

## ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Occupational safety compliance and workforce stability in women-owned businesses in China

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Qiao lin<sup>1\*</sup>, Shu Yulian<sup>2</sup>, Zhang Yaheng<sup>3</sup> and Chen Sen<sup>4</sup>

College of Life Sciences and Agriculture, Zhoukou Normal University, Zhoukou 466001, China<sup>1</sup>; Zhoukou Vocational and Technical College Zhoukou 466001, China<sup>2</sup>; Faculty of Education, SEGi University Malaysia, Selangor 47810, Malaysia<sup>3</sup>; Logistics Department, Zhoukou Normal University Zhoukou 466001, China<sup>4</sup>

\*For Correspondence: Email: qiaolin2012@126.com

## Abstract

Occupational safety compliance is essential for ensuring workforce stability, particularly in women-owned businesses, which play an increasing role in China's economy. Despite comprehensive regulatory frameworks, challenges such as inconsistent enforcement and varying compliance levels persist. This study examines the relationship between occupational safety compliance and workforce stability in women-owned businesses in China. Utilising World Bank survey data from 598 employees, the study employs descriptive statistics and logistic regression to analyse the impact of safety inspections on employee retention. Workforce stability is measured through hiring trends over five years, while key variables include adherence to safety regulations and environmental standards during inspections. Findings reveal that businesses with robust safety compliance experience higher retention rates, while industries such as hospitality report the lowest retention intentions. The results highlight that stringent occupational safety enforcement and proactive safety management enhance employee well-being, reduce workplace risks, and strengthen organisational reputation. This research underscores the importance of fostering a culture of safety compliance to promote stability and growth in women-led enterprises across China. (*Afr J Reprod Health 2025; 29 [5]: 179-190*).

**Keywords:** Occupational Safety Compliance; Workforce Stability Employee retention, Health and safety inspection, Female-led organisations

## Résumé

Le respect des règles de sécurité au travail est essentiel pour garantir la stabilité de la main-d'œuvre, en particulier dans les entreprises dirigées par des femmes, qui jouent un rôle croissant dans l'économie chinoise. Malgré des cadres réglementaires complets, des difficultés persistent, telles qu'une application incohérente et des niveaux de conformité variables. Cette étude examine la relation entre le respect des règles de sécurité au travail et la stabilité de la main-d'œuvre dans les entreprises dirigées par des femmes en Chine. S'appuyant sur les données d'une enquête de la Banque mondiale auprès de 598 employés, l'étude utilise des statistiques descriptives et une régression logistique pour analyser l'impact des inspections de sécurité sur la rétention des employés. La stabilité de la main-d'œuvre est mesurée par les tendances d'embauche sur cinq ans, tandis que les variables clés incluent le respect des réglementations de sécurité et des normes environnementales lors des inspections. Les résultats révèlent que les entreprises affichant une solide conformité en matière de sécurité enregistrent des taux de rétention plus élevés, tandis que des secteurs comme l'hôtellerie-restauration affichent les intentions de rétention les plus faibles. Les résultats soulignent qu'une application rigoureuse des règles de sécurité au travail et une gestion proactive de la sécurité améliorent le bien-être des employés, réduisent les risques sur le lieu de travail et renforcent la réputation de l'organisation. Cette recherche souligne l'importance de favoriser une culture de conformité en matière de sécurité pour promouvoir la stabilité et la croissance des entreprises dirigées par des femmes en Chine. (*Afr J Reprod Health 2025; 29 [5]: 179-190*).

**Mots-clés:** Conformité en matière de sécurité au travail ; Stabilité de la main-d'œuvre, rétention des employés, inspection de la santé et de la sécurité, organisations dirigées par des femmes

## Introduction

The effects of occupational health and safety in influencing workforce stability has been well recognised<sup>1,2</sup>. An environment where workers feel psychologically secure is essential for reducing

workplace accidents and injuries. Strong occupational health and safety (OHS) policies, including well-defined environmental programmes play a crucial role in safeguarding employees<sup>3</sup>. Companies that prioritise workplace safety tend to experience lower employee turnover rates, which in

turn reduces operational costs and enhances overall productivity<sup>4-6</sup>.

