



# Futility of Speaking Up as a Mediator between Psychological Safety and Nurses' Silence Behavior

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## INTRODUCTION

- Previous research has shown that psychological safety reduces nurses' silence behavior
- Organizational researchers have emphasized the futility of speaking up as one of the major enablers of silence behavior
- Futility of speaking up pertains to an individual's feeling that speaking up is useless because the point they assert is often ignored and/or nothing changes
- It is worthwhile to examine whether the futility of speaking up mediates the relationship between psychological safety and silence behavior of nurses

## AIM

- To explore the mediating role of futility of speaking up in the relationship between psychological safety and nurses' silence behavior

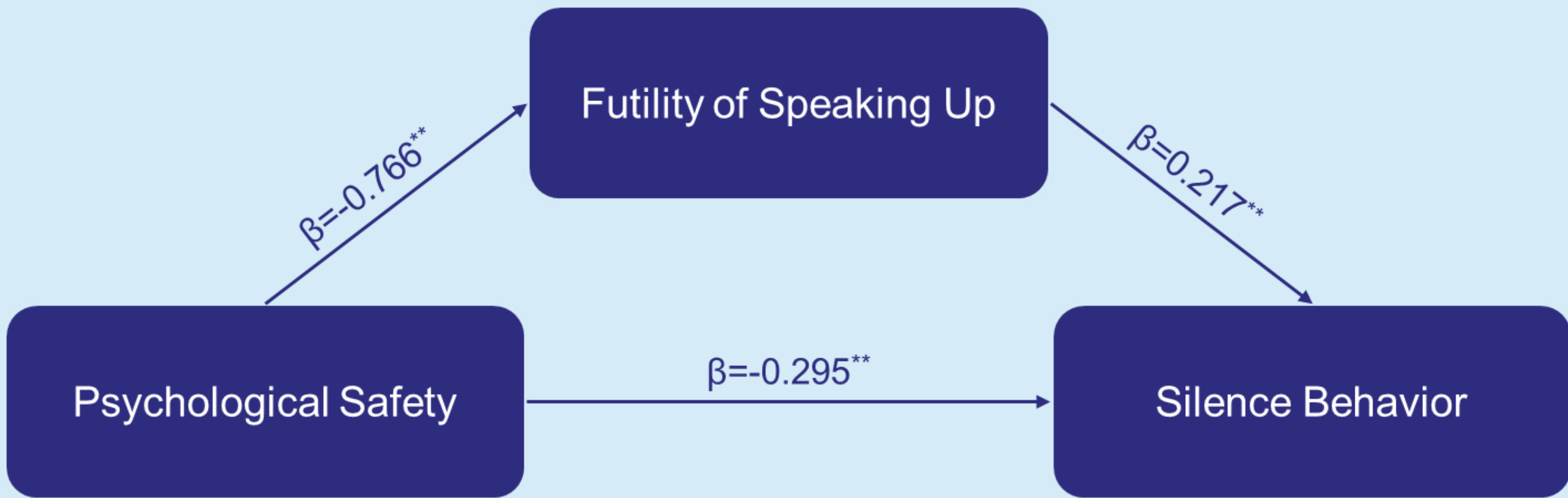
## METHOD

- Research design: Cross-sectional, correlational study
- Data: Survey data of 730 direct care nurses working at medical/surgical wards in 33 Korean hospitals
- Dependent variable: psychological safety, measured using the Psychological Safety Scale [1]
- Outcome variable: silence behavior, measured using a 5-item tool [2]
- Mediator: futility of speaking up, measured using a 3-item tool [3]
- Control variables: Nurses' unit tenure and age
- Statistical analysis: Model 4 of Hayes' PROCESS macro version 4.2 in IBM SPSS/WIN 26.0 program

## RESULTS

Table. Sample characteristics (N=730)

| Categories                 | n(%) or M±SD | Median (IQR) |
|----------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| Gender                     |              |              |
| Male                       | 13(1.8)      |              |
| Female                     | 717(98.2)    |              |
| Education level            |              |              |
| Associate degree           | 60(8.2)      |              |
| Bachelor's degree          | 619(84.8)    |              |
| >= Master's degree         | 51(7.0)      |              |
| Age                        | 30.76±0.22   |              |
| Nursing experience (month) |              | 61(81.25)    |
| Hospital tenure (month)    |              | 51(77.00)    |
| Unit tenure (month)        |              | 36(40.25)    |



\* $p < 0.05$  \*\* $p < 0.01$

Figure. Bootstrap mediating effect of futility of speaking up in psychological safety and silence behavior

- Psychological safety negatively correlated with silence behavior ( $\beta = -0.295$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and futility of speaking up ( $\beta = -0.766$ ,  $p < 0.001$ )
- Futility of speaking up positively correlated with silence behavior ( $\beta = 0.217$ ,  $p < 0.001$ )
- Psychological safety had a negative indirect effect on silence behavior through futility of speaking up ( $\beta = -0.166$ , 95% confidence interval = -0.228 to -0.111), indicating that futility of speaking up had a partial mediating effect on the relationship between psychological safety and silence behavior

## CONCLUSIONS

- When nurses feel psychologically unsafe in their working unit, they perceive speaking up as futile, and therefore, choose to remain silent even if they have concerns
- Hospital administrators and unit managers should put effort into creating a psychologically safe environment for nurses not to perceive their speaking up behavior as useless, which in turn can reduce nurses' silence behavior

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