

Mediating Emotional Exhaustion on the Effect of Workload on Quiet Quitting

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Abstract—Workers who have a negative attitude in the form of quiet quitting can have an impact on the work environment and the overall productivity of the organization. Quiet quitting, which reflects withdrawing from work engagements, can disrupt team dynamics, reduce collaboration, and slow project progress. High workload often influence quiet quitting, which can exhaust a person's physical and mental energy and lead to emotional exhaustion. Constant exposure to the demands of a heavy and unbalanced job can lead to feelings of fatigue and energy drain, both physically and mentally. As a result, individuals tend to experience decreased motivation, lose interest in work, and even feel emotionally burned. So, this study aims to determine the effect of workload on quiet quitting mediated by emotional exhaustion in private workers in the Special Region of Yogyakarta. This quantitative study employs accidental sampling techniques with 473 permanent and non-permanent employee respondents, as well as data analysis using SMARTPLS. The results showed that workload has a significant positive effect on quiet quitting and emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion can have a significant positive effect on quiet quitting and be a mediator between workload and quiet quitting. These findings highlight organizational leaders' role in managing workload and employees' mental well-being.

Index Terms— Emotional exhaustion, Quiet quitting, Workload.

I. INTRODUCTION

The development of the organization has increased after the Covid-19 pandemic. This impact creates a significant transformation in Human Resources (HR) management and organizational structure. Pressures from the external environment drive organizations to constantly adapt, design new strategies, and have resilient survivability. While surviving is the first step, in order to achieve long-term success, organizations need to develop and thrive in a better direction (Indriani, 2022). Organizations need people with a growth mindset, aligned goals, leading potential, and diverse perspectives to achieve sustainable development. Non-adoption of these behaviours can create gaps and pose minimum job risks, denial of excessive tasks, and defiance of the "hustle" culture. Generation Z, born in 1997-2012 (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2009), is prone to this kind of behaviour, which is quiet quitting. Generation Z grew up in an era of technological advancement where all activities require high flexibility and are more demanding than the previous generation. So, generation Z employees often express work that is easy according to their era and show different characteristics and

preferences in the context of work or work environment compared to previous generations.

Quiet quitting is a negative attitude of individuals who quietly withdraw from involvement in their work organisation (Galanis, Katsiroumpa, Vraka, Siskou, Konstantakopoulou, Katsoulas, et al., 2023). It phenomenon reflects an attitude that deliberately limits engagement in work activities, and prioritises personal well-being over achieving organisational goals (Serenko, 2023). Withdrawal from work, employee cynicism, and silence are examples of psychological elements of the idea such as "working for power" (Hamouche & Koritos, 2023). Employees carry out duties according to their responsibilities and obligations without receiving overtime offers or exceeding the established obligation limits. Employees will carry out job duties without making work a living culture, setting limits only on the scope of work to reduce pressure that is considered unreasonable (Lata & Kumar, 2022). Quiet quitting behaviour in HR is triggered by workload, which is excessive workload provided by the organization, resulting in mental and physical fatigue. In the United States and the United Kingdom, >40% of employees experience burnout, which includes mental and physical fatigue that can drain energy and lead to negative attitudes towards work (Melati, 2023). Of these, human resources with a higher risk of burnout are women and workers <30 years old. The 18-29 age group is more prone to fatigue than the >30 age group, and fatigue levels tend to be higher in women than men. It has the impact of stress triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, both during and after the pandemic, along with economic uncertainty, further exacerbating burnout and behaving to a minimum in working and with remote work (Lata & Gupta, 2021). Research by Nal et al. (2022) shows that the burden of a nurse can increase boredom, impacting the organization's resignation.

Another factor that can cause quiet quitting is Emotional Exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion is affected by the high pressure of the organization, causing emotional drain and encouraging employees to work according to their duties. As of 2 years ago, Generation Z (46%) experienced emotional exhaustion that led to minimal work and left the organization (Deloitte, 2022). Conversely, employees who have an active attitude in the organization will show less to behave negatively (Silva et al., 2024). Employee emotional exhaustion can be caused by a perceived workload exceeding job duties, which is by mutual agreement (Bernuzzi et al., 2024; Kräft et al., 2024)

This research develops from the workload phenomenon in Generation Z, which can cause quiet quitting behaviour. This influence can be mediated by emotional exhaustion in response to excessive work pressure and demands. Emotional exhaustion can drain a person's emotional energy, make it difficult to cope with stress, and impact mental well-being. Limited references to this variable encourage researchers to develop comparable studies on the causes of quiet quitting. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the impact of workload on quiet quitting with the mediation of emotional exhaustion in Generation Z. So that the problems formulated (1) workload positively affect quiet quitting, (2) workload positively affects emotional exhaustion, (3) Emotional Exhaustion positively affects quiet quitting, (4) the effect of workload on quiet quitting mediated by Emotional Exhaustion.