In the twenty-first century, workplace characteristics emphasise the need for businesses to prioritise employee health and safety<sup>7-9</sup>. The post-pandemic era has heightened work-related uncertainties, leading to increased labour mobility, workplace restructuring, and a transformation of occupational environments. Many employees face challenges in returning to work due to health and safety concerns<sup>10,11,12,13,14</sup>. The International Labour Organisation<sup>15</sup> reports that approximately three million workers globally die annually due to work-related accidents and illnesses. This underscores the need for organisations to conduct thorough inspections of their health and safety procedures to attract and retain employees, particularly in industries experiencing labour shortages.

China's rapid industrial growth has heightened occupational hazards despite advancements in workplace safety measures<sup>16-19</sup>.

The country has made notable progress in reducing occupational fatalities, with overall workplace deaths decreasing by 83% between 2005 and 2021, and coal mining-related fatalities dropping by 98%<sup>15</sup>. However, work-related injuries remain a concern, particularly due to gaps in national OHS frameworks, insufficient regulatory enforcement, and a lack of a safety-conscious culture at both national and organisational levels<sup>20,21</sup>. Governments and businesses share the responsibility of mitigating workplace hazards, as occupational accidents and illnesses negatively impact both individual well-being and corporate profitability.

Workplace safety regulations in China are enforced through industry-specific inspections, focusing on environmental conservation, worker safety, and labour law compliance<sup>22-24</sup>. Businesses are required to obtain relevant licenses and permits, which must be renewed annually to ensure compliance with safety and operational standards. Licensing plays a pivotal role in business operations, as it signifies adherence to government regulations, environmental control measures, and OHS policies. Moreover, corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives have been found to positively impact local

employees<sup>9,25</sup>. Globally, OHS measures have been linked to enhanced job satisfaction and performance<sup>26-30</sup>. However, the impact of workplace safety compliance on workforce stability within Chinese women-owned businesses remains underexplored.

Over the past decade, research on workplace safety has gained traction worldwide, particularly in China, where management practices are increasingly seen as critical to ensuring compliance with OHS regulations<sup>31,25</sup>. Employee turnover remains a major challenge for organisations and refers to employees' voluntary departure from their jobs<sup>32</sup>. Studies have demonstrated that enhancing workplace safety contributes to the retention of skilled professionals, such as nurses, by reducing occupational hazards and improving job satisfaction<sup>33,34</sup>. Moreover, job crafting and workplace innovation were found to enhance occupational satisfaction, particularly during the COVID-19 crisis<sup>35</sup>.

Women-led businesses have emerged as a driving force for economic growth, with female entrepreneurs playing an increasingly prominent role in business ownership and management. The shift from traditional roles to modern employment structures has led to a significant increase in female workforce participation.

However, research indicates that women have a higher turnover intention than their male counterparts due to a range of workplace factors affecting retention<sup>36</sup>. Female employers often adopt unique management and administrative strategies that emphasise work-life balance, making them more family-friendly compared to male-led organisations. This study extends existing research by investigating the impact of occupational safety compliance on workforce stability in Chinese women-owned businesses. This study also examines the differences in OHS implementation between female-led organisations and explores the role of business regulatory bodies in overseeing quality control and workplace safety inspections. Given the growing importance of workplace safety in employee retention and productivity, understanding these dynamics is crucial for shaping effective policy interventions.

## Methods

### Materials

Under the workplace safety approach, this research aims to describe the link between the individual and the organisation. Using nationally representative survey datasets from the Hong-Kong-SAR-China-2023-survey dataset<sup>37</sup> a secondary analysis of quantitative data was conducted. This enterprise survey covers a wide range of topics related to the business climate in China's administrative regions. It is carried out by the World Bank and its partners for small, medium, and big businesses in all geographical areas. Employee counts: 5 to 19 (small), 20 to 99 (medium), and 100 or more (big) indicate the firm's size.

A representative sample of 598 formal, non-agricultural private economy businesses managers received the questionnaires and were interviewed between April 2023 and October 2023. Sector coverage is defined consistently across all economies and includes the entire manufacturing sector and most services sectors: retail, wholesale, automotive repair, hotels and restaurants, transportation, storage, communications, construction, and IT. The enterprise survey is repeated every three years for a particular economy and repeated surveys aid in studying the evolution of the business environment and how it affects the dynamics of the private sector.

