

Work Overload and Turnover Intention Among Generation Z Startup Workers

Ayu Winda Rizky*, Jihan Humairoh, Mela Novaliska Panjaitan

Manajemen, Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Manajemen Sukma, Medan, Indonesia

Full Address: Jl. Sakti Lubis, Siti Rejo I, Kec. Medan Kota, Kota Medan, Sumatera Utara 20219, Indonesia

Email: ¹*aywrzky.ky@gmail.com, ²jihanhumairoh07@gmail.com, ³melanova.panjaitan@gmail.com

Correspondance Author Email: aywrzky.ky@gmail.com

Abstract—This research aims to analyze the effect of perceived work overload on turnover intention among Generation Z employees in Indonesian startup companies. It also explores the mediating role of emotional exhaustion and the moderating role of perceived organizational support in this relationship. Employing a quantitative approach and survey method, data were collected from 223 respondents who are Generation Z employees with a minimum of one year of work experience in startups. The data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS). The results show that perceived work overload has a significant positive effect on turnover intention. Furthermore, emotional exhaustion significantly mediates the relationship between perceived work overload and turnover intention. Meanwhile, perceived organizational support moderates the relationship between emotional exhaustion and turnover intention in a negative direction, indicating that higher perceived support weakens the effect of emotional exhaustion on turnover intention. These findings reinforce the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) framework and offer practical implications for startup management in managing workload, enhancing organizational support, and reducing turnover among Generation Z employees.

Keywords: Perceived work overload; Emotional exhaustion; Turnover intention; Perceived organizational support; Generation Z; Startup companies

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has accelerated the growth of startup companies worldwide, including Indonesia. Startups are organizations established to develop innovative products or services and create substantial value in highly dynamic environments (Baldrige, 2024). In Indonesia, startup development continues to grow significantly due to increasing digital adoption and technological innovation. Startup Ranking (2024) reported that Indonesia ranks sixth globally and first in Southeast Asia, with more than 2,500 active startups. This growth has increased employment opportunities, particularly for younger generations.

Generation Z has become the dominant workforce in Indonesian startups. MIKTI (2021) reported that approximately 49.6% of startup employees belong to Generation Z. As digital natives, they possess strong technological capabilities and adaptability to rapidly changing work environments (Roddy, 2024). However, Generation Z is also characterized by higher job mobility and lower organizational attachment compared to previous generations (Schroth, 2019). They place considerable importance on work-life balance, psychological well-being, and supportive work environments. Consequently, they are more likely to leave organizations when their expectations are not fulfilled.

Carta (2024) reported that employee attrition rates in startups are considerably higher than in traditional organizations. Similarly, Deloitte (2019) found that Generation Z employees in Indonesia exhibit a relatively high turnover rate. Recent evidence from Populix (2023) showed that nearly 43% of Generation Z employees intend to leave their jobs within one to two years. High turnover can create significant organizational costs, including recruitment expenses, training costs, productivity losses, and the loss of organizational knowledge (Berber & Gašić, 2024; Chen & Wang, 2019). Therefore, understanding the factors influencing turnover intention is critical for startup sustainability.

One factor frequently associated with turnover intention is perceived work overload. Harvey et al. (2003) defined perceived work overload as a subjective perception that work demands exceed the available time and resources required to complete assigned tasks. In startup environments, employees are often expected to perform multiple roles, meet tight deadlines, and remain available beyond formal working hours (Junça Silva et al., 2024; Rasulovala & Tanova, 2025). Such conditions may increase employees' perceptions of excessive workload and encourage withdrawal behaviors.

Previous studies have consistently identified a positive relationship between work overload and turnover intention. Hwang and Kim (2021) found that excessive job demands increase employees' intentions to leave their organizations. Similarly, Ali et al. (2022) reported that perceived work overload significantly influences turnover intention. These findings suggest that employees who perceive their workloads as exceeding their capabilities are more likely to seek alternative employment opportunities.

