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Quiet Quitting in Toxic Work Environments: The Mediating Role of Emotional Exhaustion Across Gen Z and Non-Gen Z Employees in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT: Quiet quitting has emerged as a major organizational challenge associated with declining employee engagement, reduced discretionary effort, and psychological withdrawal from work. Despite growing attention to this phenomenon, limited research has integrated workplace toxicity, emotional exhaustion, and quiet quitting within a unified theoretical framework while simultaneously examining generational differences. This study investigates the direct and indirect effects of toxic work environment on quiet quitting through emotional exhaustion among Gen Z and non-Gen Z employees in Indonesian private companies. Drawing on the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory and Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, the study explains how adverse workplace conditions deplete employees' psychological resources and encourage withdrawal behavior. Data were collected from 1,246 employees working in private companies in Indonesia using convenience sampling. The hypotheses were tested using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) and multi-group analysis. The findings reveal that toxic work environment significantly increases emotional exhaustion in both generational groups. The direct effect of toxic work environment on quiet quitting is stronger among Gen Z employees, whereas the influence of emotional exhaustion on quiet quitting, including its mediating effect, is stronger among non-Gen Z employees. These results indicate that generational differences are reflected not in the existence of quiet quitting itself, but in the psychological mechanisms through which workplace toxicity influences withdrawal behavior. This study contributes to the literature by integrating toxic work environment, emotional exhaustion, and quiet quitting into a single explanatory model and by extending understanding of generational workplace behavior in the context of emerging economies. The findings also provide practical implications for organizations seeking to reduce disengagement and improve employee well-being across generational cohorts.

Keywords: Quiet quitting, Toxic work environment, Emotional exhaustion, Generation Z, JD-R and COR theory.

I. INTRODUCTION

Quiet quitting is when employees perform work with minimal exertion and diminish their responsibilities [1]. The emergence of quiet quitting has gained global attention, particularly in the post-pandemic labor market, where shifts in work arrangements, rising psychological strain, and changing employee expectations have reshaped work engagement across countries [2, 3]. Global evidence indicates

that only a small proportion of employees are fully engaged, while the majority fall into low-engagement categories associated with quiet quitting, reflecting a persistent and structural disengagement trend in the workforce [4, 5]. This condition not only reduces productivity and work quality but also weakens organizational commitment and limits discretionary effort, leading to substantial global economic losses estimated at trillions of dollars annually [4, 5]. Quiet quitting occurs when employees disengage and show dissatisfaction with workplace issues, reducing well-being and increasing conflict [6]. Quiet quitting is a phenomenon linked to job discontent, a lack of managerial support, and excessive expectations. This phenomenon has been discussed particularly in the context of Generation Z.

Previous research shows that quiet quitting is more common among Gen Z employees and is associated with working conditions, career opportunities, affective involvement, and organizational support [7]. These conditions were exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, which increased preferences for flexible lifestyles and reduced tolerance for intense competition and overwork [7]. However, empirical evidence indicates that quiet quitting is most pronounced among younger generations, particularly Gen Z and Millennials, while Generation X also experiences it at a more moderate level, and Baby Boomers show a lower tendency [8]. A survey shows that 50% of employees globally fall into low-engagement categories associated with quiet quitting [3]. Meanwhile, the Microsoft Work Trend Index 2022 report found that 54% of employees feel their work is not valued, which is a key reason they stop putting extra effort into their work [2]. The same factors affect other generations: poor evaluation, lack of career development, low involvement in decision-making, lack of autonomy, and declining trust in the organization all contribute to quiet quitting [9]. Evidence suggests that quiet quitting is not unique to one generation [10]. Rather than focusing on whether quiet quitting is more prevalent in a particular generation, prior research highlights that differences in work values and expectations may shape how employees respond to workplace conditions [11, 12]. In this study, the generational comparison is limited to Gen Z and non-Gen Z employees to examine whether the relationships among variables differ between these two groups.

This study adopts a comparative analytical strategy by examining Gen Z and non-Gen Z employees using a multi-group approach to assess whether the structural relationships among variables differ across generational groups. Prior research suggests that generational differences are reflected not only in demographic characteristics but also in variations in work values, expectations, and responses to workplace conditions, which may lead to different behavioral outcomes [11, 12].

Indonesian private companies were selected as the research context because of their significant role in employment and economic activity. They also contribute to infrastructure development, cooperation with the government, and corporate social responsibility programs that benefit society and the environment [13]. Workers in private businesses should consistently innovate to support the sustainability of the organization. High demands without adequate employee well-being can create an unhealthy work environment, leading to negative behaviors, stress, burnout, and increased absenteeism. Work behavior has received increasing attention, particularly among Gen Z, those born between 1997 to 2012 [14]. Gen Z grew up with rapid technological advances, leading organizations to place high expectations on them. However, Gen Z may be more vulnerable to pressure due to expectations of flexible and adaptive work environments. Generational cohorts include the Silent Generation (1928–1945), Baby Boomers (1946–1964), Generation X (1965–1980), Millennials (1981–1996), and Generation Z (1997–2012) [14, 15].

Employees who are in a toxic work environment will experience unpleasant conditions that impact their psychological health [16]. Such employees may experience mental health vulnerability, depression, absenteeism, and burnout at work [17]. These effects can impact employee performance, increase absenteeism, and reduce company loyalty [17]. Toxic work environments include narcissism, abusive leadership, threats, harassment, humiliation, and bullying [16]. Increased internal conflict and low collaboration can hinder innovation and decision-making in organizations [17]. Employees who have quiet quitting behavior will only perform the minimum work tasks possible or in accordance with the employment contract without any additional initiative or exceeding expectations [18]. This behavior reflects employees avoiding extra effort and additional activities beyond their responsibilities [18]. Indirectly, these behaviors can reduce overall organizational productivity and efficiency, which can impact both physical and

psychological dimensions [19, 20]. Physically, this can be reflected in increased absenteeism without clear reasons, whereas decreased productivity and work quality reflect performance-related outcomes [19, 20].

Emotional exhaustion is fatigue felt by employees due to continuous work activities without recovery, causing a great deal of emotional exhaustion [21]. Employees who experience this condition show symptoms of fatigue from deep feelings of stress, thus reducing emotional well-being in individuals [22]. The condition impacts employee psychology and is characterized by chronic fatigue, depression, and decreased levels of self-efficacy at work [23]. Emotional exhaustion is a key component of burnout, which can affect individuals' mental and physical health as well as performance and productivity [21]. This condition can negatively affect organizations and individuals by contributing to psychological health problems [23]. Emotional exhaustion can result from high work pressure, lack of social support, and role ambiguity in a negative work environment [24].