### Econometric model

This study examines the relationship between occupational safety compliance and workforce stability in women-owned businesses in China. Workforce stability is measured using retention intention (RI), which is assessed through the question: *"In the last five years, how many workers has the establishment needed to hire?"* A business is classified as having high workforce stability if it reports no need to hire any new permanent full-time workers (coded as 1), while businesses that have needed to hire new permanent full-time workers are

coded as 0. The rationale for this classification is that organisations with high employee retention over the past five years demonstrate greater workforce stability and do not require additional permanent staff.

Key explanatory factors in this study revolve around occupational safety compliance, which includes adherence to business regulations, licensing and permits, and management practices related to worker safety and environmental sustainability. Occupational licensing serves as a mechanism to uphold service quality, mitigate incompetency, and protect consumer welfare. Safety inspections, conducted by various government agencies, evaluate compliance with industry-specific regulations and operational safety requirements.

The study examines the following occupational safety compliance variables: Occupational Licensing: Quality Certificate Inspection: This is a critical factor and is assessed through: Business license and permits (coded as 1 if not a problem, 0 otherwise); Internationally-recognised quality certification (coded as 1 for establishments with certification, 0 otherwise); Health and safety inspections (coded as 1 if inspected, 0 if no visitation). Work Conditions measured by Transport accessibility (coded as 1 if transport is not an obstacle, 0 otherwise); Water supply adequacy (coded as 1 if the establishment has insufficient water supply, 0 otherwise). We included Environmental Management measured by CO2 Emissions Monitoring: Establishments that have monitored CO2 emissions in the past three years (coded as 1 for monitoring, 0 otherwise). To account for other factors that may influence workforce stability, the study includes the following control variables: We also included Type of Business: Categorized into manufacturing, wholesale, hotels, professional activities, and others (coded as 1 if the business falls into the category, 0 otherwise); Year of Establishment: Classified into two groups: businesses established before 2013 and those established in 2013 or later (coded as 1 for yes, 0 otherwise).

## Methods

Descriptive statistics was done using counts, mean, standard deviation and percentages to identify the proportion of respondents in each covariate. Statistics was described for the population sample of 598 workers interviewed between April 2023 and October 2023. Logistics and average marginal effect regression help generate the relationship among the variables with test for goodness of fit carried out with the Hosmer-lemeshow test. The general model of the logistic regression equation used in the analysis is presented in the form:

$$P(Y = 1 | x_i \dots x_n) = f(P(Y = 1 | x_i \dots x_n)) \quad (1)$$

The function of  $f$  represents the logit distribution function such that it leads to:

$$\text{logit}(P) = \log \left\{ \frac{p(Y=1)}{1-(p=1)} \right\} = B_0 + B_1x_{i1} + B_1x_{i2} + B_px_{in} \quad (2);$$

For  $i=1 \dots n$

Which is express in odd ratio as:

$$\frac{\exp(\beta_0 + \beta_1x_1 + \beta_2x_2 + \dots + \beta_nx_n)}{1 + \exp(\beta_0 + \beta_1x_1 + \beta_2x_2 + \dots + \beta_nx_n)} \quad (3)$$

## Ethical consideration

As this study relied solely on survey datasets from the Hong-Kong-SAR-China-2023-survey dataset by the World Bank<sup>37</sup>, which is publicly available online, no human or animal subjects were involved. Therefore, ethical concerns related to participant safety, confidentiality, and informed consent were not applicable.

## Results

### Summary statistics: Characteristics of variables

The analysis in Table 1a reveal the descriptive statistics of the 598 respondents in the enterprise survey. Out of the 586-establishment surveyed, 331 exhibited workers retention with the mean of 0.55; an indication that about 55% retained their workers (meaning 55% Workforce Stability) and require no

additional workers. 268 establishment were led by female with a mean value of 0.45, signifying about 45% women-led establishment while male dominant is reflected in the mean value of 0.54 which reflect that 54% of the establishment surveyed are led by male. Only 122 establishments had internationally recognised quality certification with a mean value of 0.20, thus suggesting that only about 20% of businesses had international certification.

