

# Burnout as a Mediator of Quiet Quitting and Employee Well-Being in Generation Z

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*Burnout*  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The increasing prevalence of quiet quitting among Generation Z employees has raised concerns regarding its implications for employee well-being and psychological health in the workplace. This study examines the relationship between quiet quitting and employee well-being, with burnout positioned as a mediating variable among Generation Z employees working at a Honda-affiliated company in Padang City, Indonesia. A quantitative correlational design was employed, involving 100 respondents selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using standardized self-report questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis, and mediation analysis through path modeling. The results indicate that quiet quitting is positively associated with burnout and negatively associated with employee well-being. Further analysis reveals that quiet quitting has a significant direct negative effect on employee well-being, as well as an indirect effect through increased levels of burnout, indicating partial mediation. The proposed model explains 5.6% of the variance in burnout and 23.2% of the variance in employee well-being, confirming that disengagement behaviors contribute meaningfully, though not exclusively, to employees' psychological outcomes. Overall, the findings confirm that quiet quitting represents maladaptive disengagement rather than a protective coping strategy, as it is linked to emotional exhaustion and reduced workplace well-being. These results highlight the importance of organizational interventions aimed at reducing burnout and fostering healthy engagement to support the psychological well-being of young employees and promote sustainable work environments.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Employees play a crucial role in the organizational structure of a company because they are responsible for carrying out operational activities that directly support the achievement of organizational goals [1]. The success of a company is largely determined by the extent of employee contribution. To perform their duties optimally, employees require not only skills and knowledge but also intrinsic motivation and a supportive work environment that fosters collaboration and a strong work ethic [2]. In organizational psychology, this condition is closely related to the concept of Employee Well-Being (EWB), which refers to employees' psychological, emotional, and social functioning that enables them to work effectively and sustainably.

Research consistently shows that employee well-being contributes to healthier, more productive, and sustainable work environments, whereas low well-being increases stress, fatigue, disengagement, and turnover intention [3]. Sustainable organizational performance, therefore, depends not only on productivity indicators but also on employees' psychological experiences in the workplace.

In recent years, however, global workforce reports indicate a decline in employee engagement, particularly among younger employees. One phenomenon that has gained substantial attention is quiet quitting, defined as limiting work involvement strictly to formal job requirements without additional discretionary effort. Although initially popularised through social media discourse, empirical studies in Indonesia demonstrate that quiet quitting intention is significantly associated with work engagement and job satisfaction in the banking sector [4]. Furthermore, research in Indonesian hospital settings shows that burnout and work-life imbalance significantly predict quiet quitting behavior, explaining

57.6% of its variance [5]. These findings suggest that quiet quitting is not merely a social trend but a measurable organizational behavior with psychological implications.

This phenomenon is especially relevant within the current workforce structure, where Generation Z increasingly dominates organizational environments. Generation Z employees are characterized by strong awareness of mental health, a preference for flexibility, and high expectations regarding work-life balance. While these characteristics may promote adaptive work models, they may also increase the likelihood of disengagement when organizational resources are perceived as inadequate [6]. In this context, maintaining employee well-being becomes particularly critical.

The relationship between quiet quitting and employee well-being remains theoretically ambiguous. Some studies conceptualize quiet quitting as maladaptive disengagement associated with burnout and reduced psychological functioning [4]. However, other perspectives interpret quiet quitting as a self-protective boundary-setting strategy aimed at preserving mental health, particularly among younger employees [5]. This theoretical tension indicates that the mechanism linking quiet quitting and employee well-being requires further empirical clarification. This ambiguity creates a critical organizational problem. If quiet quitting is interpreted merely as a self-protective strategy, organizations may underestimate its long-term psychological consequences. Conversely, if it is viewed solely as disengagement without understanding its underlying mechanism, interventions may focus only on increasing performance demands rather than addressing psychological strain. Without clarifying whether burnout serves as a mediating process, organizations risk implementing ineffective human resource strategies that fail to protect employee well-being.

To clarify this ambiguity, the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Theory provides a comprehensive explanatory framework. JD-R theory posits that excessive job demands combined with insufficient job resources trigger a health impairment process that leads to burnout, which subsequently reduces employee well-being [7]. Burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced personal accomplishment, represents a chronic response to prolonged work stressors and serves as a

central mechanism within organizational stress models. Within this framework, quiet quitting may be understood as a behavioral manifestation of accumulated psychological strain rather than a purely attitudinal choice.