Previous research has explored the relationship between toxic work environment and quiet quitting. A toxic work environment positively and significantly influences the desire to quit quietly [25]. Negative organizational conditions increase the likelihood of quitting [25]. Research shows that well-being and job satisfaction play a more dominant role than a toxic work environment in influencing the intention to quit [26]. Psychological issues are linked to the interaction between toxic work environments and emotional exhaustion. When employees perceive that their contributions are undervalued or adequately supported by supervisors and co-workers, the risk of emotional exhaustion increases [27]. Despite these findings, prior studies on burnout and disengagement focus on emotional exhaustion and reduced engagement, while quiet quitting studies emphasize behavioral withdrawal without integrating workplace conditions [7, 16, 28]. Empirical findings also remain inconsistent regarding its dominant drivers. Consequently, these fragmented approaches fail to explain the unified mechanism linking toxic work environment, emotional exhaustion, and quiet quitting.

In addition, empirical evidence comparing how this mechanism operates across generational groups is still limited. To address these limitations, this study develops an integrated model linking toxic work environment, emotional exhaustion, and quiet quitting and examines how this mechanism operates across Gen Z and non-Gen Z employees. The novelty of this study lies in integrating these relationships within a single framework while positioning generational differences as variations in underlying behavioral mechanisms rather than mere demographic distinctions. Furthermore, examining this model in the Indonesian private-sector context provides additional theoretical insight into how generational responses to workplace conditions emerge in emerging economies, where organizational structures and work expectations differ from those in developed contexts.

II. RELATED WORK

1. GENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

1.1 Generational Cohort Theory and Work Values

Generational cohort theory explains that individuals who grow up in similar social and historical contexts tend to share life experiences that shape relatively similar values and attitudes, although intra-generational variation remains [14, 15]. In organizational contexts, generational differences are often assumed to influence how employees interpret job demands, organizational support, and psychological well-being; however, empirical evidence shows that such differences are inconsistent, context-dependent, and sometimes overstated [11, 12, 29]. Work values, including intrinsic, extrinsic, and work–life balance orientations, may vary across generations, although findings remain mixed [30, 31]. In the context of Gen Z, research highlights attention to psychological well-being and working conditions in relation to behaviors such as quiet quitting, without directly comparing across generations [7]. Therefore, the generational perspective is used as a comparative approach to examine whether differences in the relationships among variables emerge empirically.

1.2 Differences Between Gen Z and Non-Gen Z in Work Values and Behavioral Responses

Generation Z, defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012, is often described as having an orientation toward work flexibility, technological integration, and attention to psychological well-being and work–life balance [32]. However, empirical evidence indicates that these characteristics are not consistently observed and are highly dependent on research context [12, 33]. In organizational settings, Gen Z employees are frequently associated with expectations of supportive leadership, rapid feedback, and inclusive, collaborative work environments, reflecting their experiences with rapid technological advancement and evolving social norms [32]. By contrast, differences from other generations are not always clearly delineated, as studies suggest that variations in work values and work attitudes across generations tend to be small, inconsistent, and difficult to generalize empirically [11, 33]. In terms of work behavior, research indicates that psychological well-being and working conditions are associated with tendencies toward behaviors such as quiet quitting, particularly among Gen Z [7], while other studies link quiet quitting to work-related factors such as burnout and disengagement [33]. Accordingly, generational differences in this study are conceptualized as variations in the strength of responses to toxic work environments and emotional exhaustion, allowing for potential differences in the relationships among variables without assuming absolute distinctions between cohorts.

2. INTEGRATED THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Job Demands–Resources Theory

Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) explains that job characteristics consist of job demands and job resources that influence employee well-being and behavior [34]. Job demands refer to aspects of work that require sustained physical and psychological effort and contribute to fatigue and stress, whereas job resources function to mitigate these effects and enhance work motivation [35, 36]. Within the JD-R framework, high job demands trigger the health impairment process, leading to burnout, particularly in the form of emotional exhaustion, as supported by empirical findings showing that job demands are positively associated with emotional exhaustion [35, 36].

2.2 Conservation of Resources Theory

Conservation of Resources (COR) emphasizes that individuals strive to acquire and protect resources such as emotional energy and psychological capacity [37]. Continuous job demands without adequate support lead to resource depletion, which is reflected in emotional exhaustion as the core component of burnout [27]. Individuals tend to reduce their work involvement to protect remaining resources when facing sustained work pressure. Empirical evidence indicates that this condition is associated with increased disengagement and a tendency toward quiet quitting as a response to the imbalance between demands and resources [38, 39]. From a COR perspective, sustained work pressure leads to resource depletion and consequently triggers withdrawal behavior from work.

2.3 Integrated Conceptual Model: Resource Depletion and Withdrawal Behavior

The integration of JD-R and COR provides a more comprehensive conceptual framework for explaining the relationship between the work environment and employee behavior. JD-R theory conceptualizes a toxic work environment as a form of job demands that triggers emotional exhaustion through the health impairment process, whereas COR theory explains this condition as resource depletion that encourages self-protective responses [34, 37]. Furthermore, emotional exhaustion is associated with a tendency toward withdrawal behavior, where quiet quitting in this study is positioned as a specific form of withdrawal behavior reflecting the limitation of work contributions to a minimum level [18]. This study integrates JD-R and COR because JD-R explains the source of work pressure (job demands) and the health impairment process leading to emotional exhaustion but does not explicitly address the mechanism of psychological resource depletion, whereas COR explains how such pressure leads to resource depletion that drives withdrawal behavior [34, 37]. Therefore, integrating these two theories provides a more complete explanation of how a toxic work environment leads to emotional exhaustion and ultimately results in quiet

quitting through a mediating mechanism in which emotional exhaustion reflects resource depletion linking job demands to withdrawal behavior.

3. EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE AND RESEARCH GAP

Converging evidence shows that a toxic work environment is consistently associated with increased psychological strain, such as job stress, and negatively affects performance and engagement, although the specific outcomes vary across studies [16, 17, 40]. Empirical findings also indicate that burnout, particularly emotional exhaustion, is positively related to quiet quitting or quiet quitting intention [7], while psychosocial factors such as workplace bullying increase quiet quitting [28], and job satisfaction and work addiction are negatively associated with quiet quitting intention as protective factors [41].