On visitation by health and safety inspectors in assuring occupational safety compliance, only 13 managers reported that they were visited or inspected by safety and health inspector, this signifies that only about 2% of the sample were inspected. Monitoring of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions were carried out by 45 establishment out of the 586 surveyed in the last three years with a mean value of 0.08, an indication of only 8%. On how much an obstacle transport constitute a problem to the establishment; 298 reported it is not an obstacle, indicating 50% had transport as no problem, while getting business licensing and permits is not an obstacle to about 466 of the establishment, signifying about 78%, thus suggesting that business licensing and permit acquisition was adhered to moderately. Insufficient water affected 29 establishment accounting for 5% of the survey. Age of establishment classified into two groups revealed that only 32% were established within 2013 to 2023(10years before survey), thus signifying that 68% of the survey establishment had more than 10 years of operations. Table1b present the statistics of variables association with the 331 on retention intention. 83% of establishment with business licensing and permits not an obstacle retained their workers and do not need to employ additional workers. 44% of female-led establishment retained their workers, 52% establishment with no problem of transportation are associated with workers retention. 17% of establishment with internationally recognised certificates, 5.7% establishment that monitors their emission and 1.5% those inspected by health and safety officials were associated with workers retention. The poor performance of monitoring, coordination of safety and health inspection is reflected in the low level of visitation by the health officials.

**Table 1a:** Descriptive statistics of variables

Variables	Total	Mean	SD	Min	Max
No need to hire any new permanent full-time workers-Retention Intention (RI)	331	0.55	0.50	0	1
Female Employer/Manager	268	0.45	0.50	0	1
Male Employer/Manager	320	0.54	0.50	0	1
Establishment with Internationally-Recognised Quality Certification (QC)	122	0.20	0.40	0	1
Establishment visited by health and safety inspectors (Visit)	13	0.02	0.15	0	1
Establishment monitor its CO2 emissions (MoniCO2)	45	0.08	0.26	0	1
Transport not an Obstacle to work	298	0.50	0.50	0	1
Business Licensing and Permits not an Obstacle	466	0.78	0.42	0	1
Experience Insufficient Water Supply	29	0.05	0.21	0	1
Manufacturing sector	92	0.15	0.36	0	1
Wholesale trade sector	179	0.29	0.45	0	1
Hotels	32	0.05	0.22	0	1
Professional activities	100	0.16	0.37	0	1
Others	195	0.32	0.46	0	1
Establish before 2013	405	0.68	0.47	0	1
Establish after 2013	193	0.32	0.47	0	1

Note: SD means standard deviation, Min means minimum value, and Max means maximum value.

Source: Authors compilation

**Table 1b:** Descriptive statistics of variables with retention intention

Variables	Total	Freq.(RI)	%
No need to hire any new permanent full-time workers-Retention Intention (RI)	331	331	100%
Female Employer/Manager	268	148	44%
Male Employer/Manager	320	178	54%
Establishment with Internationally-Recognized Quality Certification (QC)	122	57	17%
Establishment visited by health and safety inspectors (Visitation)	13	5	1.51%
Establishment monitor its CO2 emissions (MoniCO2)	45	19	5.74%
Transport not an Obstacle to work	298	174	52.57%
Business Licensing and Permits not an Obstacle	466	275	83%
Experience Insufficient Water Supply	29	16	4.83%
Manufacturing sector	92	58	17.50%
Wholesale trade sector	179	101	30.50%
Hotels	32	12	3.60%
Professional activities	100	48	14.50%
Others	195	112	33.80%
Establish before 2013	405	227	68.50%
Establish after 2013	193	104	31%

Source: Authors compilation

**Table 2:** Results of logistic regression analysis

	Model 1			Model 2		
QC	-0.477	0.231	0.039**	-0.474	0.231	0.04**
Business permit not an obstacle	0.639	0.215	0.003***	0.641	0.215	0.003***
Manufacturing	0.785	0.313	0.012***	0.786	0.313	0.012***
Others	0.477	0.255	0.062*	0.477	0.255	0.062*
constant	-0.614	0.291	0.035**	-0.602	0.298	0.044**

Number of Obs.	598	598
Log likelihood	-394.54663	-394.52931
Prob > chi2	0.0005	0.0009
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.0402	0.0402

Result for Goodness of Fit Test: Hosmer-Lemeshow Test

Note: \*, \*\*, \*\*\* means significant at 10%, 5% and 1%, respectively. Source: Authors computation  
Source: Authors' own work

**Table 3:** Goodness of Fit Test (Hosmer-Lemeshow goodness-of-fit test)

Variable:	model 1	Model 2
no of observations	598	598
No of groups	10	10
Hosmer-Lemeshow chi2(8)	7.40	Hosmer-Lemeshow chi2(8) = 3.02
prob>chi2	0.4944	0.9333

