

## THE ROLE OF WORK STRESS AND COWORKER SUPPORT BETWEEN TOXIC LEADERSHIP AND TURNOVER INTENTION

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### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguji dampak *toxic leadership* terhadap intensi keluar kerja melalui peran mediasi stres kerja, serta menguji peran dukungan rekan kerja sebagai moderator pada hubungan *toxic leadership* dan stres kerja. *Toxic leadership* dapat meningkatkan stres kerja, sehingga menambah peluang individu untuk meninggalkan organisasi. Dalam hal ini, dukungan rekan kerja diharapkan dapat membantu mengurangi efek negatif *toxic leadership* terhadap stres kerja. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian kuantitatif non eksperimental dengan menggunakan kuesioner. Survei dilakukan dengan melibatkan 417 karyawan Generasi Z di Jakarta yang diperoleh melalui teknik *convenience sampling*. Alat ukur yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah *Toxic Leadership Scale*, *Intention to Leave Scale*, *Job Stress Scale* dan *Coworker Support Scale*. Analisis data menggunakan tes sobel dan *structural equation model* (SEM) menggunakan AMOS. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa *toxic leadership* berpengaruh terhadap stres kerja, yang pada gilirannya memicu niat karyawan Gen Z untuk meninggalkan pekerjaan. Dalam hal ini, dukungan rekan kerja menunjukkan pengaruh signifikan dalam meredakan stres yang disebabkan oleh *toxic leadership*. Temuan ini menggarisbawahi pentingnya organisasi untuk mengatasi fenomena *toxic leadership* demi kesejahteraan karyawan dan keberlanjutan organisasi. Hasil penelitian ini diharapkan memberikan wawasan bagi organisasi dalam mengembangkan intervensi yang lebih efektif untuk menciptakan lingkungan kerja yang positif, serta mengurangi tingkat *turnover* dalam organisasi.

**Kata Kunci:** *Toxic leadership*, intensi keluar kerja, stres kerja, dukungan rekan kerja.

### ABSTRACT

*This study aims to examine the impact of toxic leadership on turnover intention through the mediating role of work stress, as well as examine the role of coworker support as a moderator in the relationship between toxic leadership and work stress. Toxic leadership can increase work stress, thus increasing the chances of individuals leaving the organization. In this case, coworker support is expected to help reduce the negative effects of toxic leadership on work stress. This study uses a quantitative research method using a questionnaire. The survey was conducted involving 417 Generation Z employees in Jakarta obtained through convenience sampling technique. The measuring instruments used in this study are Toxic Leadership Scale, Intention to Leave Scale, Job Stress Scale and Coworker Support Scale. Data analysis used sobel test and structural equation model (SEM) by AMOS. This study found that toxic leadership affects work stress, which in turn triggers Gen Z employees' intention to leave work. In this study, coworker support show a significant effect in relieving stress caused by toxic leadership. These findings underscore the importance of organizations to address the phenomenon of toxic leadership for employee well-being and organizational sustainability. The results of this study are expected to provide insights for organizations in developing more effective interventions to create a positive work environment, as well as reducing turnover rates in organizations.*

**Keywords:** *Toxic leadership*, turnover intention, work stress, coworker support.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Employee turnover constitutes a significant challenge for contemporary organizations due to its association with elevated recruitment and training expenditures, as well as the migration of organizational knowledge (Fitriani et al., 2023). This phenomenon is of particular relevance to the younger generation, particularly Generation Z. According to a report by Deloitte (2024), 53% of Generation Z worldwide are contemplating job tenure changes within the subsequent two years, marking a 13% increase from the 2022 statistics (Deloitte, 2022). In Indonesia, a survey conducted

by Jakpat in 2024 revealed that 69% of Generation Z individuals intend to resign from their current employment, with 20% attributing their decision primarily to dissatisfaction with their leadership. Gen Z, which is currently the largest generational group in Indonesia, with a population of approximately 74.93 million or 27.94% of the total population (IDN Media, 2024), also contributes around 25% of the workforce in DKI Jakarta (BPS DKI Jakarta, 2024). As a generation that has recently entered the workforce, Generation Z is more sensitive to toxic leadership behavior and has high expectations for a positive work environment (Wilis et al., 2023). This suggests that the inclination to disengage from professional obligations, particularly among Generation Z, is not merely an individual concern but also poses a significant threat to the long-term viability of the organization.

Work stress is a primary factor contributing to the development of an turnover intention from one's current position. Given the high incidence of staff turnover, business enterprises may face the prospect of losing competent personnel, a situation that can potentially compromise their overall performance and productivity (Marcella & Le, 2022). Employees experience work stress when there is a mismatch between job demands and actual abilities (Wijaya et al., 2019). A growing body of research indicates a positive correlation between work stress and the turnover intention. This finding, as reported by Ekingen et al. (2023), suggests a potential link between work stress and the desire to seek alternative employment opportunities. Consequently, work stress can function as a significant mechanism that elucidates employees' decisions to resign from their positions.