Inconsistencies in the literature appear in several aspects. Differences in model structures occur when some studies position toxic work environment as a predictor of psychological outcomes without including quiet quitting [17, 16, 40], while other studies examine quiet quitting or quiet quitting intention from individual factors such as burnout, employee well-being, job satisfaction, and work addiction without integrating workplace conditions and linking them to outcomes such as turnover intention [7, 28, 41]. Differences also arise in the conceptualization of quiet quitting, where some studies treat it as a unidimensional construct in the form of quiet quitting intention [7], while others conceptualize it as a multidimensional form of psychological withdrawal with multiple behavioral dimensions [18, 42], and some use it as a behavioral construct without explicitly specifying its structure [28]. Differences in dominant factors are also evident, where some studies emphasize employee well-being [26], while others highlight toxic work environment [16, 17]. Generational findings also remain inconclusive, with some studies indicating that Gen Z is more vulnerable [7], while others show cross-generational patterns without consistent differences [8, 28]. These empirical findings are systematically summarized in Table 1.

3.1 Convergence and Inconsistencies in Prior Findings

Table 1. Selected empirical studies on toxic work environment and quiet quitting.

Category	Study (Context, Method)	Variables and Key Findings (Including Research Gap)
TWE and Psychological Outcomes	Health sector, Pakistan (n = 267), SEM (AMOS) [40]	Variables: toxic work environment, job stress, and job productivity. Finding: toxic work environment reduces job productivity through job stress; however, emotional exhaustion and quiet quitting are not examined.
	SMEs, China (n = 301), PLS-SEM [16]	Variables: toxic work environment, organizational support, employee well-being, and employee engagement. Finding: toxic work environment reduces employee engagement through organizational support and employee well-being; however, emotional exhaustion and quiet quitting are not examined.
	Project-based organizations, Pakistan, SEM [17]	Variables: toxic work environment, workplace stress, organizational support, and project outcomes. Finding: toxic work environment increases workplace stress and reduces project outcomes; however, emotional exhaustion and quiet quitting are not examined.

Category	Study (Context, Method)	Variables and Key Findings (Including Research Gap)
Burnout / Emotional Exhaustion and Quiet Quitting	Hotels, South Africa, SEM [43]	Variables: toxic work environment, work stress, and job dissatisfaction. Finding: toxic work environment increases work stress and job dissatisfaction; however, emotional exhaustion and quiet quitting are not examined.
	Gen Z employees, China (n = 683), PLS-SEM [7]	Variables: burnout, employee well-being, and quiet quitting intention. Finding: burnout increases quiet quitting intention, whereas employee well-being reduces it; however, toxic work environment is not included.
	Healthcare workers, regression [28]	Variables: burnout and quiet quitting. Finding: burnout increases quiet quitting; however, toxic work environment is not examined.
	Gen Z hotel employees, China (n = 585), PLS-SEM [41]	Variables: burnout and quiet quitting intention. Finding: burnout increases quiet quitting intention; however, toxic work environment is not included.
Quiet Quitting (Concept and Antecedents)	Employees, scale validation, CFA [18]	Variables: quiet quitting. Finding: quiet quitting is multidimensional; however, its antecedents are not examined.
	Working adults, CFA [42]	Variables: quiet quitting and psychological withdrawal. Finding: quiet quitting reflects multidimensional withdrawal associated with burnout; however, toxic work environment is not examined.

3.2 Research Gap and Positioning of the Present Study

Prior research lacks an integrated model, leaving the underlying psychological mechanisms insufficiently explained. Existing studies remain partial, either linking work environment to psychological outcomes [16] or examining burnout, employee well-being, and quiet quitting separately [7]. Theoretical integration is also limited, as JD-R and COR are typically applied in isolation to explain work pressure and resource depletion [34, 37], leaving the process from job demands to resource depletion and withdrawal behavior insufficiently articulated. Generational comparisons have not been systematically tested at the structural level. Prior studies focus on single cohorts or do not directly examine group differences using multi-group approaches [7, 8, 28], leaving differences between Gen Z and non-Gen Z unclear. This study integrates toxic work environment, emotional exhaustion, and quiet quitting within a JD-R and COR-based model and tests structural differences using multi-group analysis between Gen Z and non-Gen Z in the Indonesian private sector. This approach clarifies the resource depletion mechanism linking job demands to withdrawal behavior and reveals cross-generational variation in structural relationships.

4. HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

4.1 Toxic Work Environment and Quiet Quitting

A toxic work environment is defined by high work demands, weak managerial support, ineffective leadership practices, and an unhealthy organizational culture, such as mobbing and negative gossip, which collectively deplete employees' psychological resources. These conditions have been proven to trigger mental health issues, decrease work motivation, and escalate the likelihood of burnout [17]. Within the context of the JD-R theory, a work environment filled with pressure but lacking resources will drive emotional

exhaustion and reduce work engagement, thereby triggering withdrawal behaviors. Empirical findings indicate that excessive workload and techno-overload contribute to work fatigue, which in turn increases the tendency for quiet quitting by limiting work engagement to the minimum formal requirements [44, 45]. Additionally, low organizational support and laissez-faire leadership exacerbate role stress and reduce perceptions of fairness and recognition, which drive employees to psychologically withdraw from their work [46, 47]. Toxic work culture has also been shown to be associated with increased turnover and quiet quitting, as well as a decline in organizational reputation due to unhealthy working conditions, limited career opportunities, and excessive workloads [25]. The persistence of toxicity within the organization weakens employee motivation and hinders the achievement of organizational goals [48], leading employees to adopt protective strategies such as reducing work effort as an adaptive mechanism to maintain psychological balance and personal well-being [49, 50]. Therefore, a toxic work environment can be understood as a primary contextual factor that increases the tendency for quiet quitting, thus formulating the following research hypothesis:

- H1: A toxic work environment positively influences quiet quitting.

4.2 Toxic Work Environment and Emotional Exhaustion

The imbalance between job demands and social support creates working conditions that reduce employees' emotional resilience in the long term. The increase in workload, lack of assistance from colleagues and superiors, and an unconducive work environment have proven to be the main triggers for the emergence of emotional exhaustion [21]. When work efforts do not receive adequate appreciation and interpersonal relationships are characterised by indifference, the risk of emotional exhaustion increases because individuals lose psychological resources to maintain work engagement [27]. An unhealthy work environment also increases the likelihood of stress, burnout, and psychological distress, which simultaneously worsen employee well-being and mental health [16, 51]. In that context, destructive leadership practices accelerate emotional exhaustion and weaken individuals' ability to manage work pressure [52, 53]. Work relationship patterns characterised by bullying and arbitrary treatment also deepen the perception of psycho-logical insecurity, thereby making emotional exhaustion a response to the organization's failure to provide a supportive and dignified work environment [54, 55]. Work pressure that is not balanced with safety protection systems and institutional support further exacerbates this condition because employees face physical and psychological risks simultaneously [56]. Consequently, a toxic work environment may be viewed as an important determinant of increased emotional exhaustion through the accumulation of chronic work stress, leading to the development of the subsequent research hypothesis:

- H2: A toxic work environment positively influences emotional exhaustion.

