indicates that continuous exposure to gender-based challenges undermines women's self-belief and persistence at work.

Specifically, stigma consciousness emerges as a negative predictor of occupational self-efficacy, implying that heightened sensitivity to gender-based judgment diminishes motivation and perseverance [35]. Women who are acutely aware of social stigma may avoid gender-typed tasks, thereby limiting their opportunities for skill development and career advancement [9]. Similarly, stereotype vulnerability—another dimension of stereotype threat—reduces women's occupational self-efficacy by internalizing societal messages that question women's competence in male-dominated fields. This finding is consistent with [36], who demonstrated that stereotype vulnerability lowers self-efficacy and hampers task performance.

5 Conclusion

Overall, the study reveals a nuanced psychological mechanism connecting coping strategies, stereotype threats, and self-efficacy among Indonesian women. While coping

with barriers reduces stigma consciousness, it does not significantly affect stereotype vulnerability, likely due to entrenched patriarchal norms. Both dimensions of stereotype threat negatively influence occupational self-efficacy.

This study employs a rigorous research method to address all proposed research objectives. Nevertheless, this study has limitations, particularly in its measurement of constructs, which focus on employees' current stereotype vulnerability and stigma consciousness without delving deeper into their cultural and social backgrounds, as suggested in a previous study [18]. Additionally, the cross-sectional nature of the study limits its ability to examine the causal mechanism among the constructs. Future studies could address this limitation by adopting an experimental, longitudinal approach.

In practice, the results of this study emphasize the importance of managing gender equality and diversity in the workplace. Given the crucial role gender stereotypes play in shaping occupational self-efficacy, employers are advised to pay close attention to gender equality, particularly in work distribution and pay. Lastly, the workplace must ensure career supports are provided equally to all employees, irrespective of gender.

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