**Table 4:** Average marginal effect

	Delta-method			Delta-method		
	dy/dx	Std.err	P> z	dy/dx	Std.err	P> z
QC	-0.111	0.053	0.036**	-0.111	0.053	0.038**
MoniCO2)	-0.083	0.081	0.311	-0.082	0.081	0.314
Visitation	-0.228	0.140	0.103*	-0.230	0.140	0.100*
Transport: Not an obstacle	0.031	0.043	0.463	0.031	0.043	0.467
Business permit not an obstacle	0.149	0.049	0.002***	0.150	0.049	0.002***
Insufficient Water	0.013	0.096	0.895	0.014	0.096	0.884
manufacturing	0.183	0.072	0.010***	0.184	0.072	0.010***
Wholesale	0.078	0.060	0.192	0.078	0.060	0.190
Hotels	-0.161	0.098	0.100*	-0.161	0.098	0.100*
Others	0.111	0.059	0.059**	0.111	0.059	0.059**
Professional activities	0.000			0.000		
Establish before 2013	0.026	0.044	0.560	0.026	0.044	0.561
Establish after 2013	0.000			0.000	(omitted)	
Female manager				-0.008	0.040	0.852

Note: \*, \*\*, \*\*\* means significant at 10%, 5% and 1%, respectively. Source: Authors computation

**Impact of safety and health inspection on worker retention intention**

The results presented in Table 2 indicate that for Model 1, internationally recognised certification (QC), carbon emission monitoring by establishments, and inspections conducted by safety and health regulators exhibit a negative effect on workforce retention. Specifically, businesses with recognised certifications have a 0.47 lower probability of worker retention, a result that is statistically significant at the 5% level. This finding aligns with the characteristics outlined in Table 1b,

where only 17% of businesses with QC certification report retention intent. One possible explanation is that while obtaining international certification enhances business credibility, it may also introduce stricter operational policies, increased workloads, or compliance costs that could impact employees' job security and satisfaction.

Conversely, establishments with valid business licenses and permits demonstrate a significant positive relationship with workforce retention, with an estimated 0.63 probability at the 1% level of significance. This suggests that legal certification fosters job stability, possibly by providing structured

business operations, financial security, and an environment where employees feel assured of their long-term engagement. This result supports the findings of Gittleman, Klee, and Kleiner<sup>38</sup> who reported that professional licenses and certifications are linked to wage and non-wage benefits, thereby enhancing worker retention. Similarly, Li and Mo<sup>39</sup> found that workplace support, particularly in the form of legal permits and licensing, contributes to job stability and boosts employees' morale, leading to greater workforce retention.

In analysing different business sectors, the results indicate that only the hotel industry exhibits a negative relationship with worker retention. In contrast, the manufacturing sector and other classified businesses show a positive relationship with retention, with probabilities of 0.78 and 0.47, respectively, compared to professional service businesses. Workforce stability is highest in the manufacturing sector, whereas hotel industry workers face the greatest mobility challenges, with a 68% likelihood of leaving their jobs. This trend can be attributed to the nature of these sectors—manufacturing jobs often require specialised skills and provide structured career progression, while hospitality jobs are more susceptible to burnout and turnover due to irregular hours and high-stress environments. These results align with the findings of Park and Min<sup>40</sup> and Nguyen *et al.*<sup>41</sup>, who identified that job burnout, employment level, and business type significantly impact hospitality employees' turnover intentions.

Although the number of years an establishment has been operational does not yield a statistically significant effect, businesses that have existed for more than a decade before the survey show an 11% higher chance of retaining workers compared to those within a 10-year timeframe. Additionally, establishments that do not face transportation challenges have a 0.13 probability of worker retention. The results from Model 2 closely mirror those of Model 1. Notably, businesses led by female managers exhibit a negative but statistically insignificant relationship with workforce retention, suggesting that gender of ownership does not have a significant influence on employees' retention intentions in women-owned businesses in China.

The Hosmer-Lemeshow goodness of fit test for the two models as reported in Table 3 confirms the stability of the model. The Hosmer-Lemeshow goodness-of-fit test is an important tool for verifying if the result of an expected events in a logistic regression model corresponds to the observed event data number in the model. Its null hypothesis states that both the observed and expected proportions are same, thereby reporting chi-square probability values greater than 0.05 presents the model to be a good fit. Result presented in Table 3 thus signifies that the variables of the models are a good fit in determining the association between the dependent and independent variables.

