

Understanding the Work Stress–Performance Link: The Mediating Role of Quiet Quitting among Indonesian Generation Z Employees

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Abstract

Quiet quitting has become an increasingly visible feature of the post-pandemic workplace, particularly within Generation Z the cohort that now makes up the largest share of Indonesia's labour force. Work stress has long been identified as an antecedent of this behaviour, yet its direct and mediated influence on performance is rarely estimated simultaneously within a single model, and evidence drawn from Indonesian Gen Z employees beyond specific sectors remains limited. Grounded in the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) perspective, this research asks how strongly work stress shapes both quiet quitting and employee performance, and whether quiet quitting transmits the stress–performance relationship. An explanatory quantitative approach was adopted; responses were gathered through an online survey distributed purposively to 400 Gen Z workers across Indonesia. Measurement and structural models were estimated using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS. Results indicate that higher work stress raises quiet quitting ($\beta=0,727$), that quiet quitting lowers performance ($\beta=-0,225$), and that work stress depresses performance directly ($\beta=-0,610$). The indirect path running from work stress to performance through quiet quitting is likewise negative and statistically significant ($\beta=-0,163$). Taken together, the evidence positions quiet quitting as the behavioural route through which stress erodes performance, contributes to the JD-R literature, and points to concrete stress-management priorities for organisations employing Indonesia's Gen Z workforce.

Keywords: *Quiet Quitting, Work Stress, Performance, Job Demands-Resources, Generation Z*

INTRODUCTION

Since the pandemic subsided, quiet quitting has drawn attention as a workplace pattern of international scope, with an estimated cost of up to US\$8.9 trillion to organizations worldwide and affecting 62% of workers globally (Atiku et al., 2025). The Indonesian context intensifies this concern: Generation Z has come to occupy a dominant position in the domestic labor market, representing 35.4% of all workers nationally (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2025). Such a shift in workforce composition warrants closer study, since the priority this cohort places on mental well-being and the boundary between work and personal life sets its occupational conduct apart from that of earlier generations (Chillakuri & Mahanandia, 2018; Schroth, 2019).

Employee performance is a key indicator of organizational effectiveness, and both work stress and quiet quitting pose gradual threats to it. Work stress is well established as an antecedent of quiet quitting: Zhou et al. (2026) found that job burnout mediates the effect of multiple workplace stressors on quiet quitting among vocational college lecturers; Prentice et al. (2025) and Hidayathulla et al. (2025) reported comparable patterns among hospitality employees and nurses, respectively; and Dilekçi et al. (2025) confirmed this pattern among teachers. Quiet quitting itself has, in turn, been shown to directly reduce performance (Priya et al., 2025), positioning it as a

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potential behavioral pathway through which work stress ultimately undermines performance outcomes.

Nevertheless, much of the available evidence has been generated within narrowly defined occupational contexts, including nursing, vocational education, hospitality, and teaching — so that Gen Z employees working across the broader economy, particularly in emerging markets like Indonesia, have received little empirical attention. Equally, the direct route from work stress to performance and the route running through an intervening behavior are seldom estimated together in one model. The present research responds to these shortcomings by estimating four relationships among Indonesian Generation Z employees: the influence of work stress on quiet quitting, the influence of quiet quitting on performance, the unmediated influence of work stress on performance, and the mediating function of quiet quitting between the two. Two contributions follow. First, it broadens quiet quitting scholarship beyond sector-bound samples to Indonesia's general Gen Z workforce. Second, it specifies a mediation model that captures both direct and indirect transmission channels from work stress to performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Job Demands-Resources and Conservation of Resources as Theoretical Foundations

The theoretical anchor for this research is the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) framework (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014, 2017). Its central premise is that job characteristics can be grouped into two categories: demands, which require sustained physical or mental effort and therefore carry a psychological cost, and resources, which enable workers to cope with those demands. From this distinction, the framework derives a health-impairment pathway, whereby demands that persist beyond an employee's capacity progressively deplete reserves and give rise to strain, disengagement from the role, and reduced performance. Applied here, work stress is treated as a demand that erodes psychological resources, with quiet quitting and reduced performance representing the observable consequences of that erosion.

Conceptualizing Quiet Quitting

Quiet quitting is a pattern of psychological disengagement in which employees remain formally employed while limiting their effort to the minimum requirements stipulated in their job description, withdrawing discretionary effort and extra-role behavior (Mahand & Caldwell, 2023). Anand et al. (2024) operationalize the construct through reduced initiative, diminished commitment, and minimal discretionary involvement, distinguishing it from voluntary turnover in that the employee remains on payroll while psychologically withdrawing from the role.