Empirical evidence further indicates that burnout is closely associated with disengagement behaviors among Generation Z employees [8] [9], [10]. Quiet quitting often emerges in response to prolonged job dissatisfaction, low organizational commitment, and excessive work pressure [11], [12], [13]- [14]. As burnout intensifies, employees may withdraw psychologically from their roles as a protective reaction to emotional exhaustion[15] [20-[16]]. Consequently, burnout may function as a mediating psychological mechanism that explains how quiet quitting influences employee well-being.

However, despite the growing literature on burnout and quiet quitting, empirical studies integrating quiet quitting, burnout, and employee well-being within the Indonesian industrial organizational context remain limited. Most Indonesian studies have examined quiet quitting in relation to work engagement or job satisfaction [4] [5] or have focused on burnout and work-life balance as predictors of disengagement. There remains a lack of research positioning burnout explicitly as a mediating variable that explains the mechanism linking quiet quitting and employee well-being, particularly among Generation Z employees in structured industrial settings. Without empirical clarification of this mediating mechanism, organizations lack evidence-based guidance to determine whether quiet quitting reflects adaptive boundary management or emerging psychological risk.

This gap is particularly critical in the Indonesian context, where empirical evidence on quiet quitting and its psychological mechanisms remains limited. This gap is practically important. Without understanding whether quiet quitting behavior reflects psychological exhaustion rather than lack of motivation, organizations risk implementing ineffective human resource strategies. Interventions that merely increase monitoring or performance pressure may fail to address the underlying psychological strain. By empirically testing burnout as a mediating

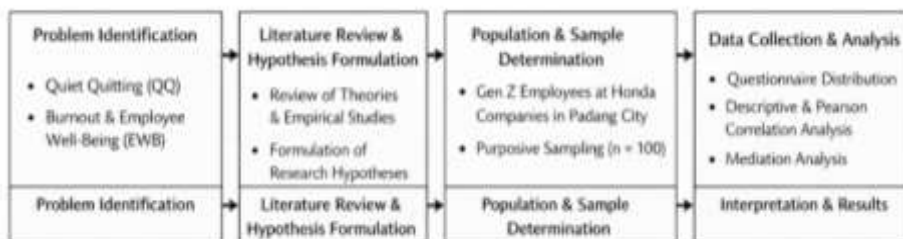
mechanism, this study provides a structured explanatory model that enables organizations to design targeted interventions, such as workload restructuring, enhancement of job resources, and preventive burnout management strategies. Such evidence-based approaches are essential for balancing productivity with psychological sustainability.

Therefore, this study addresses the identified theoretical and empirical gap by examining burnout as a mediating variable in the relationship between quiet quitting and employee well-being among Generation Z employees in a structured industrial organizational context. By clarifying this mechanism, the study seeks to provide both theoretical advancement within the JD-R framework and practical guidance for organizations in designing evidence-based strategies to sustain employee well-being.

## 2. METHOD

### 2.1. Research Design

This study uses a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional mediation design to examine the statistical role of burnout as a mediating variable in the relationship between quiet quitting (QQ) and employee well-being (EWB) among Generation Z employees. Although the data were collected at a single point in time, mediation analysis was employed to examine the associative mechanism between variables rather than to imply causal directionality. This design allows researchers to evaluate the relationship between variables simultaneously and to understand the psychological mechanism linking QQ and EWB through burnout.



**Figure 1.** Research Procedure

## *2.2. Participants*

The participants in this study were Generation Z employees who worked at a Honda-affiliated company located in Padang. The purposive sampling technique was applied based on clear operational criteria: (a) respondents were permanent employees, (b) born between 1997 and 2012 to meet Generation Z classification, (c) had a minimum of one year of work experience in the company, and (d) were actively involved in operational work roles. Respondent eligibility was verified through coordination with the company's HR department to ensure data validity. A sample size of 100 participants is considered adequate for regression-based mediation analysis, although larger samples are recommended to improve statistical power.

