

Relationship between Toxic Leadership and Job Related Affective Well-Being: The Mediating Role of Job Stress

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Abstract

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between toxic leadership and the job-related affective well-being of workers with the mediating role of job stress. Research population consisted of knowledge workers in knowledge-based organizations, 213 of whom were selected and filled in the Job-Related Affective Well-being Scale (JAWS) (Van Katwyk, Fox, Spector, & Kelloway, 2000), Measures of Job Stressors and Strains (MJSS) (Spector & Jex, 1998), and Toxic Leadership Scale (TLS) (Schmidt, 2014). Data were analyzed through correlation and path analyses. Results showed the significant direct and indirect effects of toxic leadership, quantitative workload, organizational constraints, and interpersonal conflicts on job-related affective well-being. Four variables (interpersonal conflicts, organizational constraints, quantitative workload, and toxic leadership) accounted for 13% of the variance of job-related affective well-being. Moreover, results of the fit of the model revealed a direct significant effect of toxic leadership on interpersonal conflicts where it accounted for 12% of the variance of interpersonal conflicts. Also, accounting for 9% of the variance of quantitative workload, toxic leadership was demonstrated to have a direct significant effect on quantitative workload. Results also indicated a direct significant effect of toxic leadership on organizational constraints where it accounted for 11% of the variance of organizational constraints. Finally, the necessity of paying attention to organizational management styles was discussed.

Keywords: Toxic leadership; Job-related affective well-being; Job stress

Introduction

In the current turbulent environment, organizations have no choice but to pay adequate attention to human resources in order to achieve higher levels of productivity and effectiveness and reach the predefined goals (Cropanzano & Ambrose, 2001). Leaders of organizations are of particular significance, since their effects on human resources and, consequently, the existence and survival of organizations differ based on the leadership styles they adopt. Leadership is the art of influencing subordinates such that they perform pre-determined activities willingly and voluntarily in line of organizational goals (Pelletier, 2010).

Toxic leadership is a leadership style that is harmful to the organization's followers and has negative effects on it and its members. It is a leadership style in which systematic and repetitive behaviors on the part of the leader, employer, or supervisor threaten the legitimate interests of the organization by creating obstacles to the achievement of goals and fulfillment of duties or depletion of organizational resources and reduction of employee effectiveness, motivation, and satisfaction (Webster, Brough, & Daly, 2016). This leadership style is a subcategory of unethical leadership that can lead to unethical behaviors on the part of employees (Lašáková & Remišová, 2015). According to Lipman-Blumen (2006), toxic leadership includes behaviors such as disparaging, ridiculing, discouraging and ignoring followers, persuasion through intimidation, deceit and sabotage, eliminating individuals and rivals, setting members against one another, excluding members from social groups, depriving members of their social and political rights as well as their right to choose,

encouraging workers to reprimand one another, favoritism, violence, physical action, threatening workers with dismissal, forcing members to tolerate hardships, reprimanding followers for the leaders' mistakes, ignoring suggestions, suppressing opposite views, withholding information required by workers, promoting the ideology of hatred among coworkers, creating division, or even prompting imprisonment. Toxic leaders display a need to belittle, trivialize, and denigrate others (Daniel & Metcalf, 2015; Dinh, Lord, Gardner, Meuser, Liden, & Hu, 2016).

According to Bowlby's (1969) theory of attachment, leadership styles affect workers' well-being through the mechanism of leader-worker support and relationship (Game, 2011; Hudson, 2013). Job-related well-being is a novel construct in organizational psychology and positive organizational behavior defined as the absence of negative experiences, e.g. anxiety, mental stress, and occupational burnout (Danna & Griffin, 1999); existence of positive emotions and emotional experiences (Diner et al., 1999); and the level of happiness in the workplace (Schultz, 2008). In other words, job-related affective well-being is a function of positive and negative emotions experienced in reaction to various job-related components (Van Katwyk, Fox, Spector, & Kelloway, 2000). Accordingly, leaders who can be capable of fostering an environment for secure attachment can positively influence workers' job-related well-being. That is to say, the social support received from a manager or leader is a predictor of job-related well-being (Sonnentag & Frese, 2003). On the other hand, research has shown that unhealthy behaviors on the part of leaders who fail to foster such an environment negatively affect workers' job-related well-being (Hudson, 2013).