In the post-pandemic era, research on turnover intention has gained considerable attention as companies strive to recover and expand their workforce while employees simultaneously seize emerging opportunities to change jobs, influenced by factors such as organizational environment, leadership, and workplace interpersonal dynamics (Wijaya et al., 2024). A significant contributing factor to work stress is the presence of toxic leadership within an organization. A preliminary survey of 100 employees in Indonesia in 2024 demonstrated that 70% had experienced toxic leadership. A survey conducted in the United States reported that 71% of workers had experienced something similar at least once in their careers (The Harris Poll, 2023). The phenomenon of toxic leadership has been defined by a particular set of behaviors, including manipulative, narcissistic, authoritarian, and unethical tendencies. These behaviors have been shown to exert a detrimental influence on both employees and the organizations they work for (Lipman-Blumen, 2005).

The consequences of these conditions can include elevated stress levels, depression, anxiety, burnout, and even PTSD (Augustin et al., 2022; Sippio, 2023). Moreover, the presence of toxic leadership has been demonstrated to engender a decline in creativity, commitment, and job satisfaction, while concurrently fostering elevated levels of absenteeism and the propensity to seek alternative employment opportunities (Labrague et al., 2020; Nonehkaran et al., 2023). Research by Labrague et al. (2020) on 770 nurses in the Philippines found that nurses under toxic leadership were more prone to stress, high absenteeism, and turnover intention. Recent research also indicates that narcissistic behavior from toxic leadership is the strongest factor triggering job turnover intention (Nonehkaran et al., 2023). However, the direct relationship between toxic leadership and turnover intention is not always consistent. Dwita (2022) study of logistics couriers in Indonesia found that toxic leadership was not significantly related to job turnover intention. Rather, its effect was mediated by work stress.

In addition to work stress, coworker support has been identified as a significant factor in the development of mental health challenges. Coworker support has been demonstrated to function as an efficacious coping mechanism in diminishing the repercussions of toxic leadership (Jóhannsdóttir & Ólafsson, 2004). A study by Kusin et al. (2021) revealed that employees who perceive support from their colleagues tend to exhibit higher levels of job satisfaction and exhibit reduced intention to resign. Coworker support in the workplace has been demonstrated to fortify employees' resilience to pressure, thereby mitigating the deleterious effects of toxic leadership behaviors.

In Indonesia, the majority of studies on toxic leadership have centered on its detrimental effects, including elevated work stress (Dwita, 2022), counterproductive work behavior (Hattab et al., 2022) and turnover intention (Yulianto et al., 2024). However, there is a paucity of research that comprehensively examines the role of work stress as a mediator and coworker support as a moderator in the relationship between toxic leadership and turnover intention, especially among Generation Z employees. It is imperative for organizations to comprehend this mechanism to formulate more efficacious strategies that foster a healthy, supportive, and productive work environment.

### **The Effect of Toxic Leadership on Turnover Intention**

Leaders who display harsh and authoritarian (toxic) leadership styles have a negative impact on their subordinates, leading to frustration with their work, increased exhaustion, and heightened turnover intention (Gravili et al., 2022). When employees work under toxic leadership, they often experience stress and dissatisfaction, which deplete their personal resources. Negative leader behaviors—such as excessive criticism and control, or a lack of support—can make employees feel pressured and undervalued. Support functions as a valuable resource that influences employees' behaviors, emotions, and their ability to cope with job demands (Jolly et al., 2021). Consequently, the loss of such resources can trigger feelings of anxiety and helplessness, ultimately increasing their intention to leave the organization.

The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory provides a framework for understanding employees' responses to toxic leadership. This theory focuses on how the actual or potential loss of resources can become a significant source of stress. Individuals are naturally motivated to acquire, build, and maintain resources such as self-esteem, social status, and job stability (Hobfoll, 1989). The loss of these resources is perceived as a threat and can heighten psychological stress. When individuals experience resource loss or struggle to secure new resources, their stress levels increase. In toxic work environments, employees face various stressors stemming from both toxic leaders and weak organizational support.

COR posits that individuals' ability to cope with stress is enhanced through the development of social relationships and personal characteristics. Positive relationships can generate resources for both parties, whereas negative relationships can result in leaders depleting followers' resources without providing adequate support in return. When resource levels are low, perceived threats to these resources become more salient, influencing individuals' assessments of their ability to cope with such threats. These individual appraisals, shaped by toxic leadership, contribute to the creation of an unhealthy work environment that ultimately drives employees to consider leaving the organization. Based on the conceptual framework and, the hypotheses of this study are formulated as follows:

**H1:** Toxic leadership has a positive effect on turnover intention.

**Work Stress as a Mediator Between Toxic Leadership and Turnover Intention**

The relationship between toxic leadership and turnover intention has been widely examined in previous studies. Several studies have shown that toxic leadership contributes to increased turnover intention by creating a negative, high-pressure work environment with limited social support (Sippio, 2023). However, turnover intention is a complex phenomenon influenced by multiple factors. Much of the prior research has focused on examining the direct relationship between toxic leadership and turnover intention, without elaborating on the underlying psychological mechanisms that explain this relationship in depth.