The average marginal effect results in Table 4 further validate the logistic regression findings. A one-unit increase in internationally recognised certification (QC), carbon emission monitoring (MoniCO<sub>2</sub>), regulatory visits, and hotel business reduces workforce stability. Conversely, a one-unit increase in business licenses and permits, as well as engagement in manufacturing and other business sectors, enhances workforce stability. This suggests that regulatory compliance and industry type significantly influence workforce stability, with structured and legally certified businesses fostering higher stability, while stricter compliance measures and high-mobility industries, such as hospitality, contribute to lower workforce stability.

## Discussion

The findings from this study highlight the critical role that occupational safety compliance plays in workforce stability, particularly in women-owned businesses in China. Employee turnover and retention are significantly influenced by factors such as the nature of the job, business licenses, and regulatory permits. In Hong Kong's commercial administrative region, obtaining business licenses and permits is generally not a challenge for most organisations. With a 2020 World Bank Doing Business score of 85.3, Hong Kong serves as a dynamic economic hub and a gateway to both Asia and Mainland China. The city has improved its regulatory processes, making business licensing and permissions an essential aspect of corporate organisation.

Ensuring compliance with Hong Kong's regulatory framework is crucial for lawful operations, worker safety, and overall business sustainability. Companies that fail to obtain the necessary licenses may face fines, penalties, or even forced closure, which can significantly impact employee retention. Business licensing also fosters employee confidence and engagement, making workers more likely to remain with a company. Employees feel more secure when they know their employer operates within legal parameters, which contributes to overall job satisfaction.

Since official inspections are required before licenses and permits are granted, businesses that obtain these approvals demonstrate a commitment to legal compliance and operational stability. This reassurance enhances employees' perception of job security and workplace reliability. Despite the importance of health and safety regulations in business licensing, findings indicate that post-licensing safety inspections are infrequent. Out of 598 businesses surveyed, only 13 (2%) reported undergoing routine inspections by health officials.

Additionally, only 8% of establishments actively monitored their CO2 emissions, and just 20% held internationally recognised quality certifications. These statistics highlight the inadequacy of regulatory oversight, which could affect employee safety and overall workforce stability. A positive workplace atmosphere is a crucial determinant of employee retention. Employees are more likely to remain with an organisation if they perceive their work environment as safe, stable, and conducive to productivity. Businesses that create supportive and safe workspaces tend to have lower employee turnover rates. This correlation highlights the need for regular safety inspections and compliance monitoring to improve workplace conditions and enhance workforce stability.

In Hong Kong region, most business licenses require annual or biannual renewal to avoid fines and operational disruptions. Employees working in licensed firms experience greater job security compared to those in unlicensed establishments, making them more likely to stay

with their employer. According to Mathimaran and Kumar<sup>42</sup>, an organisation's productivity, performance, and long-term success depend on its ability to retain key employees. Workforce stability directly affects business growth and sustainability, particularly in high-pressure industries such as hospitality and tourism.

The hospitality and tourism sector in Hong Kong face high employee turnover due to extreme work-related stress. Recent industry growth has intensified competition and created multiple job mobility opportunities, leading to significant workforce movement. High workloads and demanding schedules in the hotel industry often prompt employees to seek job opportunities in different sectors, further exacerbating retention challenges. For women-owned businesses, these challenges are particularly pronounced. Many female entrepreneurs operate businesses in sectors that require stringent compliance with safety regulations, such as food services and hospitality. Ensuring consistent adherence to safety protocols and conducting regular inspections can help mitigate high turnover rates and contribute to long-term workforce stability.

Findings from this study align with recent research highlighting regulatory compliance, organisational practices, and workplace culture as key drivers of workforce stability. Zhao *et al.*<sup>43</sup> emphasised how digital transformation improves environmental compliance and sustainability in Chinese manufacturing firms. Dai *et al.*<sup>44</sup> similarly emphasised executives' legal expertise as vital for fostering innovation and organisational stability. Moreover, aligning job roles with labour skills significantly reduces employee turnover and boosts productivity, as shown by Zhang *et al.*<sup>45-46</sup>. Family-oriented organisational policies, effective time management, and reduced workplace uncertainty also enhance employee retention, according to Hong *et al.*<sup>47</sup> and Mao *et al.*<sup>48</sup>. Strong corporate governance further contributes to innovation efficiency and employee commitment<sup>49</sup>. Workplace culture significantly influences group dynamics, cooperative behaviour, and retention intentions, as evidenced by Hao *et al.*<sup>50,51</sup>. Also, family responsibilities and psychological factors,

such as perceived workplace exclusion and political dynamics, shape retention<sup>52-53</sup>. Finally, addressing latent organisational challenges and ensuring accessible supportive infrastructures are crucial for maintaining stable workforces<sup>55,56</sup>.