## *2.3. Validity and Reliability of Measurement Tools*

All measurement tools used in this study were established instruments that have been previously validated. The Employee Well-Being Scale (EWBS) consists of 18 items measuring psychological, social, and emotional aspects of well-being. The scale was translated and adapted to ensure semantic equivalence and contextual suitability. Cronbach's alpha in this study was 0.91. The burnout scale consists of 22 items representing emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment dimensions based on the Maslach Burnout framework. Construct validity was confirmed in previous studies with RMSEA = 0.048, CFI = 0.943, and TLI = 0.934. The Quiet Quitting Scale consists of 20 items covering disengagement behavior, lack of initiative, and minimal task fulfillment. The reliability coefficient in this study was 0.943

## *2.4 Data Analysis*

The following hypotheses were tested:

H1: Quiet quitting is significantly associated with employee well-being.

H2: Burnout mediates the relationship between quiet quitting and employee well-being.

Data were analyzed using JASP version 0.18.3. Descriptive analysis was used to describe participant characteristics and data distribution. Pearson's correlation test was conducted to examine

the relationship between variables. Furthermore, multiple regression analysis was used to test the contribution of quiet quitting and burnout to well-being. In addition, mediation analysis was conducted to examine whether burnout mediates the effect of quiet quitting on employee well-being. The assumptions of normality, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity were tested before performing regression analysis.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 1.** Means, standard deviations, and Pearson’s bivariate correlations among variables (n = 100)

	Observed Range	M	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.
1. Age	20 – 31	27.210	1.731	-			
2. EWB	34 – 88	58.890	9.978	0.012	-		
3. QQ	33 – 81	56.990	8.855	-0.144	0.440**	-	
4. BO	36 – 108	89.060	17.733	-0.238*	0.320**	0.255**	-

\* p < .05, \*\* p < .01, \*\*\* p < .001, Ewb: Employee Well Being, QQ: Quiet quitting, BO: Burn Out

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and Pearson’s bivariate correlations among age, employee well-being (EWB), quiet quitting (QQ), and burnout (BO) among Generation Z employees working in a Honda-affiliated company in Padang. The respondents were aged between 20 and 31 years, with a mean age of 27.21 years (SD = 1.73).

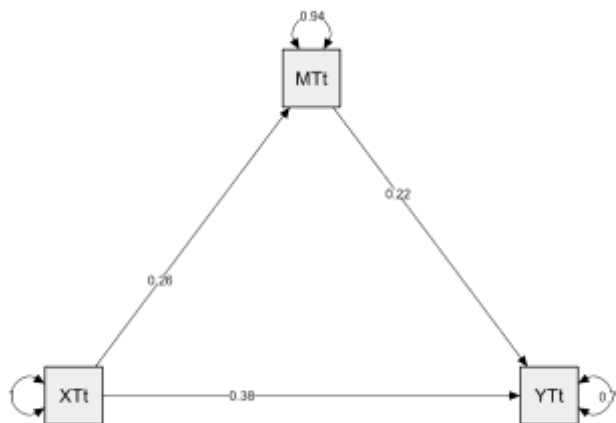
The average employee well-being score was 58.89 (SD = 9.98), indicating a moderate level of well-being among participants. The mean score for quiet quitting was 56.99 (SD = 8.86), while the burnout score was relatively high (M = 89.06, SD = 17.73).

The correlation analysis shows that age had a significant negative correlation with burnout ( $r = -0.238$ ,  $p < .05$ ), suggesting that older employees tended to experience lower levels of burnout. However, age was not significantly related to employee well-being ( $r = 0.012$ , ns) or quiet quitting ( $r = -0.144$ , ns).

Interestingly, employee well-being showed a significant positive correlation with quiet quitting ( $r = 0.440$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This unexpected finding suggests that, at the correlational level, quiet quitting may function as a temporary psychological boundary-

setting strategy among Generation Z employees. However, correlation analysis does not explain the directional mechanism between variables, which requires further mediation analysis.

Overall, these correlation results indicate a mutual relationship between the three main variables (EWB, QQ, BO), although some relationships appear to contradict general theoretical assumptions. Therefore, a more in-depth interpretation through further analysis is needed to understand the direction and strength of each variable's influence on employee well-being.



**Figure 2.** Mediation model (n = 100) illustrating the effect of QQ on EWB through the mediating role of BO.

Figure 2 illustrates the mediation model examining the role of burnout as a psychological mechanism linking quiet quitting and employee well-being. The path analysis indicates that quiet quitting significantly increases burnout ( $\beta = 0.255, p = .014$ ). In turn, burnout significantly decreases employee well-being ( $\beta = -0.223, p = .006$ ). In addition, quiet quitting has a significant direct negative effect on employee well-being ( $\beta = -0.383, p < .001$ ).