The Effect of Work Stress on Quiet Quitting

Across the literature, work stress recurs as a principal precursor of quiet quitting. In a study of vocational college lecturers, Zhou et al. (2026) traced the influence of several workplace stressors on quiet quitting through job burnout, with the resulting model accounting for 57.2% of the variance in the outcome. A similar sequence emerged in Prentice et al.'s (2025) hospitality sample, where role conflict elevated burnout, and burnout, in turn, produced quiet quitting. Hidayathulla et al. (2025) observed the same chain among nurses, though in their case job satisfaction played the mediating role. Evidence from teaching adds a multi-predictor variant: Dilekçi et al. (2025) found that occupational stress, burnout, and change fatigue operated together to predict quiet quitting. Indonesian studies point in a similar direction. Dudija & Putri (2025) connect workload to burnout among Gen Z employees, while Adhika & Astiti (2025) tie work-related stress to turnover intention. Read collectively, these results indicate that stress-related

constructs precede withdrawal behavior across a range of occupations and national settings.

The Effect of Quiet Quitting and Work Stress on Performance

Employee performance reflects the extent to which employees apply their skills and effort to accomplish tasks and contribute to organizational goals (Widarko & Anwarodin, 2022) and is a central indicator of organizational effectiveness (Harter et al., 2002). Because quiet quitting is defined by the withdrawal of discretionary effort rather than the cessation of task completion, employees who quiet quit continue to perform formally assigned duties while withholding the extra-role behaviors that typically differentiate adequate performance from high performance. Priya et al. (2025) provide direct empirical support for this pathway, finding that quiet quitting significantly and negatively predicts employee performance among IT sector employees. Work stress is separately documented to reduce performance: Jamil et al. (2023) identified role overload and inadequate resources as root causes of job stress that impair performance outcomes, while complementary well-being research (Bellet et al., 2024; De Neve et al., 2023) shows that psychological strain translates into tangible productivity losses. Taken together, this evidence suggests that work stress affects performance both directly and indirectly, through the behavioral pathway of quiet quitting.

Conceptual Framework

The preceding theoretical discussion and empirical evidence provide the basis for the following research model, in which quiet quitting is hypothesized to affect work stress, which in turn affects employee performance, as illustrated in Figure 1.

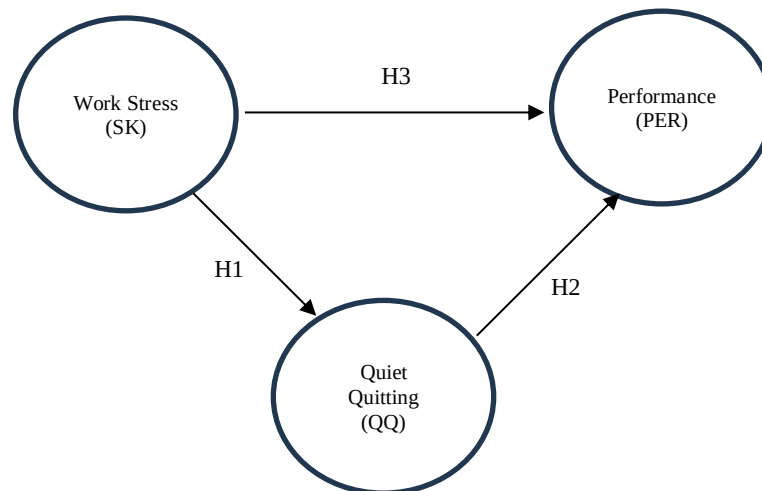


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Employee Performance

Hypotheses Development

Building on this theoretical and empirical foundation, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

- H1: Work stress has a significant effect on quiet quitting among Generation Z workers in Indonesia.
- H2: Employee performance among Indonesia's Generation Z workforce is significantly influenced by quiet quitting.
- H3: Work stress significantly predicts employee performance among Generation Z workers in Indonesia.

H4: Quiet quitting serves as a significant mediating mechanism in the relationship between work stress and employee performance among Indonesia's Generation Z workforce.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research adopts an explanatory quantitative design to test how work stress, quiet quitting, and performance relate to one another among Generation Z employees in Indonesia. Responses were collected via a self-administered online questionnaire distributed through Google Forms during June–July 2026. Participants were selected purposively based on two eligibility criteria: membership in Generation Z (birth years 1997–2012) and current employment status. The final dataset comprises 400 valid responses.