By discouraging workers (Webster et al., 2016) and motivating them to engage in destructive activities, toxic leadership increases negative responses and corruption among workers, and creates an insecure organizational environment (Mehta & Maheshwari, 2013). Thus, job commitment and satisfaction is decreased (Mehta & Maheshwari, 2013) and job stress is increased (Haddadian & Zarei, 2016).

Based on Spector's model, interpersonal conflict is one of the factors leading to job stress, ranging from minor disagreements among coworkers to serious physical assaults. Also, conflict can be overt (e.g. being rude to colleagues) or covert (e.g. spreading rumors about them) (Spector & Jex, 1998). Thus, leader's destructive behaviors can cause job stress as well. Job stress has three components: organizational constraints (e.g. faulty equipment and other constraints), quantitative workload (i.e. work quantity), and interpersonal conflict (i.e. disagreement among coworkers). Studies report that facilities (e.g. faulty equipment or tools), workload, and unfair payment and compensation systems result in organizational stress (Spector, 2002; Guarinoni et al., 2013). In addition, stress can harm physical and mental health (Caulfield, 2004). According to Spector's model, job stress can affect job-related affective well-being (Spector & Jex, 1998). Studies show that job stress has a negative and reductive correlation with affective well-being (Adriaenssens, De Gucht, & Maes, 2015; Khan & Khorshid, 2017). Research has confirmed the relationship between job-related affective well-being and job stress components, including organizational constraints (Bass & Stogdill, 1990), interpersonal conflicts (Aube, Rousseau, Mama, & Morin, 2009), and quantitative workload (Spector & Jex, 1998; Guarinoni et al., 2013).

Therefore, toxic leadership can increase job stress through destructive behaviors and, consequently, affect job-related affective well-being. The present study aimed to examine the mediating role of job stress in the relationship between toxic leadership and job-related affective well-being. The hypothetical model of relationships among variables is illustrated in Figure 1.

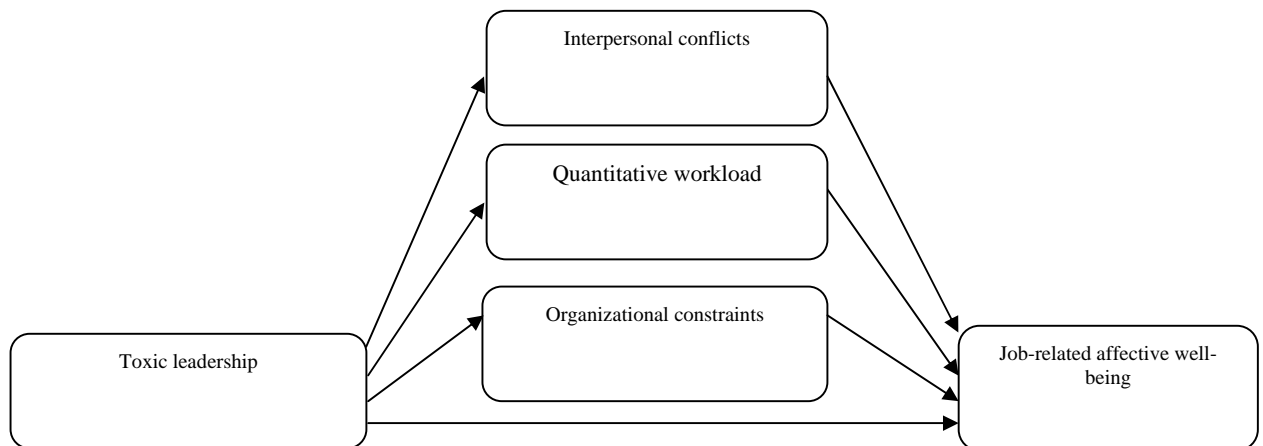


Figure 1. Hypothetical model of relationships among variables

Method

The present study was a correlational research in terms of design. . Research population consisted of knowledge workers in knowledge-based organizations in Alborz and Tehran Provinces, Iran, 213 of whom were selected as the sample using Cochran's formula and responded to Measures of Job Stressors and Strains (MJSS) (Spector & Jex, 1998), Toxic Leadership Scale (TLS) (Schmidt, 2014), and Job-Related Affective Well-being Scale (JAWS) (Van Katwyk et al., 2000).