However, the relationship between work overload and turnover intention may involve important psychological mechanisms. One important emotional consequence of excessive workload is emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion refers to a condition in which individuals experience depleted emotional resources due to prolonged exposure to work-related stress (Ali et al., 2022). Employees experiencing emotional exhaustion often feel psychologically drained and less capable of coping with workplace demands. Feng and Cui (2024) reported that emotionally exhausted employees are more likely to consider leaving their organizations. López-Cabarcos et al. (2021)

and Saleh et al. (2023) also found positive relationships between emotional exhaustion and turnover intention across different occupational contexts. These findings indicate that emotional exhaustion may serve as a critical mechanism explaining why excessive workload leads to employee withdrawal.

The issue is particularly relevant among Generation Z employees. Research suggests that younger employees are more vulnerable to mental health concerns and workplace burnout than previous generations (Schroth, 2019; Yu, 2022). Future Forum (2022) reported that employees aged 18–29 experience higher levels of burnout than older workers. Consequently, Generation Z employees working in startup companies may be especially susceptible to emotional exhaustion arising from excessive workload, thereby increasing their turnover intention.

Despite the growing literature, several research gaps remain. First, previous studies have primarily focused on the direct relationship between work overload and turnover intention (Hwang & Kim, 2021; Ali et al., 2022). Second, empirical evidence examining emotional exhaustion as a mediating mechanism among Generation Z employees in Indonesian startups remains limited. Third, previous studies have reported variations in the strength of the relationship between emotional exhaustion and turnover intention across different contexts (Rumbold et al., 2023; Saleh et al., 2023), suggesting the presence of contextual factors that may influence this relationship.

One potential factor is perceived organizational support (POS). Perceived organizational support refers to employees' beliefs that their organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Within the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) framework, organizational support functions as a job resource that helps employees cope with workplace demands (Bakker et al., 2005). Previous studies have shown that organizational support reduces turnover intention and mitigates the negative effects of emotional exhaustion (Mishra & Kumar, 2016; Siddiqi et al., 2024). However, studies investigating the moderating role of perceived organizational support among Generation Z startup employees remain scarce.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the effect of perceived work overload on turnover intention among Generation Z employees in Indonesian startup companies, with emotional exhaustion serving as a mediator and perceived organizational support serving as a moderator. The study is important because it addresses the growing turnover tendency among Generation Z employees and contributes to the sustainability of startup organizations. The novelty of this research lies in integrating emotional exhaustion and perceived organizational support within a moderated-mediation framework based on the Job Demands–Resources model in the context of Generation Z employees working in Indonesian startup companies.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

2.1 Basic Research Framework

This study employed a quantitative research approach using a cross-sectional survey design to examine the effect of perceived work overload on turnover intention among Generation Z employees working in Indonesian startup companies. The study also investigated the mediating role of emotional exhaustion and the moderating role of perceived organizational support. The proposed research framework was developed based on the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model, which explains how job demands may lead to employee strain and withdrawal behavior, while job resources can buffer such negative consequences (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker et al., 2005).

The target population consisted of Generation Z employees working in startup companies in Indonesia. Respondents were required to meet three criteria: (1) belonging to Generation Z, (2) currently working in a startup company, and (3) having at least one year of work experience in the organization. Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed using Google Forms. A total of 232 responses were obtained, and 223 valid responses were retained for analysis after data screening procedures.

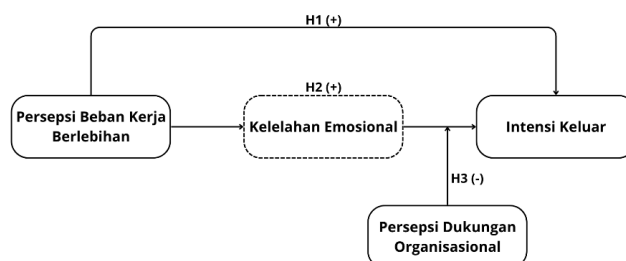


Figure 1. Research Model Design

The conceptual framework proposes that perceived work overload (PWO) directly influences turnover intention (TI). Furthermore, emotional exhaustion (EE) mediates the relationship between perceived work overload and turnover intention. Perceived organizational support (POS) is proposed as a moderating variable that weakens the relationship between emotional exhaustion and turnover intention. Based on the framework, three hypotheses were developed:

H1: Perceived work overload positively affects turnover intention.

H2: Emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between perceived work overload and turnover intention.
H3: Perceived organizational support moderates the relationship between emotional exhaustion and turnover intention.