These findings indicate that higher levels of quiet quitting are associated with increased burnout, which subsequently reduces employee well-being. This pattern supports the proposed mediation model, suggesting that burnout partially explains how disengagement behavior influences employees' psychological well-being.

**Table 2.** Standardized estimates of direct, indirect, and total effects in the mediation model examining the relationship between QQ and EWB through BU (n = 100).

Effect Type	Path	Estimate ( $\beta$ )	SE	p-value	95% CI
Direct Effect	QQ → EWB	-0.383	0.099	<.001	[-0.549, 0.163]
Indirect Effect	QQ → BO → EWB	0.057	0.027	.034	[0.015, 0.119]
Total Effect	QQ → EWB	-0.326	0.102	<.001	[0.202, -0.615]

**Table 3.** Summary of Mediation Model Results Examining the Relationships Among QQ, BO, and EWB (n = 100).

Component	Path/Index	Estimate ( $\beta$ )	SE	z-value	p-value	95% Confidence Interval
Path Coefficients	BO → EWB	-0.223	0.081	2.761	.006	[-0.071, -0.387]
	QQ → EWB	-0.383	0.099	3.860	<.001	[-0.163, -0.549]
	QQ → BO	0.255	0.104	2.461	.014	[0.052, 0.447]
Indirect Effect	QQ → BO → EWB	0.057	0.027	2.115	.034	[0.015 - 0.119]
Total Effect	QQ → EWB	-0.326	0.102	4.326	<.001	[-0.202, -0.615]

*Note.* The explained variance ( $R^2$ ) was 5.6% for *Burnout* and 23.2% for *Employee Well-being*, indicating that the predictors accounted for a small to moderate portion of variance in the mediator and outcome variables.

The mediation results presented in Table 2 show that quiet quitting has both direct and indirect effects on employee well-being. The direct effect of quiet quitting on well-being was significant ( $\beta = -0.383$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating that employees who exhibit higher levels of quiet quitting tend to experience lower well-being.

The indirect effect through burnout was also significant ( $\beta = 0.057$ ,  $p = .034$ ), indicating that burnout partially mediates the relationship between quiet quitting and employee well-being. The total effect of quiet quitting on well-being remained significant ( $\beta = -0.326$ ,  $p < .001$ ), confirming the overall negative influence of disengagement behavior on employee well-being.

Although the correlation analysis initially showed a positive relationship between quiet quitting and employee well-being, the mediation model reveals the underlying mechanism explaining this paradox. When burnout is considered, quiet quitting is shown to have a negative impact on well-being. This indicates that the positive correlation observed earlier may reflect a superficial coping response, whereas the deeper psychological process captured in the mediation analysis demonstrates the detrimental effect of disengagement behavior on employee well-being.

#### **4. DISCUSSION**

This study provides a clear answer to the research question by demonstrating that quiet quitting negatively affects employee well-being among Generation Z employees, both directly and indirectly through burnout as a mediating mechanism. The findings confirm that burnout serves as a key psychological pathway through which disengagement behavior translates into reduced well-being. Thus, quiet quitting cannot be considered an adaptive coping strategy, but rather a maladaptive form of disengagement associated with psychological strain and diminished well-being. [17]. However, given the cross-sectional nature of this study, the relationships observed represent statistical associations rather than causal directions.

These findings are consistent with prior research that positions quiet quitting as a response to psychological strain and imbalance. Oktavia et al [18] found that quiet quitting among Generation Z is closely associated with work-life imbalance, workload, and anxiety, where disengagement may function as a coping mechanism but also intensifies psychological distress. In line with these findings, the present study confirms that burnout is a key mechanism linking disengagement behavior with reduced employee well-being. However, unlike previous studies that mainly rely on systematic review approaches, this study applies an empirical mediation model, providing a clearer explanation of the underlying psychological process.

Furthermore, the results are aligned with Moczyłowska. [19], who identified psychological and managerial factors, such as low

emotional attachment and shifting work values, as drivers of quiet quitting. While prior studies focus on identifying antecedents, this study extends the literature by explaining how these factors translate into decreased well-being through burnout. This highlights that quiet quitting is not only a behavioral outcome but also part of a deeper psychological mechanism. Thus, this study contributes by integrating behavioral and psychological perspectives within the JD-R framework and providing empirical evidence from the Indonesian context.