4.3 Emotional Exhaustion and Quiet Quitting

Emotional exhaustion reflects a condition where affective resources are depleted, reducing an individual's ability to maintain sustained work engagement and encouraging depressive symptoms. Empirical evidence shows that work pressure, family role conflict, and techno-demands increase emotional exhaustion, which in turn reduces work engagement and performance, leading employees to limit their contributions to the minimum formal level [39, 57]. Exposure to supervisor rudeness, negative gossip, and demeaning social dynamics also exacerbates emotional exhaustion and triggers psychological withdrawal from work [49, 58, 59]. Persistent fatigue has been proven to damage psychological health and weaken employees' adaptive capacity in facing work demands [23]. Quiet quitting occurs when individuals perform only the minimum tasks due to excessive work demands while neglecting their psychological well-being, and emotional exhaustion decreases motivation and commitment, thereby reinforcing this tendency [16]. Research also shows that emotional exhaustion increases the tendency to disengage psychologically because employees no longer have the vigor to immerse themselves thoroughly in their tasks [17, 35]. Similar findings were obtained in high-stress work environments such as the disaster sector, education, and healthcare, where burnout correlates with attitudes of disengagement and quiet quitting [60, 61]. Therefore, emotional exhaustion may be comprehended as a key psychological determinant that drives a shift in work behavior from active engagement to limiting contributions, thus formulating the research hypothesis as follows:

- H3: Emotional exhaustion positively influences quiet quitting.

4.4 Mediating Role of Emotional Exhaustion

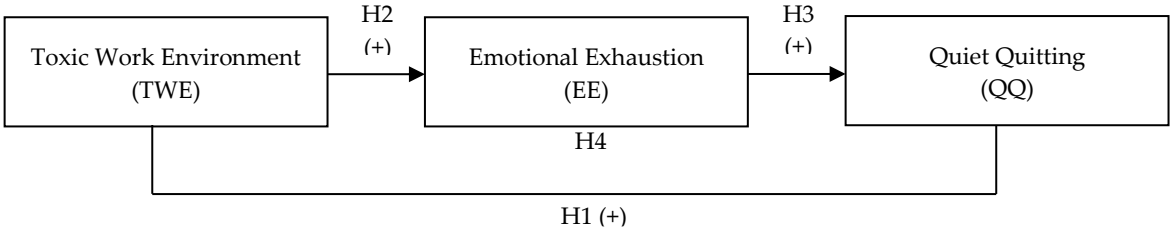
Various forms of toxic work environments, including negative gossip, excessive workload, rudeness from superiors, bullying, techno-demands, petty tyranny, and laissez-faire leadership, create psychological pressure that continuously drains employees' emotional energy. Exposure to continuous work demands without recovery mechanisms increases emotional exhaustion because employees have to face pressure that is not balanced with organizational support [27]. The lack of support and excessive work demands further exacerbate emotional exhaustion and encourage employees to limit work engagement as an effort to prevent burnout [62]. Empirical evidence shows that negative gossip and disrespectful behavior from supervisors increase emotional exhaustion, which in turn triggers quiet quitting through psychological withdrawal from work [49, 58, 59]. Workload and technological demands have also been shown to indirectly influence quiet quitting through burnout as a form of emotional exhaustion due to sustained work pressure [44, 39]. Additionally, practices of bullying and petty tyranny reinforce the function of emotional exhaustion as a mechanism bridging the influence of destructive leadership on deviant behavior and intentions to leave the organization, including quiet quitting [54, 55]. The laissez-faire leadership style also contributes to quiet quitting through increased role stress and emotional exhaustion due to a lack of direction and organizational support [63]. Consequently, emotional exhaustion functions as the principal psychological mechanism that mediates the influence of a toxic work environment on the propensity for quiet quitting, resulting in the development of the subsequent research hypothesis:

- H4: Emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between toxic work environment and quiet quitting.

4.5 Multi-Group Comparison Between Gen Z and Non-Gen Z

Generational differences are often assumed to influence how individuals respond to work conditions and psychological strain; however, empirical evidence indicates that such effects are inconsistent, generally weak, and highly context-dependent [12, 11]. Gen Z employees tend to hold higher expectations regarding psychological well-being, work–life balance, and supportive work environments [7, 32], which may make them more sensitive to unfavorable workplace conditions. In contrast, non-Gen Z employees tend to exhibit more moderate responses compared to Gen Z, although these differences are not consistently observed and remain contingent on contextual factors [8, 33]. The JD-R and COR frameworks suggest that work conditions functioning as job demands contribute to the depletion of psychological resources and trigger emotional exhaustion, which can subsequently lead to withdrawal behaviors such as quiet quitting [34, 37]. Variations in values, expectations, and coping mechanisms across generations may shape differences in the strength of relationships among variables, although empirical findings remain mixed and context-sensitive [12]. Accordingly, generational comparison in this study is framed as variation in the magnitude of structural relationships rather than as absolute differences between groups. Based on this reasoning, the following hypothesis is proposed:

- H5: There are differences in the structural relationships among toxic work environment, emotional exhaustion, and quiet quitting between Gen Z and non-Gen Z employees.



Note: H5 denotes multi-group differences between Gen Z and Non-Gen Z.

FIGURE 1. Conceptual model of the study.

This study applies multi-group analysis to examine these differences by estimating the structural model for Gen Z and non-Gen Z employees. The conceptual framework is presented in Figure 1.

III. MATERIAL AND METHOD

A quantitative design was used in this investigation involving employees of private companies in Indonesia, with a total sample of 1,246 respondents. Respondents were categorized into two groups: Gen Z (born 1997–2012; n = 1,006) and non-Gen Z (born before 1997; n = 240). The demographic composition of the sample, including employment status, marital status, education level, and job tenure, is presented in Table 2 to support group comparisons. This study used convenience sampling with a minimum work tenure criterion of three months to ensure that respondents had relevant work experience. This approach enabled the efficient collection of a large and diverse sample (n = 1,246), supporting the adequacy of the sample for analysis despite its non-probability nature, particularly for robust model estimation and group comparisons; however, it may introduce sampling bias and limit the generalizability of the findings, particularly given the imbalance between Gen Z and non-Gen Z groups.