II. THEORY AND HYPOTHESIS

A. Quiet quitting

Quiet quitting is someone who deliberately limits work activities according to their job description (Galanis, Katsiroumpa, Vraka, Siskou, Konstantakopoulou, Moisoglou, et al., 2023). It includes the inability or lack of courage to exceed job duties or volunteer for additional assignments with the sole purpose of maintaining employment status (Galanis, Katsiroumpa, Vraka, Siskou, Konstantakopoulou, Moisoglou, et al., 2023). However, it is characterized by low work involvement towards the additional responsibilities that the organization assigns. So, quiet quitting does not always reflect the employee's intention to leave his job (Boy & Sürmeli, 2023). This behaviour is different from voluntary behaviour, described by Anand et al. (2023), if quiet quitting is more focused on limiting work activities than on intentional extra contributions.

B. Workload

Workload is an activity or process a worker must complete within a predetermined period (Nal et al., 2022). Workload comes from workloads that exceed employees' capabilities, resulting in pressure, frustration, and anxiety, which can change a person's physical and mental behavior (Naamneh & Bodas, 2024). The ability of employees to exceed the demands given by the organization will cause burnout and fatigue (Ma et al., 2024). These activities can make employees feel depressed directly, which can affect employee performance (Janib et al., 2021). Workload overload often leads to burnout, and this can drive the desire to find another job (Rn et al., 2021).

C. Emotional Exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion is a feeling of someone who experiences emotional exhaustion that causes emotional resources to run out that have been channeled between someone and others (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Emotional exhaustion can be caused by the onset of excessive anxiety on the job resulting from uncontrollable work pressure and a severe organizational environment (Charoensukmongkol, 2022). Emotional exhaustion is an important part of burnout, a syndrome that affects individuals in various professional fields (Vachon et al., 2018). Burnout is characterised by feelings of energy depletion, inadequacy and lack of control (Vachon et al., 2018). Work pressure can be caused by too many work demands, causing a person to experience continuous emotional pressure, resulting in emotional fatigue (Francis et al., 2015).

Workload is a form of work that is too much in the specified time or work that exceeds the ability (Naamneh & Bodas, 2024). However, workload as the effort required to complete a task relative to the resources available (Rn et al., 2021). Employees who feel that excessive workload can cause mental and physical health problems. The organization wants HR to be able to complete the work assigned to them and be able to work as well as possible. So that whatever is assigned can be done according to the job. It can increase the behavior of employees who secretly do not want to do tasks that are not their job, commonly called quiet quitting.

H1: Workload positively affects quiet quitting

Excessive workload can urge employees to complete assigned tasks beyond the task agreement, which can interfere with mental health (Charoensukmongkol, 2022). If the organization continues to provide an infinite workload, employees feel emotional exhaustion that cannot be expressed, and it can damage their mental health. So, the workload felt by employees can increase emotional fatigue, as the research of Maslach and Goldberg (1998) and Xiaoming et al. (2014) found that the perceived workload strongly influences emotional fatigue.

H2: Workload positively affects Emotional Exhaustion

Employees who feel emotional exhaustion can experience decreased motivation, engagement, and overall well-being in the organization (Charoensukmongkol, 2022). Emotional burnout can affect employees' ability to interact positively with coworkers and superiors and can be detrimental to relationships in the work environment. In addition, emotional exhaustion often impacts job performance, decreasing productivity and focus. On a deeper level, emotional exhaustion can be a risk factor for mental health problems, such as stress, anxiety, and depression. Increasingly, employees feeling emotional exhaustion can impact work quietly quitting, thus increasing quiet quitting behavior.

H3: Emotional Exhaustion positively affects quiet quitting.