Based on Affective Events Theory (AET), workplace events, including leadership styles, are primary triggers of employees' emotional reactions, which ultimately influence their attitudes and behaviors (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Toxic leadership, as a form of negative workplace event, has the potential to generate work stress, which is defined as a negative emotional experience accompanied by physiological and behavioral changes that arise from an individual's cognitive appraisal of stressors and is highly subjective (Erdogan et al., 2024). When employees experience high levels of work stress, they are more likely to develop turnover intentions as a way to avoid such pressures (Le & Henny, 2022; Shah et al., 2022; Jacop et al., 2023). Therefore, although toxic leadership may theoretically have a direct relationship with turnover intention, this relationship may be insignificant or not strong enough if work stress is not considered as a mediating variable.

This phenomenon is especially relevant when viewed in the context of Generation Z, which is the focus of this study. Gen Z employees tend to have high expectations for recognition, fairness, and personal development in the workplace. They are also known to switch jobs more quickly than previous generations when facing job dissatisfaction. In situations involving toxic leadership, Gen Z employees are more vulnerable to experiencing stress, as they perceive their personal and professional values to be disregarded. This condition increases the likelihood of developing turnover intention. Based on the conceptual framework and, the hypotheses of this study are formulated as follows:

**H2:** Work stress mediates the relationship between toxic leadership and turnover intention.

**Coworker Support as a Moderator Between Toxic Leadership and Work Stress**

Coworker support is defined as employees' perceptions of the extent to which their colleagues provide emotional and instrumental assistance within the organizational context (Ng & Sorensen, 2008). In situations where leadership is unsupportive, coworker support can serve as a valuable resource for individuals experiencing work stress. Such support can be an essential element of the work environment, helping to reduce the negative impact of toxic leadership on employees' mental health. When coworkers provide mutual support and assistance, it is expected that the negative effects of workload on stress will be alleviated.

The Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory offers a comprehensive explanation of social support in the context of work stress. This theory focuses on how individuals strive to acquire, maintain, and protect their resources (Hobfoll, 1989). In this context, social support functions as one of the most valuable resources. When individuals face stressful situations, such as high job demands or interactions with toxic leaders, coworker support can provide significant assistance in mitigating the negative impact of such stress. COR provides a strong framework for understanding the role of social support as an essential resource for coping with workplace demands and stress. Understanding the role of coworker support enables organizations to create healthier work environments, helping employees not only to endure negative experiences but also to thrive and achieve better well-being.

Perceived coworker support is a key component of social support and serves as a crucial social resource in the workplace. It refers to the extent to which colleagues are reliable and helpful in times of need, and responsive to work-related problems. Research has shown that perceived coworker support acts as a positive moderator in the relationship between work stress and work engagement (Azila-Gbettor et al., 2022). The moderating effect of coworker support is explained as social interaction that enables individuals to access beneficial resources. These interactions form social networks that provide valuable psychosocial support among coworkers. Therefore, coworker support is considered a critical resource for reducing the negative effects of work stress caused by toxic leadership. Based on the conceptual framework and, the hypotheses of this study are formulated as follows:

**H3:** Coworker support moderates the relationship between toxic leadership and work stress.

Turnover intention cannot be understood as resulting from a single factor but rather from a complex interaction of multiple workplace conditions. This research model explains how toxic leadership, work stress, and coworker support are interconnected in shaping employees' turnover intention, particularly among Generation Z. Toxic leadership can directly lead to turnover intentions, such as pressuring, manipulative, or demeaning leadership behaviors make employees feel undervalued, increasing the likelihood that they will consider alternative job opportunities. Furthermore, work stress serves as a psychological mechanism mediating the relationship between toxic leadership and turnover intention. Toxic leaders create emotional pressure, fear, and mental strain that trigger work stress. High levels of stress make employees perceive the work environment as unsupportive of their mental health and well-being, thereby strengthening their intention to leave the organization.

Thus, work stress functions as a mediator that explains how toxic leadership translates into turnover intention. Coworker support then plays a role as a moderating factor that can buffer the impact of toxic leadership on work stress. The presence of supportive colleagues allows employees to share burdens, feel supported, and reduce the pressure caused by toxic leaders. This support is especially important for Generation Z, who tend to place high value on social recognition, collaboration, and work-life balance. With strong coworker support, even when facing toxic leadership, employees may not experience excessive stress, thereby reducing the risk of developing turnover intentions.