2.2 Measurement of Variables

The study employed previously validated measurement scales adapted from prior research. Perceived Work Overload was measured using items adapted from Pluta and Rudawska (2021). Turnover Intention was measured using indicators adapted from Mobley et al. (1978). Emotional Exhaustion was measured using indicators derived from Maslach and Jackson (1981), while Perceived Organizational Support was measured using items adapted from Eisenberger et al. (1986). All measurement items were assessed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). The use of established scales was intended to ensure content validity and comparability with previous studies.

Table 1. Research Variables and Measurement Sources

Variable	Type	Source
Perceived Work Overload	Independent	Pluta & Rudawska (2021)
Emotional Exhaustion	Mediator	Maslach & Jackson (1981)
Perceived Organizational Support	Moderator	Eisenberger et al. (1986)
Turnover Intention	Dependent	Mobley et al. (1978)

Source: Developed by the author (2025).

2.3 Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis was performed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS software. PLS-SEM was selected because it is suitable for predictive research models involving mediation and moderation relationships and is widely recommended for complex structural models (Hair et al., 2022). Through these procedures, the study aimed to provide empirical evidence regarding the mechanisms through which perceived work overload influences turnover intention among Generation Z employees in Indonesian startup companies.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Respondent Profile

A total of 232 valid responses were obtained from Generation Z employees working in Indonesian startups after data cleansing. Male respondents accounted for 50.86% of the sample, while female respondents represented 49.13%, indicating a balanced gender distribution. Most respondents had worked for at least one year (37.50%), followed by those with two to three years of experience (32.76%) and more than three years of experience (29.74%). Regarding organizational position, entry-level employees constituted the largest group (58.18%), followed by supervisors (30.17%), middle managers (8.62%), and senior managers (3.01%).

Table 2. Profile of Respondents

Profile	Categori	Amount	Percentage (%)
Gender	Man	118	50,86
	Woman	114	49,13
	Total	232	100
Work of Tenure	≥ 1 years	87	37,50
	2-3 years	76	32,76
	> 3 years	69	29,74
	Total	232	100
Position Level	Senior Manager	7	3,01
	Middle Manager	20	8,62
	Supervisor	70	30,17
	Staff/ entry level	135	58,18
Total		232	100

Source: Primer Data (2025)

The respondents were drawn from diverse startup sectors, including e-commerce (13.79%), fintech (11.64%), general digital services (10.34%), media and creative content (9.91%), agritech (9.05%), health technology (8.19%), logistics technology (8.19%), education technology (7.76%), game development (7.76%), tourism technology (6.90%), and food technology (6.47%). Such diversity indicates that the sample adequately represents the Indonesian startup ecosystem.

In terms of geographical distribution, respondents were primarily located in Yogyakarta (21.55%), Bekasi (21.12%), Bandung (19.40%), Jakarta (18.10%), and Surabaya (17.24%). These cities are recognized as major startup hubs in Indonesia, suggesting that the sample captures employees working within highly dynamic entrepreneurial environments.

3.2 Measurement Model Analysis

We examined the impact of perceived of work overload on the turnover intention with the mediating role of emotional exhaustion and moderation role of perceived of organizational support through a reflective model with each construct measured by its items. The measurement model was evaluated through convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability analyses using SmartPLS 4.

3.2.1 Construct Reliability and Validity

The Cronbach alpha and was greater than the threshold (0.7) for all the four constructs i.e perceived work overload ($\alpha = 0,857$, CR= 0,861), Turnover intention ($\alpha = 0,921$, CR= 0,922), Emotional exhaustion ($\alpha = 0,936$, CR= 0,944), Perceived of Organizational Support ($\alpha = 0,909$, CR= 0,916). The convergent validity is set when the value of AVE is larger than 0,5, hence, all the variables have the AVE value as per ther threshold values. Similiarly, the puter load values for all the items measuring each construct were near to or greater than 0,7.