Emotional fatigue is a condition of employees who feel fatigued in feelings and emotional aspects (Francis et al., 2015). Employees who feel emotional fatigue show mental fatigue and lack motivation, thus decreasing involvement in work and having a negative mood. Often, emotional exhaustion is caused by excessive workload with employee abilities, leading to quitting. Understanding the mediating role of emotional exhaustion in the connection between workload and quiet quitting behavior is crucial (Peterson et al., 2019). A higher workload can increase employee emotional fatigue (Xiaoming et al., 2014). Emotional exhaustion caused by high workloads can encourage employees to adopt quiet quitting behaviors.

H4: Effect of workload on quiet quitting mediated by Emotional Exhaustion.

III. METHOD

This research was conducted on 473 private workers in the Yogyakarta Special Region. Sampling used an accidental sampling technique to collect data from private workers who were willing to fill out the questionnaire and in accordance with the requirements as a data source, namely those who had worked for a minimum of 3 months and were born between 1997 and 2012. Existing data is then processed and analyzed using quantitative methods using SmartPLS. Researchers used a Likert Scale of 1-5, from strongly disagree to agree strongly. The measurement of the Workload variable is taken from pressure to produce, which is a dimension of organizational climate (Patterson et al., 2005), the emotional exhaustion variable is taken from Grobelna (2021) which was developed from Karatepe and Uludag, (2007) based on the beginning of Maslach & Jackson (1982), quiet quitting variables (taken from Galanis et al., 2023 adopted from Galanis, Katsiroumpa, et al., 2023).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Results

i. Characteristics Responden: The characteristics of respondents can be seen in Table 1, with a total of 473 respondents consisting of 181 (38.3%) men and 292 (61.7%) women. Respondents based on employment status were dominated by non-permanent employees totalling 268 (56.7%) people; based on marital status were dominated by unmarried employees totalling 447 (94.5%) people. This research on generation Z born 1997-2012 (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2009), indicates that younger individuals tend to have a higher work ethic, which can be a significant force in improving organisational performance, with the ability of this age to carry different workloads according to workload variables. However, it is also prone to "Quiet Quitting", which arises in response to work pressure and the impact of rapid technological growth. This phenomenon creates a paradox where such ages appear externally assertive and energised. However, they can become weak and vulnerable when faced with heavy pressure, resembling a strawberry that although looks beautiful from the outside, quickly crumbles when pressed. The last education of the employees was dominated by senior high school as many as 320 (67.7%) people. The majority of employees have a working period of <1 year as many as 230 (48.6%) people. Respondents who are private employees in the Special Region of Yogyakarta are taken with the majority in Sleman district, 198 (41.9%) people.

TABLE I CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

Category	Description	Amount	Percentage(%)
Gender	Male	181	38.3%
	Female	292	61.7%
Employment status	Not permanent	268	56.7%
	Permanent	205	43.3%
Marital status	Not married	447	94.5%
	Marry	25	5.3%
Last education	Widows/widowers	1	0.2%
	Middle school/equivalent	2	0.4%
	High school/equivalent	320	67.7%
	Diploma(D1/D2/D3/D4)	41	8.7%
	S1	108	22.8%
Working period	S2/S3	2	0.4%
	<1 years	230	48.6%
	1-5 years	226	47.8%
	6-10 years	17	3.6%
Special Region of Yogyakarta district	Yogyakarta	98	20.7%
	Bantul	142	30%
	Sleman	198	41.9%
	Kulon Progo	8	1.7%
Organization Type	Gunung Kidul	27	5.7%
	Privately owned organizations/companies	473	100%

Source: Primary Data processed, 2024.

i. Data quality Test: Outer loading shows if quiet quitting values are 0.754 - 0.878, workload values are 0.722-0.855, emotional exhaustion values are 0.754-0.878, and the convergent validity test using the AVE value from Table 2 shows emotional exhaustion (0.607), quiet quitting (0.654), workload (0.632) > 0.5, then all indicators pass

TABLE II RELIABILITY DAN VALIDITY

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
EE	0.869	0.873	0.902	0.607
QQ	0.823	0.832	0.883	0.654
W	0.706	0.714	0.837	0.632

Source: Primary Data processed, 2024.

EE= Emotional Exhaustion; QQ= Quiet Quitting; W= Workload.

according to the criteria. At composite reliability, emotional exhaustion was 0.902, quiet quitting 0.883, and workload 0.837 > 0.7. Cronbach's Alpha score for emotional exhaustion was 0.869, quiet quitting 0.823, and workload 0.706 > 0.6 or said to be a reliable instrument.