Overall, this research model integrates the four variables by explaining that toxic leadership acts as the primary trigger, while work stress serves as the psychological pathway that explains why toxic leadership can lead to turnover intention. Coworker support functions as a buffer that can weaken the effect of toxic leadership on stress, and ultimately, turnover intention emerges as the outcome resulting from the interaction of all these factors. The proposed research model is illustrated in Figure 1.

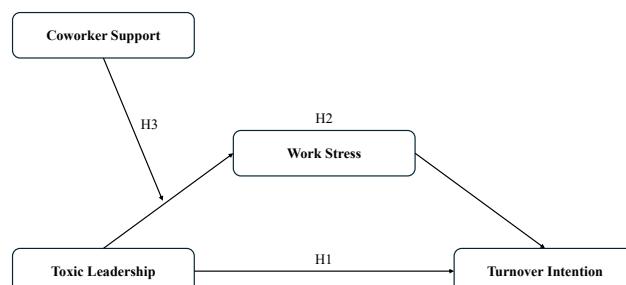


Figure 1. Research Model

Figure 1 further illustrates that toxic leadership can exert negative pressure that triggers employees' work stress, thereby increasing turnover intention. The discomfort experienced by employees also contributes to heightened work stress, which in turn strengthens the relationship between toxic leadership and turnover intention. In this context, positive coworker support serves as an important factor in mitigating these negative effects. Such support helps employees feel more secure, reduces their stress levels, and ultimately strengthens their commitment to the organization.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a quantitative non-experimental research design. The variables measured include toxic leadership, turnover intention, work stress, and coworker support. In this study, toxic leadership serves as the independent variable, while turnover intention functions as the dependent variable. Work stress acts as a mediating variable between toxic leadership and turnover intention, and coworker support serves as a moderating variable between toxic leadership and work stress. The convenience sampling technique was employed, allowing the researcher to select respondents based on criteria relevant to the study. The data collected were analyzed quantitatively and processed statistically to test the hypotheses. Data recording, processing, and analysis were conducted using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with AMOS software.

### Participants

The recruitment process began with a clear introduction to the purpose of the study. However, the term *toxic leadership* was considered potentially negative and could lead to discomfort. Referring to previous research, the term was replaced with *dysfunctional leadership* to create a more supportive and neutral atmosphere, thereby encouraging participants to share their experiences more freely and honestly (Schmidt, 2008). Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the survey at any time if they felt uncomfortable or wished to discontinue participation, without any consequences.

The participant characteristics included Generation Z employees aged 18–27 years in Jakarta, with a minimum of one year of work experience and full-time employment status. The sample size was calculated to ensure that the decisions drawn from the sample could be representative of the larger population. Using the formula proposed by (Bhalerao & Kadam, 2010), with a significance level ( $\alpha$ ) of 0.05 and an estimated standard deviation ( $\sigma$ ) of 0.5, at least 393 participants were required to estimate the proportion of Gen Z employees in Jakarta. A general overview of the participants' demographics is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographics

Characteristics	Sub-characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	178	42.7
	Female	239	57.3
Age	18 years	2	0.5
	19 years	2	0.5
	20 years	10	2.4
	21 years	10	2.4
	22 years	22	5.3
	23 years	58	13.9
	24 years	72	17.3

	25 years	84	20.1
	26 years	50	12
	27 years	107	25.7
Educational Background	High School	143	34.3
	Diploma	36	8.6
	Bachelor	223	53.5
	Master	11	2.6
	Other	4	1
Work Experience	1-2 years	86	20.6
	> 2-3 years	108	25.9
	> 3-4 years	72	17.3
	> 4-5 years	79	18.9
	> 5 years	72	17.3

### Toxic Leadership

Toxic leadership is defined as a leadership style characterized by authoritarian, manipulative, and abusive behaviors that create a negative work environment, measured through indicators such as authoritarian behavior, abusive supervision, self-promotion, unpredictability, and narcissism (Schmidt, 2008). The Toxic Leadership Scale (Schmidt, 2008) was used to measure toxic leadership in this study. This instrument has also been employed in previous research by Türkmen Keskin & Özduyan Kılıç (2024); Semedo et al. (2022); and was adapted by Hattab et al. (2022). The scale consists of five subscales, self-promotion, abusive supervision, unpredictability, narcissism, and authoritarian leadership. In total, the instrument contains 30 items. Each item is rated on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Somewhat disagree), 4 (Somewhat agree), 5 (Agree), to 6 (Strongly agree).

Example items include: "My supervisor expresses anger toward subordinates without clear reasons" (unpredictability), "My supervisor thinks that he or she is extraordinary" (narcissism), "My supervisor takes credit for achievements that do not belong to him or her" (self-promotion), "My supervisor talks badly about subordinates to others in the workplace" (abusive supervision), and "My supervisor ignores..." (authoritarian leadership).