Table 3. Variables reliability and validity statistics

Latent construct	Items	Outer loads	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Perceived Work Overload	PWO1	0,817	0,857	00,861	0,699
	PWO2	0,814			
	PWO3	0,855			
	PWO4	0,857			
Emotional Exhaustion	EE1	0,826	0,936	0,944	0,661
	EE2	0,837			
	EE3	0,829			
	EE4	0,799			
	EE5	0,827			
	EE6	0,792			
	EE7	0,808			
	EE8	0,810			
	EE9	0,790			
Turnover Intention	TI1	0,927	0,921	0,922	0,863
	TI2	0,927			
	TI3	0,933			
Perceived Organizational Support	POS1	0,826	0,909	0,916	0,687
	POS2	0,805			
	POS3	0,807			
	POS4	0,828			
	POS5	0,843			
	POS6	0,864			

Source: Primer Data (2025)

3.2.2 Hypothesis Testing

The following is shown Path Analysis in Figure 2.

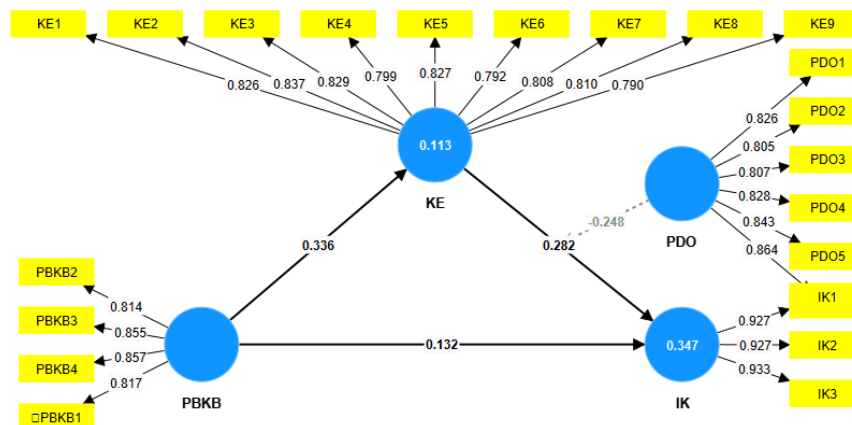


Figure 2. Path Analysis

Table 4. Hypothesis Testing

Relationship	β	t-value	p-value	Result
PWO $\rightarrow$ TI	0.132	2.119	0.034	Supported
PWO $\rightarrow$ EE	0.336	7.334	0.000	Supported
EE $\rightarrow$ TI	0.282	2.918	0.004	Supported
PWO $\rightarrow$ EE $\rightarrow$ TI	0,095	2,930	0,003	Supported
POS $\rightarrow$ TI	-0,437	4,759	0.000	Supported
POS $\times$ EE $\rightarrow$ TI	-0.248	4.907	0.000	Supported

Source: Primer Data Developed (2025)

The results indicate that perceived work overload significantly increases turnover intention among Generation Z startup employees. Emotional exhaustion also exerts a significant positive influence on turnover intention and partially mediates the relationship between perceived work overload and turnover intention. Furthermore, perceived organizational support significantly moderates the relationship between emotional exhaustion and turnover intention by weakening the positive effect of emotional exhaustion.

3.3 Discussion

The findings indicate that perceived work overload significantly and positively affects turnover intention among Generation Z employees working in Indonesian startup companies ($\beta = 0.132$, $p = 0.034$). This result supports Hypothesis 1 and suggests that employees who perceive their workloads as exceeding their available resources are more likely to consider leaving their organizations. Consistent with previous studies, Ali et al. (2022) found that perceived work overload significantly increases employees' turnover intention, while Hwang and Kim (2021) reported that excessive job demands contribute to withdrawal behaviors and turnover-related attitudes. The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that the relationship remains significant within the context of Indonesian startup companies, where employees frequently encounter dynamic work environments, limited organizational resources, and demanding performance expectations.

This finding can be explained through the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, which proposes that excessive job demands consume employees' physical and psychological resources, thereby increasing strain and reducing employee well-being (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). In startup environments, employees are often expected to perform multiple responsibilities simultaneously and adapt quickly to organizational changes. Such conditions may create perceptions that work demands exceed available resources, ultimately increasing employees' intentions to seek alternative employment opportunities.