## Strength and limitations

One of the study's strengths is its focus on how occupational safety compliance influence workforce stability, especially in women-led enterprises, a topic that has been relatively underexplored. The research utilises a nationally representative dataset from the World Bank, incorporating responses from 598 employees. The study employs descriptive statistics and logistic regression to provide robust and reliable evidence. By emphasising the role of business licensing and adherence to safety standards, the research offers practical insights for both policymakers and business leaders. The findings highlight the need for regulatory bodies to conduct regular inspections and enforce occupational safety measures. This approach not only enhances workplace safety but also improves employee retention rates, ultimately benefiting businesses and the overall economy.

Despite its contributions, the study has certain limitations. First, its exclusive focus on China may limit the generalisability of its findings to other regions with different regulatory environments. Countries with less structured licensing frameworks or different labour laws may exhibit varying relationships between occupational safety compliance and workforce stability. Second, while the study underlines the impact of safety management, it does not explore other organisational factors such as management style, company culture, or employee incentives, all of which can significantly influence retention. Future research could expand on these variables to provide a more comprehensive analysis of workforce stability. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported survey data introduces the potential for response bias or inaccuracies. Employees may overstate or underreport their experiences due to subjective perceptions or fear of employer retaliation. Implementing a mixed-method approach, including

direct observations and employer-reported data, could strengthen the study's findings. Finally, the study's emphasis on women-led businesses, while valuable, limits the broader understanding of how safety inspections impact retention across all types of organisations. Male-led enterprises and mixed-gender leadership structures may exhibit different trends, necessitating further investigation to draw industry-wide conclusions.

The study provides crucial insights into the relationship between occupational safety compliance and workforce stability, particularly in women-owned businesses in China. Business licensing and regulatory adherence play a fundamental role in ensuring employee retention, fostering job security, and creating a conducive work environment. However, the findings reveal gaps in post-licensing safety inspections, with only a small fraction of businesses undergoing routine evaluations. To improve workforce stability, regulatory authorities should enhance their oversight mechanisms, ensuring that safety standards are consistently enforced. Businesses should also prioritise workplace safety as a core component of employee retention strategies. By addressing these issues, women-owned businesses can strengthen their workforce stability, contribute to economic growth, and improve overall job satisfaction.

Future research should explore additional factors affecting employee retention, such as workplace culture, managerial practices, and employee engagement programs. Expanding the scope of analysis beyond China would also provide comparative insights into how different regulatory environments influence workforce stability. By addressing these gaps, policymakers and business leaders can develop more effective strategies to enhance occupational safety and reduce workforce turnover rates in women-led enterprises

## Conclusion

Women-owned businesses in China play a crucial role in economic development, yet they face unique challenges in maintaining a stable workforce. Staff turnover remains a significant issue, often exacerbated by unclear business missions,

workplace safety concerns, and job security uncertainties. Ensuring a safe and conducive work environment, fostering strong professional relationships, offering motivating leadership, competitive compensation, training and development opportunities, and implementing effective organisational policies are key to improving employee retention. Additionally, management's commitment to employees' well-being is a critical determinant of workforce stability. For women entrepreneurs in China, attracting and retaining skilled employees is vital for business success. Retaining experienced workers preserves institutional knowledge, enhances productivity, and reduces the high costs associated with frequent hiring and training. Conversely, addressing workforce turnover through the recruitment of new talent enables businesses to bridge skills gaps, remain innovative, and adapt to evolving market conditions, ensuring long-term sustainability and competitiveness. This study contributes to the existing knowledge on occupational safety and workforce stability in China's women-owned businesses. The study highlights the importance of adherence to professional standards, labour laws, and business regulations in fostering employee retention. The findings will assist women entrepreneurs, particularly in sectors such as hospitality, in formulating effective workforce retention strategies. Retention strategies are among the most essential tools for maintaining a competitive advantage in today's business environment. By prioritizing occupational safety compliance and employee well-being, women entrepreneurs can build resilient businesses that thrive in China's dynamic economic landscape.

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