### Turnover Intention

Turnover intention refers to employees' deliberate and conscious willingness to leave their organization, measured through the intention to quit, to search for alternative employment, and to resign (Mobley et al., 1979). *Intention to Leave Scale* was used to measure the turnover intention variable (Rosin & Korabik, 1991). The instrument was adapted by Rifmawati et al. (2016) and has also been applied in previous research by Tutan & Kökalan (2024); and Tari Selçuk et al. (2022). The scale is unidimensional and consists of 7 items, rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Neutral), 4 (Agree), to 5 (Strongly agree). Example items include: "If I were offered a job tomorrow, I would refuse it" and "I often think about leaving my job."

### Work Stress

Work stress is defined as a negative emotional experience accompanied by physiological and behavioral changes arising from employees' appraisal of workplace stressors, measured through indicators including role conflict, workload, emotional exhaustion, and work pressure (Erdogan et

al., 2024). *Job Stress Scale (JSS)* was used to measure work stress in this study (Parker & Decotiis, 1983). The instrument was adapted by Sarah (2018) and has been applied in prior studies by Hemati Alamdarloo et al. 2023; and Pincha (2022). The scale consists of two subscales, namely time stress and job anxiety, comprising a total of 13 items. Responses are rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Agree), to 4 (Strongly agree). Sample items *include*: “I feel like I never have a day off” *and* “I feel nervous or anxious because of my job.”

### **Coworker Support**

Coworker support refers to employees’ perceptions of emotional and instrumental assistance received from colleagues, assessed through emotional support and instrumental support (Ng & Sorensen, 2008). *The Coworker Support Scale* (Settoon & Mossholder, 2002) was employed to assess coworker support in this study. The instrument has also been used in prior research by Um-e-Rubbab & Khursheed (2023); and Shin et al. (2022), and was adapted by Kotimah (2023). The scale consists of two subscales, namely instrumental support and emotional support, comprising a total of 14 items. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree), 2 (Disagree), 3 (Neutral), 4 (Agree), to 5 (Strongly agree). Example items include: “*My coworkers help me with difficult tasks even when I do not directly ask for help*” (instrumental support) *and* “*My coworkers listen to me when I need to vent my complaints*” (emotional support). ”

The data analysis in this study employed Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using AMOS through several stages, including data screening, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and model fit evaluation. All indicators showed standardized factor loadings between 0.566 and 0.909, meeting validity and reliability criteria. Model fit analysis indicated a Chi-Square value of 7006.219 (df = 2001,  $p < 0.001$ ) and RMSEA of 0.078 (CI 90% = 0.076–0.080), with GFI = 0.662, AGFI = 0.638, CFI = 0.818, TLI = 0.810, IFI = 0.818, and Hoelter = 126 ( $p < 0.05$ ). Although not perfect, the model meets acceptable fit standards for complex social research. The structural model shows that toxic leadership significantly increases work stress ( $\beta = 0.63$ ), which affects job anxiety ( $\beta = 0.99$ ) and turnover intention ( $\beta = 0.42$ ), while coworker support moderates the relationship between toxic leadership and work stress ( $\beta = -0.22$ ). These results provide a clear and replicable data processing framework.

## **3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Goodness of Fit Test**

The results of the model fit analysis demonstrate that the default model has a Chi-Square value of 7006.219 with degrees of freedom (df) = 2001 and  $p < 0.001$ . The RMSEA value of 0.078 (CI 90% = 0.076–0.080) is within the acceptable cutoff range for large sample sizes. Other fit indices demonstrate that GFI = 0.662, AGFI = 0.638, and CFI = 0.818. These findings indicate that the model has not yet attained the perfect fit category; however, it is still considered acceptable for use in complex social research. The TLI value of 0.810 and IFI of 0.818 also indicate moderate model fit. Concurrently, the Hoelter result of 126 ( $p < 0.05$ ) demonstrates that the model maintains considerable stability for the sample size employed ( $n = 417$ ). Consequently, while the model may not fully align with the highest standards, it can be considered reasonably fit for hypothesis testing.