These findings are consistent with previous studies. Similarly, Basha and Pathania [23] demonstrated that quiet quitting emerges as a response to accumulated burnout rather than a proactive coping strategy. These similarities suggest that across different organizational contexts, quiet quitting tends to reflect underlying psychological strain rather than healthy boundary management. Previous empirical studies have also demonstrated that burnout is strongly associated with withdrawal behaviors, reduced work engagement, and declining psychological well-being among employees [21]. In this context, burnout functions as an explanatory psychological mechanism that links quiet quitting behavior with well-being outcomes.

From a practical perspective, these findings suggest that organizations should not immediately interpret quiet quitting as merely a lack of commitment or work motivation. Instead, quiet quitting may represent an early signal of underlying psychological strain experienced by employees. Organizations may therefore benefit from focusing on preventive strategies that reduce burnout and promote employee well-being. Interventions such as strengthening psychological safety, improving supportive leadership, increasing job autonomy, and providing opportunities for job crafting may help employees manage work demands more effectively and reduce the likelihood of disengagement behaviors [22] [23]. Such organizational practices are particularly important for Generation Z employees, who tend to prioritize mental health, work-life balance, and meaningful work experiences.

However, this study also reveals a nuanced finding that slightly differs from general theoretical assumptions. At the bivariate level, quiet quitting was positively correlated with employee well-being, suggesting a temporary adaptive function. This aligns with

perspectives that interpret quiet quitting as a boundary-setting strategy to protect mental health, particularly among younger employees [16]. Nevertheless, the mediation analysis clarifies that this positive association is superficial. When burnout is included in the model, quiet quitting demonstrates a negative effect on well-being. This indicates that while disengagement may initially reduce perceived pressure, it does not eliminate underlying psychological strain, which eventually manifests as burnout and decreases well-being[24].

From a theoretical perspective, these findings extend the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) framework by empirically demonstrating that quiet quitting can be understood as a behavioral manifestation of the health impairment process. While previous studies have primarily focused on burnout as an outcome of job demands, this study positions quiet quitting as an observable behavioral indicator that signals the presence of psychological strain. In this sense, burnout functions as a key explanatory mechanism that links disengagement behavior with reduced well-being outcomes[25]. However, unlike prior studies that predominantly interpret quiet quitting as either disengagement or coping behavior, this study demonstrates that its impact on well-being is contingent upon underlying burnout processes[26].

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. The model explains 23.2% of the variance in employee well-being and only 5.6% of burnout, indicating that other variables may play a more dominant role. Factors such as psychological capital, meaningful work, and supervisory support may provide stronger explanatory power and should be incorporated in future research. In addition, the cross-sectional design limits causal interpretation, and the use of self-report measures from a single organizational context may restrict generalisability. Future studies are therefore encouraged to employ longitudinal designs and more diverse samples to better capture the dynamic relationship between quiet quitting, burnout, and employee well-being.

This study offers two main contributions. First, it extends the Job Demands–Resources framework by positioning quiet quitting as a behavioral indicator of the health impairment process. Second, it

provides empirical evidence from the Indonesian context, which remains underexplored in prior research on quiet quitting and employee well-being. These findings highlight the importance of examining underlying psychological mechanisms rather than relying solely on surface-level behavioral interpretations [27].

## **5. CONCLUSION**

This study confirms that quiet quitting negatively affects employee well-being among Generation Z employees, both directly and indirectly through burnout as a mediating mechanism. These findings demonstrate that disengagement behavior contributes to psychological strain, which ultimately reduces well-being.

An important nuance identified in this study is that quiet quitting initially appeared positively correlated with well-being at the bivariate level. However, mediation analysis revealed that this relationship is superficial, as underlying burnout processes explain the negative impact of quiet quitting on well-being. This highlights the importance of examining deeper psychological mechanisms rather than relying solely on correlational findings.

These findings contribute to the literature by positioning quiet quitting as a behavioral manifestation of the health impairment process within the Job Demands–Resources framework, while also providing empirical evidence from the Indonesian organizational context. However, the results are limited to Generation Z employees within a single industrial setting and should be interpreted with caution.

Future research is recommended to replicate this study across broader organizational contexts, incorporate additional explanatory variables, and employ longitudinal designs to better capture the dynamic relationship between quiet quitting, burnout, and employee well-being. Overall, this study emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between surface-level behavioral adaptations and underlying psychological mechanisms in understanding employee well-being in contemporary work environments.

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