Items measuring each construct were adapted from previously validated instruments. Four indicators of work stress were drawn from [Dilekçi et al. \(2025\)](#) and [Parker & DeCotiis \(1983\)](#); quiet quitting was captured by three indicators adapted from [Veren et al. \(2025\)](#); and five indicators of performance were taken from [Koopmans et al. \(2013\)](#). Each item was rated on a five-point Likert scale anchored at 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree). To avoid comprehension problems, the questionnaire was administered in Indonesian. Appendix A reports the full item list.

Table 1 summarizes respondent characteristics. Men made up 54% of the sample, and 36% were in the 24–26 age band. Java was the residence of most participants (84.9%), and 58% reported job tenure of between two and four years.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristics	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	218	54
	Female	186	46
Age (Years)	18 – 20	29	7
	21 – 23	97	24
	24 – 26	144	36
	27 – 29	134	33
Regions	Java	343	84,9
	Sumatra	34	8,4
	Kalimantan	11	2,7
	Sulawesi	10	2,5
	Bali & Nusa Tenggara	4	1
	Maluku & Papua	2	0,5
Length of Employment	Less than 2 years	56	14
	2 – 4 years	234	58
	5 – 6 years	80	20
	More than 6 years	31	8
	Others	3	1

Hypothesis testing was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS. This approach was used to estimate the proposed relationships among work stress, quiet quitting, and performance, and to assess whether quiet quitting mediates the stress–performance relationship.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study focuses on three constructs: work stress, quiet quitting, and performance. The

analysis was conducted in two stages, beginning with the measurement model assessment and followed by the structural model assessment.

Measurement Model Assessment

The evaluation of the measurement model addressed three properties: indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, and convergent validity. As Table 2 shows, every indicator loaded above the 0.70 benchmark. Internal consistency was satisfactory, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.894 to 0.936 and composite reliability from 0.934 to 0.954. Convergent validity was likewise supported: Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values ranged from 0.799 to 0.838 across all constructs, comfortably above the 0.50 cutoff.

Table 2. Measurement Model Assessment

Variable	Indicator	Outer Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Work Stress	SK13	0,923	0,936	0,954	0,838
	SK14	0,891			
	SK15	0,942			
	SK16	0,905			
Quiet Quitting	QQ4	0,905	0,894	0,934	0,825
	QQ5	0,922			
	QQ6	0,898			
Performance	PER44	0,807	0,936	0,952	0,799
	PER45	0,915			
	PER46	0,912			
	PER47	0,921			
	PER48	0,908			

Two approaches were used to establish discriminant validity: the Fornell-Larcker criterion and the HTMT ratio. Table 3 shows that for each construct, the square root of its AVE exceeded its correlations with the other constructs. HTMT ratios ranged from 0.729 to 0.823, all below the 0.90 benchmark. Discriminant validity among the constructs can therefore be considered adequate.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity

Fornell-Larcker Criterion			
	Performance	Quiet Quitting	Work Stress
Performance	0,894		
Quiet Quitting	-0,668	0,908	
Work Stress	-0,773	0,727	0,916
Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)			
	Performance	Quiet Quitting	Work Stress
Performance			
Quiet Quitting	0,729		
Work Stress	0,823	0,793	

Structural Model Assessment

With the measurement model's reliability and validity established, attention turned to the structural model and the hypothesized links among work stress, quiet quitting, and performance. The R^2 values indicate that the model explains 52.9% of the variance in quiet quitting and 62.1% of the variance in performance. Table 4 presents the results for each proposed relationship.

Table 4. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path Coefficient	p-value	95% Confidence Interval		Decision
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
SK → QQ	0,727	0,000	0,656	0,782	Supported
QQ → PER	-0,225	0,000	-0,345	-0,112	Supported
SK → PER	-0,610	0,000	-0,711	-0,498	Supported
SK → QQ → PER	-0,163	0,000	-0,253	-0,083	Supported

Note: SK = Work Stress; QQ = Quiet Quitting; PER = Performance

The results in Table 4 show that all proposed relationships were statistically significant ($p < 0,001$). Work stress positively affected quiet quitting ($\beta = 0,727$), whereas quiet quitting negatively affected performance ($\beta = -0,225$). Work stress also negatively affected performance ($\beta = -0,610$). The indirect effect of work stress on performance through quiet quitting was negative and significant ($\beta = -0,610$, $p < 0,001$).