## Structural Equation Model

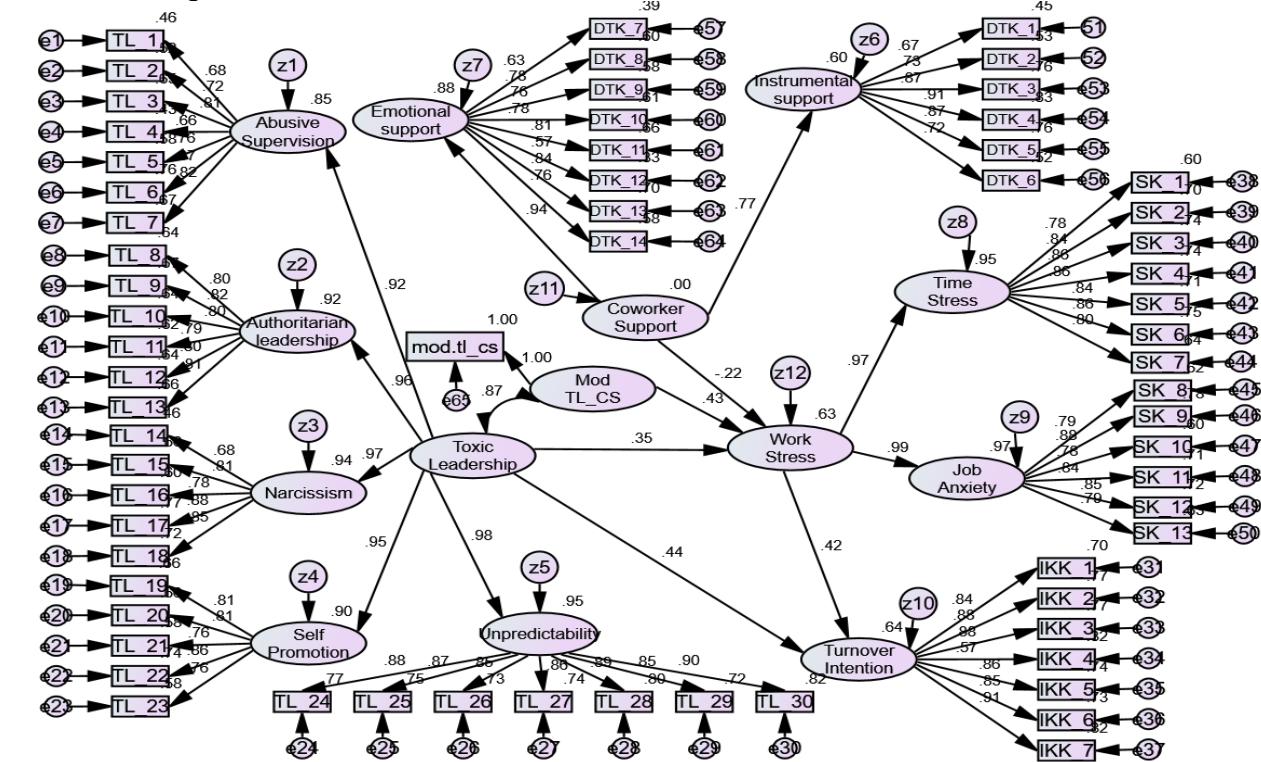


Figure 1. Structural Equation Model by AMOS

The results of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis using AMOS yielded standardized estimates, thereby illuminating the relationships between variables in the research model. The construct of toxic leadership is multifaceted, encompassing various dimensions such as abusive supervision, authoritarian leadership, narcissism, self-promotion, and unpredictability. These dimensions exhibit high factor loadings ( $\geq 0.80$ ), thereby substantiating the validity of the construct in representing its latent nature. Moreover, the repercussions of toxic leadership on work stress ( $\beta = 0.63$ ) are substantial, thereby influencing job anxiety ( $\beta = 0.99$ ) and turnover intention ( $\beta = 0.42$ ). Furthermore, work stress is influenced by time stress ( $\beta = 0.97$ ), indicating that time pressure is a dominant factor in increasing work stress. Concurrently, the influence of social support from coworkers (coworker support), which is moderated in the model (Mod TL\_CS), on the relationship between toxic leadership and work stress ( $\beta = -0.22$ ) is observed, although the effect value is relatively small. Consequently, these results corroborate the prevailing evidence that toxic leadership can engender heightened work stress and anxiety, thereby prompting employees to contemplate the departure from their organization.

Table 2. Factor Loading Of The Variable and Dementions

Construct	Indikator	$\lambda$ (Loading)
Abusive Supervision	TL1-TL7	0.658 – 0.873
Authoritarian Leadership	TL8-TL13	0.789 – 0.817
Narcissism	TL14-TL18	0.680 – 0.880
Self Promotion	TL19-TL23	0.762 – 0.862
Unpredictability	TL24-TL30	0.848 – 0.905
Turnover Intention	IKK1-IKK7	0.566 – 0.905
Time Stress	SK1-SK7	0.776 – 0.864
Job Anxiety	SK8-SK13	0.777 – 0.882
Coworker Support	DTK1-DTK14	0.572 – 0.909

Preliminary analysis indicates that all indicators constituting the research construct have factor loading values ( $\lambda$ ) ranging from 0.566 to 0.909. These findings suggest that each indicator is valid and can adequately represent the latent construct. The highest loading values were identified in the Unpredictability dimension (0.848–0.905) and coworker support (0.572–0.909), while the lowest value was found in one of the Turnover Intention indicators (0.566). These findings suggest that all indicators can be reliably used to measure the constructs under study.

### **Hypothesis 1: Toxic leadership has a positive effect on turnover intention**

The findings of this study substantiate the notion that toxic leadership exerts a significant influence on turnover intention, as evidenced by the obtained results. The obtained C.R value of 7.568 (C.R > 1.96) and p value of 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ) indicate that hypothesis 1 is validated. The estimate value of Toxic Leadership on Turnover Intention is 0.427. The present study sought to examine the impact of toxic leadership on turnover intention, with the hypothesis being that the effect would be positive and significant. Consequently, an elevated Turnover Intention is associated with a heightened probability of turnover. This finding demonstrates that toxic leadership has a significant positive effect on turnover intention. Consequently, the higher the level of perceived toxic leadership among employees, the more probable their intention to depart from the organization.