The structural model was evaluated using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples and no sign changes option to assess the significance of path coefficients, t-values, and p-values, following standard PLS-SEM recommendations [64]. PLS-SEM was selected due to its predictive orientation and its suitability for estimating complex structural models with multiple latent constructs, as well as its focus on maximizing explained variance and its flexibility compared to covariance-based SEM [65]. In addition, this approach enabled multi-group analysis (PLS-MGA) to simultaneously compare structural relationships between Gen Z and non-Gen Z. The survey was administered using Google Forms and distributed via WhatsApp to reach private-sector employees across various sectors. Participation was voluntary, and respondents completed the questionnaire anonymously. A five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), was used to measure all constructs.

The original instruments were adapted to this response format to ensure consistency across constructs. The questionnaire was developed based on previously validated instruments and prepared in Indonesian, with careful wording adjustments to ensure conceptual equivalence and contextual appropriateness. The quiet quitting variable [18] consisted of 9 items, of which 5 items were removed, resulting in 4 retained items. The toxic work environment variable [16] consisted of 7 items, of which 1 item was removed, resulting in 6 retained items. The emotional exhaustion variable [66–68] consisted of 6 items, all of which were retained. The quiet quitting variable includes statements such as I take as much time off as possible and I often pretend to work to avoid other tasks. The toxic work environment variable includes statements such as My boss, co-workers, or subordinates do not respond to my greetings and my boss, co-workers, or subordinates address me disrespectfully in public. The emotional exhaustion variable includes statements such as I feel frustrated with my job and I feel emotionally exhausted from my job.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

1. RESULTS

Gen Z respondents were predominantly female, accounting for 591 individuals (58.7%), while non-Gen Z respondents were also predominantly female, comprising 121 individuals (50.4%), as presented in Table 2. Gen Z respondents were predominantly non-permanent employees (56.8%), whereas non-Gen Z respondents were predominantly permanent employees (61.3%). This pattern indicates differences in employment characteristics across generational groups, where Gen Z tends to be in more flexible employment status, while non-Gen Z tends to be more stable. The measurement model results for Gen Z (Table 3) show that the AVE values for toxic work environment, emotional exhaustion, and quiet quitting exceed 0.5. Both the Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability scores exceeded 0.70. For non-Gen Z, the AVE, composite reliability, and Cronbach's alpha values surpassed the acceptable thresholds.

Table 2. Respondent characteristics.

Characteristics	Category	Non-Gen Z (n=240) n	Gen Z (n=1006) %	n	%
Sex	Male	119	49.6%	415	41.3%
	Female	121	50.4%	591	58.7%
Employment status	Not permanent	93	38.8%	571	56.8%
	Permanent	147	61.3%	435	43.2%
Marital status	Single	52	21.7%	941	93.5%
	Married	176	73.3%	62	6.2%
	Widowed	12	5.0%	3	0.3%
Educational attainment	Primary	4	1.7%	1	0.1%
	Lower secondary	11	4.6%	5	0.5%
	Upper secondary	83	34.6%	673	66.9%
	Diploma (D1–D4)	29	12.1%	85	8.4%
	Bachelor's	89	37.1%	235	23.4%
	Master's/Doctoral	24	10.0%	7	0.7%
Job tenure	<2 years	34	14.2%	562	55.9%
	2-5 years	98	40.8%	414	41.2%
	6-10 years	58	24.2%	29	2.9%
	11-15 years	20	8.3%	1	0.1%
	>16 years	30	12.5%	0	0%

Source: Authors' calculation.

All constructs in the full sample as well as the Gen Z and non-Gen Z groups in Table 3 demonstrate adequate convergent validity and internal consistency. The initial analysis involved eliminating indicators with outer loadings below 0.60, including items QQ1, QQ2, QQ3, QQ8, QQ9, and TWE2. After elimination, convergent validity and internal consistency were confirmed through Cronbach's α, rho_A (ϱ_A), and composite reliability, which consistently exceeded the 0.70 threshold, and average variance extracted (AVE), which exceeded 0.50 for all constructs, indicating that the latent variables explain more than half of the variance in their indicators. Although several indicators exhibited loadings in the 0.60–0.69 range, including TWE3 in the full category and EE1, EE5, TWE1, TWE3, and TWE4 in the non-Gen Z group, these indicators were retained. Indicators with loadings in the 0.60–0.69 range were retained because AVE values for all constructs exceeded the minimum threshold, ensuring that convergent validity remained satisfied [64].

Table 3. Measurement Model Assessment

Construct	Items	Full / Gen Z / Non-Gen Z Loadings	α	ϱ_A	CR
EE	EE1–EE6	0.712–0.861 / 0.715–0.864 / 0.680–0.845	0.877 / 0.865 / 0.857	0.887 / 0.869 / 0.871	0.907 / 0.899 / 0.893

QQ	QQ4–QQ7	0.772–0.864 / 0.757–0.864 / 0.814–0.853	0.837 / 0.831 / 0.849	0.839 / 0.834 / 0.850	0.891 / 0.888 / 0.898
TWE	TWE1, TWE3–TWE7	0.692–0.845 / 0.704–0.850 / 0.617–0.846	0.860 / 0.865 / 0.826	0.866 / 0.869 / 0.846	0.896 / 0.899 / 0.873

Source: Authors' calculation using SmartPLS.

Discriminant validity assessment in Table 4 indicates that all constructs meet the Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) criterion of < 0.90, with values ranging from 0.629 to 0.790 across all sample groups. In addition, the square root of AVE for each construct exceeds the inter-construct correlations in the full sample as well as in the Gen Z and non-Gen Z groups, confirming that discriminant validity is established [64].

Table 4. Discriminant validity of constructs.

	Category	Ind	EE	QQ	TWE
Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)	Full	EE			
		QQ	0.749		
		TWE	0.638	0.755	
	Gen Z	EE			
		QQ	0.732		
		TWE	0.629	0.775	
	Non-Gen Z	EE			
		QQ	0.790		
		TWE	0.662	0.638	
Fornell-Larcker Criterion	Full	EE	0.787		
		QQ	0.648	0.820	
		TWE	0.562	0.642	0.769
	Gen Z	EE	0.789		
		QQ	0.633	0.815	
		TWE	0.557	0.658	0.774
	Non-Gen Z	EE	0.765		
		QQ	0.680	0.829	
		TWE	0.581	0.541	0.734

Source: Authors' calculation using SmartPLS.