Table 2 shows that all latent variable scores have values that exceed the minimum criteria so that the indicators of these latent variables have high reliability and validity. Variables that do not exceed the minimum value will be deleted to meet the minimum value, which includes statements 1, 2, 3, 8, 9 on the quiet quitting variable and statements 2, and 5 on the workload variable.

ii. Hypothesis testing: The first hypothesis, seen from the path coefficients test (Table 3), shows STDEV 0.048, T statistic 2.115, and P Values 0.035 at a significance level $\alpha = 5\%$, which means that workload significantly positively influences quiet quitting. The second hypothesis shows STDEV 0.038, T statistic 13.560, and P Values 0.000 at a significance level $\alpha = 5\%$, which means workload significantly positively influences emotional exhaustion. The third hypothesis shows STDEV 0.041, T statistic 14.952, and P Values 0.000 at the significance level $\alpha = 5\%$, which means that emotional exhaustion significantly influences quiet quitting. The fourth hypothesis shows STDEV 0.034, T statistic 9.336, and P Values 0.000 at the significance level $\alpha = 5\%$, meaning that emotional exhaustion mediates workload on quiet quitting.

TABEL III. PATH COEFFICIENTS

		Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics (O/STDEV)	P Values
H1	W -> QQ	0.101	0.102	0.048	2.115	0.035
H2	W -> EE	0.521	0.523	0.038	13.560	0.000
H3	EE -> QQ	0.610	0.610	0.041	14.952	0.000
H4	W -> EE -> QQ	0.318	0.319	0.034	9.336	0.000

Source: Primary Data processed, 2024

EE= Emotional Exhaustion; QQ= Quiet Quitting; W= Workload.

iii. Coefficient of determination: Table 4 shows the adjusted R square value of emotional exhaustion of 0.272, meaning that the workload on emotional exhaustion in private workers in DIY is 27.2%, while other variables outside the processing of this study cause the remaining 72.8%.

TABLE IV. COEFFICIENT OF DETERMINATION

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
EE	0.272	0.270
QQ	0.447	0.444

Source: Primary Data processed, 2024.

EE= Emotional Exhaustion; QQ= Quiet Quitting; W= Workload.

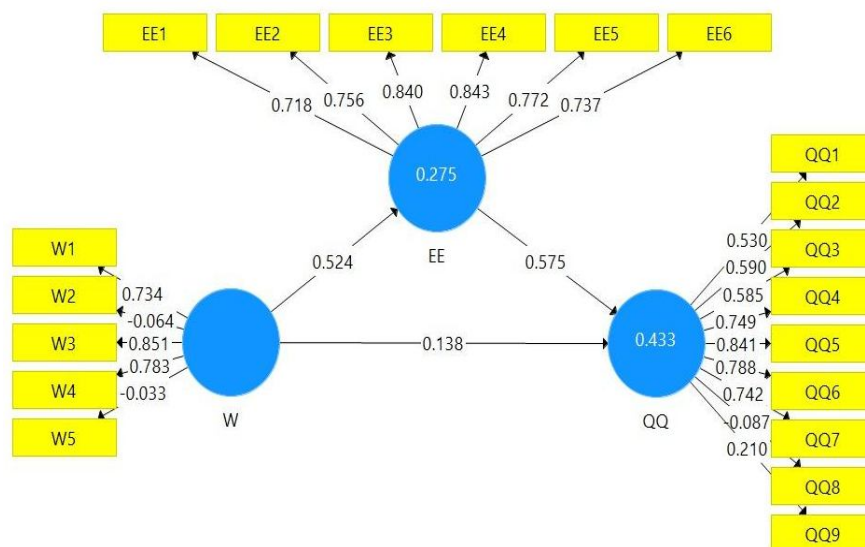


Figure 1. Results after factor analysis test
Source: Primary Data processed, 2024

At an adjusted R square quiet quitting value of 0.444, the effect of workload and emotional exhaustion on quiet quitting in private workers in the Special Region of Yogyakarta is 44.4%, and other variables outside this study cause the remaining 55.6%.

V. DISCUSSION

Testing hypothesis 1 shows that workload does not significantly affect quiet quitting in private workers in DIY. This research was conducted on generation Z who were born in 1997-2012 (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2009), so this could be a factor affecting the results of the first hypothesis. Young age is often associated with high morale, a desire to learn, and rapid adaptability, which can be a valuable asset to the organization's development. Their agile and responsive abilities can also accelerate the process of innovation and task completion. In addition, although a high workload is often considered a potential trigger for quiet quitting, the high morale of young individuals can reduce the likelihood of being affected by the workload. Thus, most young respondents have a high potential to be a valuable asset for organizations in achieving their goals. Thus, a high or low workload cannot affect quiet quitting. The workload variable has the lowest average value (2.79), stating, "The pace of work here is quite relaxed.", while the highest average (2.97) states, "Management requires me to work very hard."