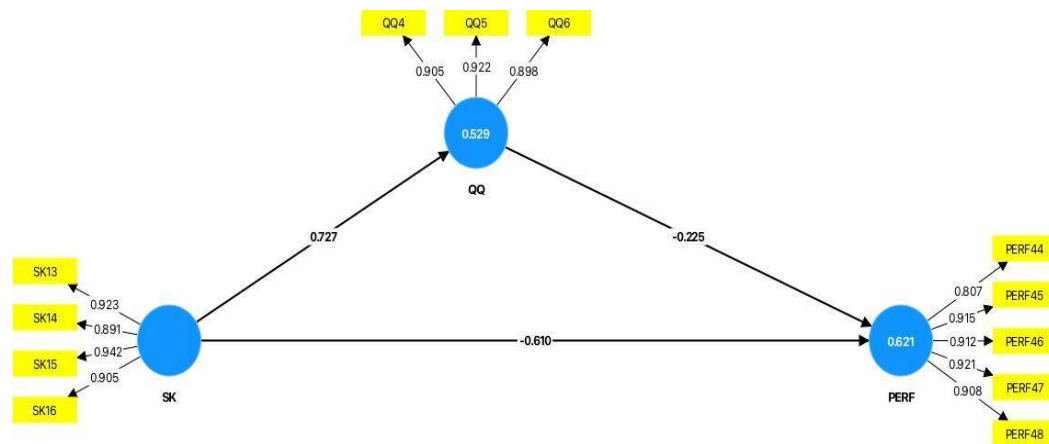


Figure 2. Structural Model

Discussion

The estimated model provides empirical support for the proposed links among work stress, quiet quitting, and performance. Work stress exerts a positive and statistically significant influence on quiet quitting: as stress intensifies, employees become more inclined to restrict their contributions and disengage behaviorally from the role. This result aligns with [Dilekçi et al. \(2025\)](#) and [Hidayathulla et al. \(2025\)](#), both of whom report that occupational stress drives quiet quitting upward. From the JD-R lens, demands that outstrip an employee's capacity deplete physical and psychological reserves; scaling back effort and involvement then serves as a coping response that preserves whatever resources remain.

Quiet quitting has a negative and significant effect on performance. This finding aligns with [Priya et al. \(2025\)](#) and [Karalıncı \(2024\)](#), who reported that quiet quitting negatively affects

performance. From the JD-R perspective, limiting effort and involvement reduces employees' contributions to their work. When employees focus only on basic job responsibilities and reduce additional effort, their overall performance may decline.

Work stress has a negative and significant effect on performance. This finding aligns with [Jamil et al. \(2023\)](#), who reported a negative relationship between work stress and performance. Within the JD-R framework, prolonged work demands can deplete employees' physical and psychological resources, leading to fatigue, reduced concentration, and emotional exhaustion. These conditions can impair employees' ability to perform their tasks effectively.

Quiet quitting significantly mediates the relationship between work stress and performance. This finding aligns with [Dilekçi et al. \(2025\)](#), who showed that higher work demands can encourage quiet quitting as a response to work-related stress. From the JD-R perspective, work stress depletes employees' resources, encouraging them to reduce their work involvement. This reduced involvement can subsequently weaken performance, indicating that quiet quitting provides a behavioral pathway through which work stress affects performance.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings demonstrate that work stress increases quiet quitting, and that both work stress and quiet quitting reduce performance among Generation Z employees. Quiet quitting also mediates the relationships between work stress and performance, indicating that reduced work involvement is one pathway through which work stress affects employee outcomes. These findings support the relevance of the JD-R framework for explaining relationships among work stress, quiet quitting, and performance.

The study contributes to the JD-R literature by positioning quiet quitting as a behavioral response to high work demands that can undermine performance. From a practical perspective, organizations should manage excessive work demands, clarify employee roles, and strengthen job resources to reduce work stress and prevent quiet quitting. A supportive work environment, fair recognition, and employee well-being initiatives may help maintain the involvement and performance of Generation Z employees.

LIMITATIONS & FURTHER RESEARCH

The cross-sectional design and purposive sampling limit the ability to capture changes over time and to generalize findings across employee populations. Future research should conduct comparative studies across industries to examine quiet quitting among Generation Z employees in different sectors, such as high-pressure service or technology industries compared with the manufacturing or public sectors. Such comparisons may reveal whether the relationships among work stress, quiet quitting, and performance vary across industry contexts.

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APPENDIX

Variable	Indicator	Item
Work Stress	SK13	My work causes me stress
	SK14	Thinking about my work makes me feel tense
	SK15	I feel stressed at work
	SK16	My work negatively affects my health
Quiet Quitting	QQ4	I pretend to be busy to avoid additional work
	QQ5	I avoid sharing my ideas because it may lead to additional work
	QQ6	I avoid sharing my ideas because I believe my work situation will not change
Performance	PER44	I complain about minor work-related problems
	PER45	I exaggerate problems at work
	PER46	I focus more on the negative aspects of my work than the positive ones
	PER47	I talk about the negative aspects of my work with my coworkers
	PER48	I talk about the negative aspects of my work with people outside my organization