Instruments

MJSS (Spector & Jex, 1998) included the Interpersonal Conflict at Work Scale (ICAWS), Organizational Constraints Scale (OCS), and Quantitative Workload Inventory (QWI). With 14 items, ICAWS evaluates interpersonal conflicts at the workplace as the main source of job stress. With 11 items, OCS assesses constraints which interfere with job performance. The score of all items are added to calculate individual scores, with higher scores indicating more constraints (Spector & Jex, 1998). With 5 items, QWI measures work amount or quantity in a profession. Each item expresses a phrase about the workload. ICAWS is scored on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ("rarely") to 5 ("very often"), indicating the frequency of each conflict at work. OCS is also scored on a 5-point Likert scale. For each item, the respondents indicate the frequency with which they find it difficult or impossible to do their tasks due to constraints. Item scores range from 1 ("never or less than once a month") to 5 ("several times a day"). Each item represents one of the 11 domains of constraints, and the sum of all items indicates the total score on this scale. QWI is scored on a 5-point Likert scale in which participants indicate the frequency with which they face each item, with scores ranging from 1 ("never or less than once a month") to 5 ("several times a day"). Cronbach's alpha for MSJ was reported to be 0.85 (Spector & Jex, 1998). In the present study, Cronbach's alphas for quantitative workload, interpersonal conflicts, and organizational constraints were 0.73, 0.75, and 0.76, respectively.

Developed by Schmidt (2014), TLS has 15 items scored on a 5-point Likert scale (from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree"). The items can be classified into 5 groups of 3, denoting self-promotion, abusive supervision, unpredictability, narcissism, and authoritarian leadership. Schmidt (2014) reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82 for this scale, whereas it was 0.83 in the present study, indicating its validity. The scale validity was assessed using factor analysis confirming the existence of 4 factors, and the four-factor structure determined 86% of the total variance. In the next step, the existence of 4 sub-scales was confirmed as well. Cronbach's alpha for each sub-scale

ranged from 0.96 to 0.98, verifying the internal reliability of this scale (Özer, Uğurluoğlu, Kahraman, & Avci, 2017).

JAWS was designed by Van Katwyk et al. (2000) to measure positive and negative emotions experienced in reaction to various job-related elements (e.g. job, coworkers, supervisors, clients, and salary). This scale has long (30-item) and short (20-item) versions. The present study employed the 20-item version. JAWS is scored on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (“never”) to 5 (“always”). To calculate the total score, items on negative emotions are reverse-scored, and then the scores of the 20 items are added. The scale validity based on the internal consistency of the 30-item version was approximately 0.95, equaling 0.92 and 0.94 for negative and positive emotions, respectively. Moreover, Cronbach’s alpha for the total score of JAWS and its sub-scales ranged from 0.80 to 0.95 (Van Katwyk et al., 2000). In Iran, the scale validity coefficients were reported to be 0.91 (internal consistency) and 0.90 (Guttman split-half). The correlation coefficients of JAWS with interpersonal conflicts and job satisfaction were -0.32 and 0.81, respectively, representing its good convergent validity (Nemat Tavvosi, 2009). In the present study, the Cronbach’s alpha of 0.72 indicated the validity of this scale.

Data were analyzed using multivariate regression analysis.

Results

The correlation matrix, mean, and standard deviation (SD) of toxic leadership, job-related affective well-being, interpersonal conflicts at work, organizational constraints, and quantitative workload are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Correlation matrix, mean, and SD of toxic leadership, job-related affective well-being, interpersonal conflicts at work, organizational constraints, and quantitative workload

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Toxic leadership					
2. Interpersonal conflicts	0.23**				
3. Organizational constraints	0.31**	0.26**			
4. Quantitative workload	0.28**	0.18**	0.13**		
5. Job-related affective well-being	-0.37**	-0.43**	-0.22**	-0.11**	
Mean	73.4	71.2	56.6	43.4	60.6
SD	4.24	6.72	7.34	8.84	5.17
** p<0.01					

As can be seen in Table 1, there was a significant positive correlation between toxic leadership, interpersonal conflicts ($r=0.23$, $p<0.01$), organizational constraints ($r=0.31$, $p<0.01$), and quantitative workload ($r=0.28$, $p<0.01$). Moreover, a significant negative correlation was observed between toxic leadership, job-related affective well-being ($r=-0.37$, $p<0.01$).

Results of path analysis are reported in Figure 2.