Structural model evaluation in Table 5 includes the variance inflation factor (VIF), path coefficients (β), p-values, 95% confidence intervals (CI), effect sizes (f^2), coefficient of determination (R^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2) [69]. All VIF values range from 1.000 to 1.463 and remain below the threshold of 5, indicating no multicollinearity issues [69]. The coefficient of determination (R^2) values range from 0.316 to 0.536, indicating moderate explanatory power across all sample groups [70]. All predictive relevance (Q^2) values are positive, ranging from 0.275 to 0.430, confirming adequate predictive capability of the model [69]. The

effect sizes (f^2) range from 0.064 to 0.509, indicating varying effect strengths from low to high across the structural relationships [71].

Table 5. Structural model results and SRMR.

Category		Path (β)	p-value	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	VIF	f^2 / v	R^2	Q^2	SRMR
Direct impact										
Full	TWE → QQ	0.406	0.000	0.347	0.466	1.463	0.241	0.533	0.410	0.060
	EE → QQ	0.420	0.000	0.359	0.480	1.463	0.258			
	TWE → EE	0.562	0.000	0.511	0.613	1.000	0.463	0.316	0.314	
Gen Z	TWE → QQ	0.443	0.000	0.375	0.508	1.449	0.292	0.536	0.430	0.061
	EE → QQ	0.386	0.000	0.319	0.457	1.449	0.222			
	TWE → EE	0.557	0.000	0.501	0.613	1.000	0.449	0.310	0.306	
Non-Gen Z	TWE → QQ	0.220	0.003	0.081	0.366	1.449	0.064	0.495	0.275	0.074
	EE → QQ	0.552	0.000	0.418	0.664	1.449	0.399			
	TWE → EE	0.581	0.000	0.485	0.682	1.000	0.509	0.338	0.323	
Indirect effect										
Full	TWE → EE → QQ	0.236	0.000	0.197	0.277	-	0.056	-	-	-
Gen Z	TWE → EE → QQ	0.215	0.000	0.172	0.261	-	0.046	-	-	-
Non-Gen Z	TWE → EE → QQ	0.321	0.000	0.241	0.404	-	0.103	-	-	-

Source: Authors' calculation using SmartPLS.

Measurement invariance of composite models (MICOM) was assessed prior to MGA to ensure comparability across groups [66]. As shown in Table 6, MICOM Step 2 confirms compositional invariance, as all constructs, namely emotional exhaustion (EE), quiet quitting (QQ), and toxic work environment (TWE), have correlations equal or close to 1 and do not significantly differ from permutation results ($p > 0.05$). In MICOM Step 3, mean invariance is not established ($p < 0.05$), while variance invariance is only partially supported, as EE and QQ meet the criterion ($p > 0.05$) but TWE does not ($p < 0.05$). These findings indicate partial measurement invariance, supporting valid comparison of path coefficients across groups using MGA [71].

Table 6. Measurement invariance of composite models.

MICOM Step 2					
	Original correlation	**Correlation perm. mean**	**5.0%**	**Perm. p-value**	
EE	0.999	1.000	0.999	0.337	
QQ	1.000	1.000	0.999	0.400	
TWE	0.999	0.999	0.999	0.111	
MICOM Step 3a (Mean)					
	Original difference	Permutation mean difference	2.5%	97.5%	Perm. p-value
EE	0.369	-0.002	-0.155	0.135	0.000
QQ	0.356	-0.004	-0.139	0.136	0.000
TWE	0.231	0.001	-0.134	0.143	0.001

MICOM Step 3b (Variance)					
	Original difference	Permutation mean difference	2.5%	97.5%	Perm. p-value
EE	0.103	0.008	-0.205	0.245	0.355
QQ	0.149	0.006	-0.203	0.223	0.179
TWE	0.321	0.008	-0.244	0.270	0.013

Source: Authors' calculation using SmartPLS.

Multi-Group Analysis was conducted to examine whether structural relationships differ between Gen Z and non-Gen Z groups [66, 71, 74]. The results in Table 7 indicate significant differences in several paths. The effect of TWE on QQ is significantly stronger in Gen Z (β = 0.443) than in non-Gen Z (β = 0.220; p = 0.007). In contrast, the effect of EE on QQ is stronger in non-Gen Z (β = 0.552) than in Gen Z (β = 0.386; p = 0.028). The indirect effect of TWE on QQ through EE is also significantly higher in non-Gen Z (β = 0.321) than in Gen Z (β = 0.215; p = 0.026). However, no significant difference is found in the relationship between TWE and EE (p = 0.663). These results support H5, indicating significant differences in structural relationships between Gen Z and non-Gen Z groups.

Table 7. Multi-group analysis.

Path.	Original (Gen Z)	Original (Non-Gen Z)	Difference (Gen Z – Non-Gen Z)	1-tailed (Gen Z vs Non-Gen Z) p-value	2-tailed (Gen Z vs Non-Gen Z) p-value
TWE -> QQ	0.443	0.220	0.223	0.004	0.007
TWE -> EE	0.557	0.581	-0.024	0.668	0.663
EE -> QQ	0.386	0.552	-0.166	0.986	0.028
TWE -> EE -> QQ	0.215	0.321	-0.106	0.987	0.026

Source: Authors' calculation using SmartPLS.

PLS-Predict analysis was conducted to assess predictive performance using cross-validated redundancy (Q^2_predict), root mean square error (RMSE), and mean absolute error (MAE) by comparing the partial least squares (PLS) model with the linear model (LM). Linearity assumptions were also assessed to examine whether the structural relationships were appropriately represented by linear specifications. In addition, robustness checks were performed using the Finite Mixture Partial Least Squares (FIMIX-PLS) approach to evaluate potential latent heterogeneity, and the Gaussian copula approach was applied to assess the presence of endogeneity, with results generally indicating model adequacy and no serious specification issues.

Hypothesis testing results based on bootstrapping are presented in Table 5. The results correspond to H1 (TWE → QQ), H2 (TWE → EE), H3 (EE → QQ), and H4 (TWE → EE → QQ), all of which are supported. In the full sample, TWE → QQ, EE → QQ, and TWE → EE are positive and significant. Similar patterns were observed in the Gen Z group. In the non-Gen Z group, TWE → QQ remained significant but weaker, while EE → QQ showed a stronger effect. The relationship between TWE and EE also remained significant across all groups. Indirect effects of TWE on QQ through EE were positive and significant in all groups, indicating a partial mediation effect. Model fit assessment using the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) indicated acceptable model fit across all groups, with values below the recommended threshold of 0.08.