### **Hypothesis 2: Work stress mediates the relationship between toxic leadership and turnover intention**

A thorough examination of the available data has yielded a conclusive result: the indirect effect of toxic leadership on turnover intention, as influenced by work stress, is 0.361 with a C.R value of 2.869 (C.R > 1.96) and a p-value of 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ). This finding provides substantial support for the second hypothesis (H2). The mediation test, in conjunction with the Sobel test, further corroborates this finding. The Sobel test value is 3.98, the Aroian test is 3.96, and the Goodman test is 4.01, all of which are greater than the critical value of  $\pm 1.96$  and are significant at the 0.05 level ( $p < 0.001$ ). The findings of this study suggest a significant mediating effect of work stress on the relationship between toxic leadership and turnover intention. In essence, toxic leadership exerts a dual influence on employees' intention to depart from the organization. On the one hand, it directly fosters an inclination to seek alternative employment opportunities. On the other hand, it indirectly amplifies work stress, thereby reinforcing the employees' sense of resignation. These findings indicate that an elevated level of perceived toxic leadership is associated with an increased propensity for employees to experience work stress. This condition emerges as a significant factor that contributes to the development of turnover intention.

### **Hypothesis 3: Coworker support moderates the relationship between toxic leadership and work stress**

The findings of the study indicate that the impact of toxic leadership on work stress, moderated by coworker support, is statistically significant. The obtained C.R value of 5.961 (C.R > 1.96) and p value of 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ) substantiate Hypothesis 3, thereby confirming that the relationship between toxic leadership and work stress is influenced by the presence of coworker support. Coworker support plays a pivotal role in moderating the nexus between toxic leadership and work stress. Despite the negligible interaction coefficient, which signified the product of toxic leadership and coworker support, the outcome substantiated the notion that coworker support functions as a substantial moderator. This finding suggests that robust social support from colleagues can mitigate the deleterious effects of toxic leadership on work stress, thereby reducing the strain imposed by such leadership. The findings indicate that all three proposed hypotheses were supported. The findings of this study demonstrate that toxic leadership significantly increases

turnover intention, both directly and indirectly through work stress. In contrast, coworker support serves as a protective factor that mitigates the negative effects of toxic leadership.

Table 3. Hypothesis Test

<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Variables</b>	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>S.E</b>	<b>C.R.</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>
H1	TL -> TI	0.427	0.056	7.568	0.000	Supported
H2	TL -> WS -> TI	0.361	0.036	2.869	0.000	Supported
H3	TL x CWS -> WS	0.000	0.000	5.961	0.000	Supported

*TL = Toxic Leadership; TI = Turnover Intention; WS = Work Stress; CWS = Coworker Support.*

## Discussion

This study has demonstrated that toxic leadership generates high levels of work stress, which in turn increases turnover intention among Generation Z employees. However, coworker social support, serves as a buffer the impact of work stress caused by toxic leadership, it was found to significantly reduce stress levels among Gen Z workers.

The negative behaviors exhibited by toxic leaders were shown to make Gen Z employees feel pressured and undervalued. Toxic leadership triggers substantial stress for younger employees, particularly Generation Y and Z, because they have stronger expectations for fair, transparent leadership that values employee well-being. These generations tend to prioritize psychological safety, open communication, and supportive work environments; when these expectations are unmet, they experience higher levels of stress and disengagement (Ng & Sorensen, 2008). Generation Z places high importance on inclusive and positive work environments and has been shaped by a workplace culture that emphasizes balance and support. When confronted with leaders who are harsh, authoritarian, or indifferent to employee needs, Gen Z perceives their values and expectations as being threatened. This challenge is further exacerbated by the fact that Gen Z employees are often in the early stages of their careers, making their experience in handling work stress and conflict relatively limited. Consequently, the psychological pressure stemming from toxic leadership exerts a greater toll, intensifying their levels of stress.

Toxic leaders often display behaviors that make employees feel pressured, undervalued, and unsupported, leading to increased emotional strain. For Generation Z, this effect is especially pronounced because this cohort has strong expectations for fair, transparent, and supportive leadership that prioritizes employee well-being and inclusivity ((Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015; (Francis & Hoefel, 2018)). Sustained exposure to such stress causes both physical and psychological reactions that can undermine employees' mental well-being. These emotional reactions frequently act as a bridge between workplace events and individual outcomes. When the demands of the job outweigh the resources available, Gen Z employees engage in appraisal processes that heighten emotional strain and shape their interpretations of the situation. As a result, when faced with experiences of injustice and persistent work stress, Gen Z workers are more likely to respond with maladaptive outcomes, most notably the intention to leave the organization.