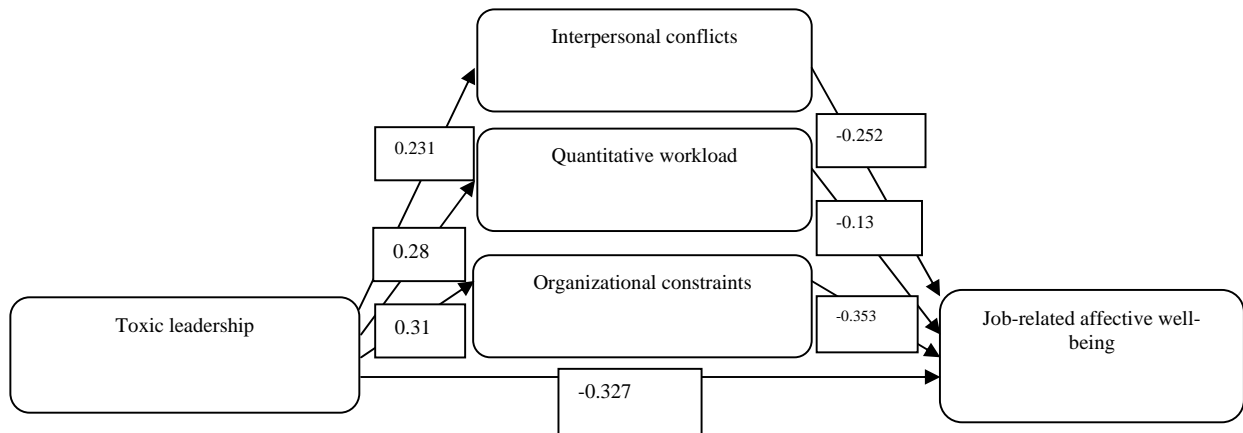


Figure 2. Mediating role of interpersonal conflicts, quantitative workload, and organizational constraints in the relationship between toxic leadership and job-related affective well-being

Model fit indices are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Model fit indices

	X ² /df	CFI	GFI	AGFI	RMSEA
Model	0.91	1	1	0.94	0.00

As is evident, model fit indices are very good.

Decomposition of effect from the Path analysis is reported in Table 3.

Table 3. Decomposition of effect from the Path analysis

Path	Standardized Effect	t
On Job-related affective well-being of Toxic leadership	-0.327*	-4.37
of Quantitative workload	-0.13*	-3.63
of Organizational constraints	-0.353*	-4.53
of Interpersonal conflicts	-0.252*	-3.83
On Interpersonal conflicts of Toxic leadership	0.231*	5.31
On Quantitative workload of Toxic leadership	0.28*	5.74
On Organizational constraints of Toxic leadership	0.31*	6.12

Direct and indirect paths and the total effect of toxic leadership and job stress factors on job-related affective well-being are reported in Table 4.

Table 4. Direct, indirect, and total effect of toxic leadership and job stress factors on job-related affective well-being

Path	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total Effect	explained Variance
On Job-related affective well-being of Toxic leadership	-0.327	-0.194	-0.52	0.13
of Quantitative workload	-0.13	-	-0.13	
of Organizational constraints	-0.353	-	-0.353	
of Interpersonal conflicts	-0.252	-	-0.252	
On Interpersonal conflicts of Toxic leadership	0.231	-	0.231	0.12
On Quantitative workload of Toxic leadership	0.28	-	0.28	0.09
On Organizational constraints of Toxic leadership	0.31	-	0.31	0.11

Based on the tested paths (Table 4), the direct ($B=-0.327$) and indirect ($B=-0.19$) effects of toxic leadership, quantitative workload ($B=-0.13$), organizational constraints ($B=-0.353$), and interpersonal conflicts ($B=-0.252$) on job-related affective well-being were significant. Furthermore, these four variables explained 13% of the variance of job-related affective well-being. Moreover, results of the fit of the model pointed to the direct significant effect of toxic leadership ($B=0.213$) on interpersonal conflicts, with toxic leadership accounting for 12% of the variance of interpersonal conflicts. Results also demonstrated the direct significant effect of toxic leadership ($B=0.28$) on quantitative workload, with toxic leadership accounting for 9% of the variance of quantitative workload. Finally, results showed the direct significant effect of toxic leadership ($B=0.31$) on organizational constraints, with toxic leadership accounting for 11% of the variance of organizational constraints.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between toxic leadership and the job-related affective well-being of workers with the mediating role of job stress. Research population consisted of knowledge workers in knowledge-based organizations, 213 of whom were selected and filled in the JAWS (Van Katwyk et al., 2000), MJSS (Spector & Jex, 1998), and TLS (Schmidt, 2014). Correlation and path analyses revealed that toxic leadership directly affects three components of job stress, i.e. interpersonal conflicts, quantitative workload, and organizational constraints. Moreover, toxic leadership explains 12%, 9%, and 11% of the variance of interpersonal conflicts, quantitative workload, and organizational constraints, respectively.