Bootstrapping results presented in Figure 2 showed consistent structural patterns across groups, including (a) the full sample, (b) Gen Z, and (c) non-Gen Z. The effect of toxic work environment on emotional exhaustion was positive and significant across all groups, and emotional exhaustion positively influenced quiet quitting. The direct effect of toxic work environment on quiet quitting was stronger in the

Gen Z group, whereas the effect of emotional exhaustion on quiet quitting was more pronounced in the non-Gen Z group, with moderate explanatory power (R^2) across models.

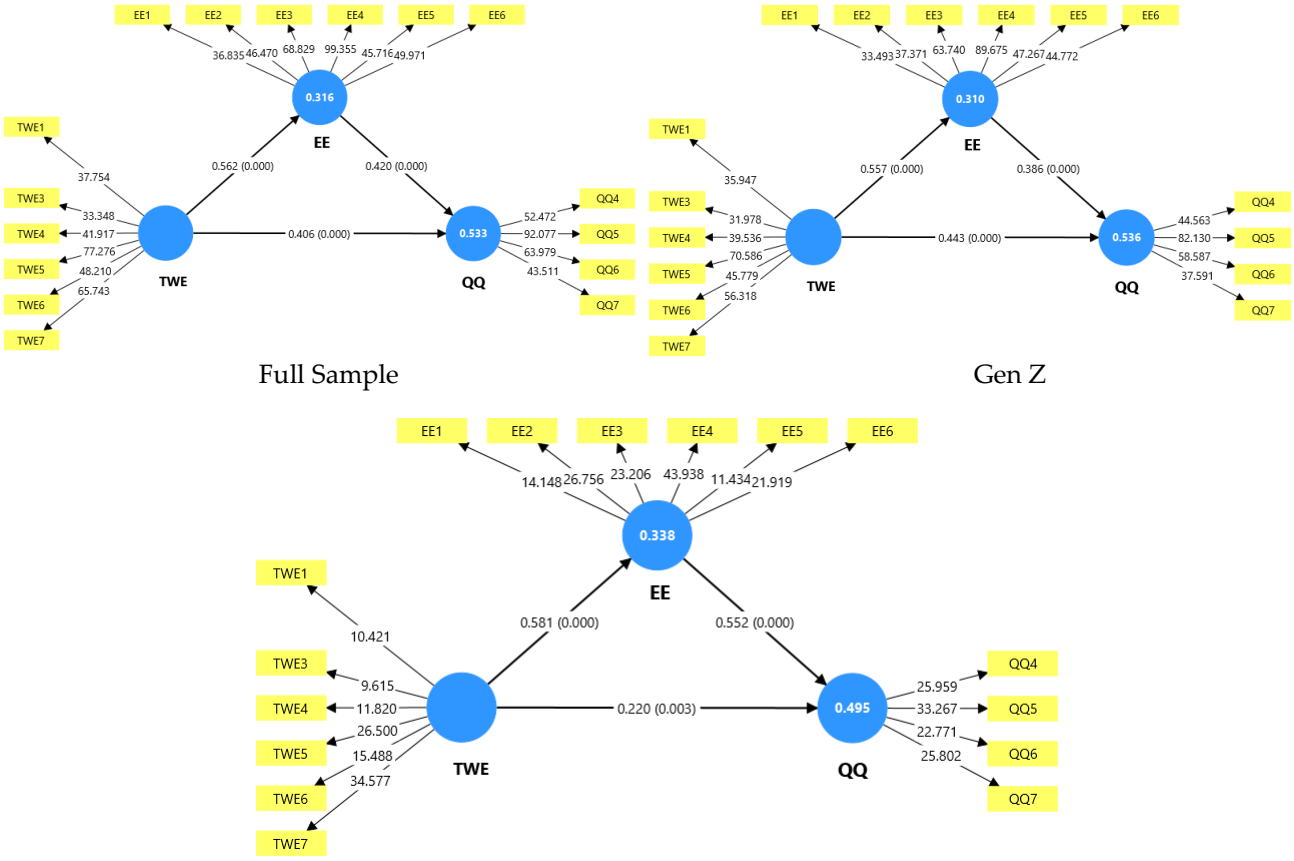


FIGURE 2. Bootstrapping Results Across Groups

2. DISCUSSION

TWE increases QQ across all groups, with a stronger effect observed among Gen Z than non-Gen Z, thereby supporting H1. This pattern aligns with prior studies indicating that toxic work environments foster withdrawal behavior, including quiet quitting [16, 7]. The present findings extend the literature by indicating that generational differences are reflected in the magnitude of the effect rather than its direction, indicating stronger behavioral responses among younger employees under similar conditions. Private-sector employees in Indonesia operate under conditions characterized by high performance demands, workload intensity, and varying levels of organizational support, which may intensify exposure to adverse work environments. JD-R conceptualizes TWE as a job demand that activates the health impairment process, while COR explains that sustained exposure leads to progressive depletion of psychological resources [34, 37]. QQ emerges as a behavioral adjustment to conserve remaining resources when individuals experience declining psychological capacity. Gen Z exhibits stronger withdrawal responses under these conditions, consistent with the generational cohort perspective that emphasizes higher sensitivity to unfavorable work

environments [7, 12]. These findings suggest that generational differences may be expressed through variations in response intensity.

Private-sector employees in Indonesia operate under conditions characterized by high performance demands, workload intensity, and uneven organizational support, which increase exposure to adverse work environments and psychological strain. TWE is associated with higher EE across both Gen Z and non-Gen Z without significant differences between groups, indicating that the effect operates consistently across generations and supporting H2. JD-R conceptualizes TWE as a job demand that activates the health impairment process, while COR explains that sustained exposure to such conditions leads to cumulative resource depletion and the emergence of a loss spiral [34, 37]. Emotional exhaustion in this context reflects a progressive decline in psychological capacity resulting from prolonged imbalance between demands and available resources. Prior studies similarly identify toxic work environments as a key antecedent of emotional exhaustion [16, 17], and the present findings reinforce this relationship while indicating that it remains structurally stable across generational groups. This stability indicates that the formation of primary psychological strain is not contingent on cohort characteristics, thereby clarifying that generational variation is more likely to emerge at the level of behavioral response rather than at the stage of emotional exhaustion.