Consistent with prior findings, toxic leadership has been shown to increase work stress (Dwita, 2022), which subsequently heightens turnover intention (Labrague et al., 2020; Hattab et al., 2022). When employees feel pressured and undervalued by their leaders, they are more likely to seek alternative employment opportunities (Le & Henny, 2022). Hattab et al. (2022) found that employees working under toxic leaders reported lower job satisfaction, which in turn contributed to greater turnover intention. Similarly, Dwita, (2022) demonstrated that higher levels of perceived

toxic leadership were associated with increased work stress among employees. This work stress was shown to be a critical factor influencing turnover intention, as employees experiencing greater stress were more inclined to leave the organization.

These findings align with the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, which emphasizes how the loss of resources can become a significant source of stress (Hobfoll, 1989). According to COR theory, resource loss is perceived as a threat that heightens psychological stress, particularly when individuals face difficulties in securing or replenishing their resources. When personal and job-related resources are depleted, employees' ability to cope with workplace demands is impaired, intensifying their stress response. In the context of toxic leadership, employees may perceive a loss of crucial resources such as emotional support, recognition, and fairness. This appraisal of resource loss fosters discomfort and dissatisfaction in the workplace, ultimately prompting employees to consider leaving the organization.

Unlike previous studies in Indonesia, which have rarely addressed appropriate coping strategies when dealing with toxic leadership, this research offers a novel contribution by identifying coworker support as a buffer between toxic leadership and work stress. This finding is consistent with previous research by Kusin et al. (2021) who revealed that when employees feel supported by their colleagues, they experience greater job satisfaction and exhibit lower turnover intention.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the sample was restricted to Gen Z employees in Jakarta, which may not fully represent the broader employee population. Second, the cross-sectional design only provides a snapshot of the relationships between variables at a single point in time, limiting the ability to draw causal inferences. Third, this research did not account for other potential factors that could influence the relationships among toxic leadership, work stress, and turnover intention, such as organizational culture or broader economic conditions. For future research, expanding the sample to include employees from different generations and across diverse industries would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of toxic leadership on turnover intention. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to better capture the causal dynamics of these relationships.

From a practical standpoint for Gen Z employees, enhancing personal coping strategies—particularly by building resilience—is strongly recommended to mitigate the negative impact of toxic leadership. Seeking professional support has been identified as one of the most effective strategies, and employees should be encouraged to access counseling services or consult with human resources when possible (Morris, 2019). For organizations, it is essential to take responsibility in recognizing toxic leadership behaviors and to establish internal support systems, such as leadership training, anonymous reporting mechanisms, and strict corrective actions. For future research, it is recommended to conduct longitudinal studies in order to explore changes over time. Furthermore, other variables such as resilience and organizational support should also be examined to better understand their influence on the relationship between toxic leadership and work stress among Gen Z employees. Such exploration is expected to contribute to the identification of more effective coping strategies in mitigating the negative impact of toxic leadership.

It is important for organizations to recognize that toxic leadership does not only affect the employees directly involved but also generates detrimental consequences for the organization as a whole. Therefore, addressing toxic leadership should be a managerial priority to ensure both employee well-being and organizational sustainability. Organizations are encouraged to design

more effective interventions, such as leadership development programs that emphasize communication and empathy skills, enabling leaders to better understand the impact of their behaviors on employees. In addition, providing psychological support for employees can serve as an essential resource to help them manage stress effectively.

Based on these findings, it is crucial for organizations to emphasize interventions aimed at mitigating the issue of toxic leadership. Moreover, it should be acknowledged that coworker support, while valuable, cannot stand alone in addressing the impact of toxic leadership and work stress. By developing integrated strategies that combine leadership improvement, social support, and well-being programs, organizations can create a healthier and more supportive work environment for their employees.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study concludes that toxic leadership significantly heightens work stress among Generation Z employees, which in turn increases their intention to leave the organization. Gen Z workers, who value fairness, transparency, and supportive workplaces, perceive toxic leadership as a direct violation of their expectations. Coworker social support found to significantly buffer the impact of toxic leadership on stress levels.

To address this issue, organizations must take responsibility for identifying and reducing toxic leadership behaviours. Leadership development programs that emphasize empathy, fairness, and communication skills are essential, alongside formal mechanisms such as anonymous reporting systems, strict corrective measures, and access to psychological support services. Integrated strategies that combine leadership improvement, organizational support, and employee well-being programs are necessary to build healthier workplaces.

For Gen Z employees, enhancing personal coping strategies, such as resilience training, stress management, and seeking professional counselling is recommended to help mitigate the negative effects of toxic leadership. Future research should broaden its scope to include multiple generations and industries, adopt longitudinal methods to examine causal dynamics over time, and explore additional factors like resilience and organizational culture. By doing so, researchers and practitioners alike can better identify effective strategies to reduce work stress and turnover intention in the face of toxic leadership.

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