Disparaging supervision aims at disrespecting workers, which is among the most offensive behaviors of a toxic leader. Disparaging supervision is rooted in the psychological characteristics and attitudes of workers, petty tyranny, the leader's deviating service and political behaviors, and the dysfunctional organizational climate. Followers who have high expectations and unmet needs seek strong figures who can promise order, glorious organizational future, and fulfillment of needs. Such subordinates lay the groundwork for the disparaging behaviors of toxic, norm-breaking, rebellious, bullying, arrogant, accusing, and tyrannical leaders. Since they see no resistance, these leaders create a climate of impoliteness and impudence for subordinates. In this toxic environment, risks of interpersonal conflicts are higher.

The direct effect of toxic leadership on quantitative workload can be accounted for based on the corruption of toxic leaders. These leaders ignore the legitimate interests of the organization for their personal goals by abusing their legal power. For instance, they blackmail, use public facilities for personal goals, engage in embezzlement and recreation at the organization's expense, abuse workers for performing extra work, and have unrealistic expectations of workers. These behaviors naturally impose a higher workload on workers to meet the leadership expectations. Such leaders abuse their workers for their personal and organizational interests. Thus, toxic leadership increases the quantitative workload of workers.

Toxic leadership also directly affects organizational constraints. These leaders pose obstacles to workers in performing their duties; aim for goals other than those of the organization; steal organizational resources such as assets, equipment, money, and time; and encourage workers to engage in such activities. In doing so, they ignore organizational goals or actively prevent their realization. Therefore, toxic leaders pose obstacles for workers in terms of money, equipment, time, and so on.

The present study confirmed the negative correlation between job stress components (i.e. quantitative workload, interpersonal conflicts, and organizational constraints) and job-related affective well-being. In the framework of most stress models, the relationship between quantitative workload, job stress and emotional responses, has been confirmed (e.g. Spector & Jex, 1998; Guarinoni et al., 2013). The increased quantitative workload, which is rarely proportionate to the workers' work ability, together with increased job stress and emotions, negatively affects and reduces workers' affective well-being.

The negative correlation between interpersonal conflicts and job-related affective well-being is consistent with the results of Lin (2013) on the relationship between psychological well-being and conflicts. Leader's destructive behaviors, e.g. increasing workers' workload for personal interests, creates a sense of abuse and thus increases stress and resistance, thereby jeopardizing job-related affective well-being.

The negative correlation between organizational constraints and job-related affective well-being is in line with the results of Bass and Stogdill (1990). By promoting a sense of insecurity and being ignored, organizational constraints affect and decrease workers' job-related affective well-being. As previously noted, leaders with destructive behaviors such as posing obstacles to workers in performing their duties, trying to attain goals other than those of the organization, and stealing organizational resources (assets and equipment), ignore the realization of organizational goals. As a result, leaders with toxic behaviors limit workers and thus affect their job-related affective well-being.

Consistent with the results of Hudson (2013), the negative effect of toxic leadership on job-related affective well-being was indicated in the present study. By creating constant stress and emotional exhaustion, together with an unhealthy emotional climate and corruption at the workplace, toxic leaders jeopardize the public health and affective well-being of individuals.

With regards to the significance of leadership styles and their effect on job-related stress and well-being, the evaluation of the behaviors of managers and workers is of utmost importance, as workers who approve managerial behaviors under all circumstances pave the way for emergence of toxic leaders.

In this study, the participants were limited to knowledge workers of knowledge-based organizations in Alborz and Tehran Provinces, recruited through convenience sampling. Moreover, years of employment, age, and level of education were not controlled, limiting the generalizability of the results. Future studies can resolve the noted limitations and examine the effect of toxic

leadership on human resource productivity, evaluate the characteristics of the followers of toxic leaders, and identify the conditions for the emergence of toxic leadership in the corporate life cycle.

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