Variation across groups indicates that the effect of EE on QQ is stronger in non-Gen Z than in Gen Z, confirming the presence of structural differences between the two groups and supporting H3. This finding is consistent with prior studies showing that emotional exhaustion increases withdrawal behavior, including quiet quitting [18, 73], while extending the literature by indicating that the strength of this relationship differs between Gen Z and non-Gen Z. The stronger effect observed in non-Gen Z suggests that accumulated emotional exhaustion is more readily translated into reduced work engagement. JD-R explains that EE represents a subsequent stage of the health impairment process leading to disengagement, while COR suggests that individuals reduce energy investment to preserve remaining resources [74, 75]. These findings clarify that the difference between Gen Z and non-Gen Z lies in the strength of behavioral responses to emotional exhaustion rather than in the existence of the EE–QQ relationship itself.

Variation across groups indicates that the mediating role of EE in the relationship between TWE and QQ is stronger in non-Gen Z than in Gen Z, thereby supporting H4 and confirming differences in indirect mechanisms between the two groups. This finding suggests that the effect of TWE on QQ does not operate solely through direct pathways, but also through a psychological process in which emotional exhaustion functions as a key transmission mechanism. Prior studies indicate that emotional exhaustion is associated with increased withdrawal behavior [18, 73], and the present findings extend this evidence by indicating that the strength of this mediating mechanism differs between Gen Z and non-Gen Z. The context of private-sector employees in Indonesia provides a deeper explanation for this mechanism. Organizational structures that remain relatively hierarchical, strong dependence on job stability, and sustained performance pressures in a competitive labor market encourage employees, particularly non-Gen Z, to maintain work involvement despite adverse conditions. These dynamic delays the translation of work stress into behavioral withdrawal, allowing psychological strain to accumulate as emotional exhaustion over time. As a result, the mediating pathway becomes stronger, and once psychological limits are reached, the behavioral response emerges more intensely in the form of quiet quitting. JD-R explains that TWE as a job demand activates the health impairment process leading to emotional exhaustion before disengagement occurs, while COR suggests that this process reflects cumulative resource depletion over time [37, 74]. These findings suggest that, in the Indonesian context, the conversion of work stress into quiet quitting is shaped not only by the level of pressure but also by how such pressure is internalized and sustained within relatively rigid work structures.

Structural differences between Gen Z and non-Gen Z emerge across several paths, indicating that H5 is supported and that the relationships among TWE, EE, and QQ do not operate identically across the two groups. This pattern is consistent with prior literature suggesting that age-group differences in work behavior are often inconsistent and context-dependent [76, 29], while also indicating that the observed variation is related to differences in the strength and pathways of relationships rather than changes in their direction. The context of private-sector employees in Indonesia shows that the two groups exhibit different response patterns to sustained work pressure. Gen Z tends to respond more quickly to unfavorable work

conditions, whereas non-Gen Z tends to maintain work involvement for a longer period before responding to such pressure. JD-R explains that work pressure triggers the health impairment process, while COR suggests that responses to pressure are associated with efforts to preserve remaining resources [34, 37]. The integration of these perspectives within a multi-group analysis framework indicates that differences between the two groups are better understood as variations in response pathways to work pressure. These findings imply that generational workforce management should focus on differences in response patterns to work conditions rather than demographic categorization, with organizations tailoring interventions to reduce toxic work environments and manage emotional exhaustion according to how employees respond to job demands and resource depletion. These results further clarify that differences between Gen Z and non-Gen Z are reflected in how work pressure is translated into behavioral responses rather than in unobserved characteristics, indicating that such differences are selective rather than universal, with some relationships remaining stable while others vary in strength across the two groups.

V. CONCLUSION

This study examines differences between Gen Z and non-Gen Z in the influence of the toxic work environment on quiet quitting mediated by emotional exhaustion among private-sector employees in Indonesia. The results indicate consistent structural patterns across groups, where toxic work environment influences quiet quitting both directly and indirectly through emotional exhaustion, although the strength of these relationships differs between groups, with the direct effect stronger in Gen Z and the effects involving emotional exhaustion stronger in non-Gen Z employees. The managerial implications suggest that toxic work environment and emotional exhaustion affect both Gen Z and non-Gen Z employees, with differing mechanisms across groups. This study contributes theoretically by integrating JD-R and COR to explain how toxic work environments are translated into quiet quitting through emotional exhaustion, indicating that differences between Gen Z and non-Gen Z are selective, with some relationships remaining stable while others vary in strength. These findings further imply that generational workforce management should be understood as differences in response patterns to work conditions rather than uniform behavioral tendencies. This perspective highlights that resource depletion and withdrawal behavior operate with different intensities across employee groups, thereby strengthening the theoretical explanation of generational differences in responses to job demands and resource depletion. Private companies should focus on reducing toxic interactions and implementing interventions targeting emotional exhaustion, with strategies tailored to generational differences. Regular cultural assessments and ethical leadership training are needed to address toxic behaviors. Psychological support services should be provided to improve employee retention and productivity. The findings indicate that Gen Z exhibits stronger direct responses to toxic work environments than non-Gen Z employees, whereas emotional exhaustion plays a stronger role in shaping quiet quitting among non-Gen Z employees. The absence of specific industry groupings and the imbalance between Gen Z and non-Gen Z samples limit broader generalization across sectors. This research grouped non-Gen Z as a single entity to focus on Gen Z behavior, but future research should examine specific generations to gain deeper insights. Convenience sampling led to uneven sample sizes, suggesting the need for improvement in future research.

The findings provide direction for future studies to further examine generational differences in responses to toxic work environments and emotional exhaustion. Examining the specific factors that contribute to Gen Z's vulnerability to emotionally draining situations and toxic work environments could lead to targeted interventions to improve worker well-being. Studies using a longitudinal design can provide deeper insights into how these interactions change over time, and future research should concentrate on examining how these dynamics emerge in various business contexts. Additionally, dividing non-Gen Z individuals into distinct generational groups may enable a more nuanced understanding of silent attrition across cohorts (e.g., Millennials, Gen X, Baby Boomers). This can result in organisational actions that are more successfully tailored to specific generational demands.

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Author Contributions

Conceptualization, Ignatius Soni Kurniawan and Hunik Sri Runing Sawitri; methodology, Ignatius Soni Kurniawan and Hunik Sri Runing Sawitri; data curation, Ignatius Soni Kurniawan; formal analysis, Ignatius Soni Kurniawan; investigation, Ignatius Soni Kurniawan; project administration, Ignatius Soni Kurniawan; supervision, Hunik Sri Runing Sawitri; validation, Hunik Sri Runing Sawitri, Sinto Sunaryo, and Hidajat Hendarsjah; visualization, Ignatius Soni Kurniawan; writing—original draft preparation, Ignatius Soni Kurniawan; writing—review and editing, Hunik Sri Runing Sawitri, Sinto Sunaryo, and Hidajat Hendarsjah. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

Data are available from the authors upon request.

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