The results further reveal that emotional exhaustion significantly mediates the relationship between perceived work overload and turnover intention ($\beta = 0.095$, $p = 0.003$). This finding supports Hypothesis 2 and suggests that perceived work overload influences turnover intention not only directly but also indirectly through emotional exhaustion. The result is consistent with previous studies by Ali et al. (2022), Feng and Cui (2024), López-Cabarcos et al. (2021), and Saleh et al. (2023), all of which reported that emotional exhaustion serves as a key psychological mechanism linking workplace stressors to turnover intention. Employees exposed to excessive work demands over prolonged periods may experience emotional depletion, fatigue, and reduced psychological capacity to cope with job challenges, which subsequently increases their desire to leave the organization. This result considering that startup organizations often operate under high levels of uncertainty and performance pressure, employees may experience continuous emotional demands that gradually deplete their emotional resources. Consequently, emotionally exhausted employees become more likely to develop intentions to leave their organizations. Another important finding concerns the moderating role of perceived organizational support. The interaction effect between emotional exhaustion and perceived organizational support was negative and significant ($\beta = -0.248$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that organizational support weakens the positive relationship between emotional exhaustion and turnover intention. This finding supports

Hypothesis 3 and is consistent with previous studies emphasizing the buffering role of organizational support (Mishra & Kumar, 2016; Li et al., 2019; Siddiqi et al., 2024). Employees who perceive greater support from their organizations may feel more valued, appreciated, and psychologically secure, thereby reducing the likelihood that emotional exhaustion translates into intentions to leave.

From the perspective of the JD-R model, perceived organizational support functions as a job resource that mitigates the negative consequences of job demands. Employees who receive support from supervisors and organizations may possess greater psychological resources to cope with work-related stress and emotional strain. The significant moderation effect suggests that organizational support remains a critical factor in reducing turnover intention among Generation Z employees. Startup organizations should therefore invest in supportive human resource practices, including managerial support, employee recognition, well-being programs, and transparent communication mechanisms.

The findings are particularly important within the context of Generation Z employees. Previous studies suggest that Generation Z places greater emphasis on psychological well-being, work-life balance, meaningful work, and supportive organizational cultures than previous generations (Schroth, 2019; Baum, 2020; Yu, 2022). As a result, excessive workload and emotional exhaustion may have stronger effects on turnover intention among this generation. When employees perceive that organizational demands threaten their well-being without adequate organizational support, they may become more inclined to seek alternative employment opportunities. Conversely, supportive organizational environments can help retain talented Generation Z employees even when work demands remain high.

This study contributes to the literature in several important ways. First, it extends the Job Demands–Resources framework by simultaneously examining perceived work overload as a job demand, emotional exhaustion as a psychological mechanism, and perceived organizational support as a buffering job resource. Second, it provides empirical evidence from Indonesian startup companies, a context that remains relatively underexplored in turnover intention research. Third, the study focuses specifically on Generation Z employees, who represent an increasingly important segment of the global workforce. The findings demonstrate that turnover intention among Generation Z employees is shaped by a complex interaction between job demands, emotional responses, and organizational resources. This integrated perspective represents the primary contribution of the study and offers valuable insights for organizations seeking to improve employee retention within rapidly growing startup environments.

4. CONCLUSION

This study examined the effect of perceived work overload on turnover intention among Generation Z employees working in Indonesian startup companies, with emotional exhaustion as a mediating variable and perceived organizational support as a moderating variable. The findings reveal that perceived work overload significantly and positively affects turnover intention, indicating that employees who perceive their workloads as exceeding their available resources are more likely to consider leaving their organizations. Furthermore, emotional exhaustion was found to partially mediate the relationship between perceived work overload and turnover intention, suggesting that excessive workload contributes to employee withdrawal intentions through the depletion of emotional resources. The study also demonstrates that perceived organizational support significantly moderates the relationship between emotional exhaustion and turnover intention. Specifically, organizational support weakens the positive effect of emotional exhaustion on employees' intentions to leave, highlighting the importance of supportive workplace environments in mitigating the adverse consequences of work-related stress. These findings support the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model by confirming that job demands increase employee strain, whereas organizational resources can buffer negative outcomes. Practically, the findings suggest that startup organizations should manage workload allocation more effectively, prioritize employee well-being, and strengthen organizational support mechanisms to reduce turnover intention and improve employee retention.

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