Testing hypothesis 2 shows that workload significantly affects emotional exhaustion in private employees in the Special Region of Yogyakarta. This finding is consistent with Maslach and Goldberg, (1998); Xiaoming et al., (2014) who found that workload can significantly affect emotional exhaustion. If individuals face a continuous workload, they can experience psychological and excessive stress. A heavy workload can create an individual's perception that they cannot cope with the tasks assigned, which can lead to feelings of anxiety, helplessness, and emotional exhaustion (Charoensukmongkol, 2022). In addition, a high workload can also drain a person's physical and mental energy, increase ongoing tension and fatigue, and disrupt the balance between work life and personal life. As a result, individuals tend to experience increased levels of emotional exhaustion due to prolonged stress from poorly managed workloads. The emotional exhaustion variable had the highest average value (2.87), stating, "I feel tired when I wake up in the morning and have to face the next day of work.", while the lowest average (2.20) states, "I felt like I was on the edge."

Testing hypothesis 3 showed that emotional exhaustion significantly positively affected quiet quitting. It is due to the psychological and emotional condition of a person who feels mentally and emotionally drained due to excessive workload or constant pressure at work and outside the workplace. When someone experiences emotional exhaustion, they tend to lose interest, motivation, and enthusiasm to be actively involved in their work. Deep and persistent feelings of fatigue can lead to decreased productivity, decreased work quality, and an increased desire to retreat (Charoensukmongkol, 2022) or leave work with a quiet quitting attitude to avoid or reduce the level of stress experienced. Thus, high emotional exhaustion can cause quiet quitting in the work environment. The quiet quitting variable, having the lowest average value (2.21), states, "I lack initiative in my work.", while the highest average score (2.72) states, "I do basic or minimum work without going above and beyond."

Using the SmartPls 3.0 path analysis path, it is proven that emotional exhaustion can mediate the balance between workload and quiet quitting. While workload does not directly affect quiet quitting, its effect on levels of emotional exhaustion can trigger deep feelings of fatigue in individuals, increasing the likelihood of quiet quitting. Emotional exhaustion can be a natural response to heavy workloads and sustained stress, and if not handled properly, can lead to a silent withdrawal from work or responsibilities. As seen from the results of the study, where the majority of respondents are young people, a heavy workload can significantly impact their psychological health. It can lead to emotional exhaustion, potentially damaging their overall mental well-being. Therefore, the importance of workload management and attention to the mental well-being of employees in preventing adverse impacts on productivity and job satisfaction is becoming increasingly apparent.

VI. CONCLUSION

Research conducted on private sector workers in the Special Region of Yogyakarta with the aim of knowing the effect of workload on quiet quitting with emotional exhaustion in Generation Z. Research results found that workload had a significant effect on quiet quitting and emotional exhaustion. It suggests that emotional exhaustion serves as a mediator between workload and quiet quitting. The implication of these findings is the importance of attention to workload management and the mental well-being of employees. By reducing excessive workload and creating a work environment that supports work-life balance, organizations can reduce

the risk of emotional exhaustion and its negative impact on quiet quitting. In addition, efforts must be made to proactively identify and address signs of emotional burnout to maintain employee well-being and productivity. These findings provide a solid foundation for developing policies and practices that support employee well-being and overall organizational performance. This study has limitations, such as only involving a sample of private sector workers in the Special Region of Yogyakarta. As such, the results may not be directly applicable to worker populations in other regions or sectors. In addition, this study also only focused on Generation Z, so the results may not fully reflect the experiences and responses to workload and emotional exhaustion of older generations of workers or other generations. To overcome this limitation, future research could add samples involving multiple generations, regions, and other variables to increase the coefficient of determination of quiet quitting. For example, research could consider work-family conflict variables, which could have a significant impact on the propensity to quiet quitting. By involving a wider variety of samples, future research can provide a more holistic and in-depth understanding of the factors that influence quiet quitting in various work contexts. Work-family conflict is a role conflict from work that conflicts with the family, which can result in individuals increasingly quiet quitting.

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