

## Digital burnout, work alienation, and turnover intention: Unveiling the mediating role of toxic leadership among Generation Y lecturers in leading universities in Medan



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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to examine how digital burnout and work alienation influence turnover intention, with toxic leadership as a mediating factor, in order to better understand the psychological challenges faced by higher education teachers. Data were collected through a survey of 293 Generation Y lecturers from five leading universities in Medan City: University of Muhammadiyah North Sumatra, University of Prima Indonesia, University of Pembangunan Panca Budi, University of Islam North Sumatra, and University of Potensi Utama. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to test the proposed hypotheses within the framework of organizational behavior and toxic leadership theory. The results show that digital burnout and work alienation significantly increase turnover intention, while toxic leadership strengthens the relationship between these stressors and lecturers' desire to leave. The study emphasizes the importance of positive leadership for faculty well-being and retention. Although focused on higher education, further research is needed to confirm these findings in other professional fields. Future studies could also include psychological safety, perceived organizational support, and job satisfaction as mediating factors to provide deeper insights into turnover among millennial professionals.

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### 1. Introduction

The growth of digital technology has changed the way people work across the world, even in higher education. Lecturers are important for spreading knowledge and creating new generations of thinkers. But because technology is now a part of the learning process, their work expectations are becoming more complicated and demanding. A UNESCO report from 2023 says that more than 80% of colleges and universities in Southeast Asia have started using online and hybrid learning systems since the pandemic. This has made academic and administrative work much harder. In this situation, digital weariness or digital burnout has become an increasingly important problem that needs to be thought about carefully.

In the last twenty years, scholarly research has paid more attention to the subject of turnover intention among higher education teachers. Lecturers who want to leave their jobs can not only make schools less stable, but they can also hurt the quality of research and the continuity of teaching, which are two of the most important things in the academic world (Nikolić and Labus, 2024). High turnover among professors can make the learning process less regular, decrease the quality of teaching, and make it harder for experienced faculty members to have an impact on research done at the school (Wenyan and Arshad, 2024).

It is becoming increasingly clear that instructors at five of Medan's top universities, notably those from Generation Y, are more likely to want to leave their jobs. A lot of teachers are thinking about shifting employment to get greater benefits and comfort. This is happening because of a lot of work stress, not enough help from management, and the difference between the amount of work and the pay. Not only is turnover intention a symptom of unhappiness, but it is also a way for people to adapt to a toxic work environment. This event is a big sign

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for university administrators to rethink how they lead and how they run their businesses.

Toxic leadership behaviors often make teachers want to leave their jobs. This type of leadership is marked by being bossy, not caring about others, and not valuing the work of teachers very much (Hassanein et al., 2025). In these kinds of situations, teachers feel disrespected, lose enthusiasm, and feel mental strain to do their jobs (Lopes et al., 2025). This makes people want to move to another school that they think will be more supportive and value their health. Toxic leadership also makes the broader culture of the organization worse, making the workplace hostile and lowering productivity.

Right now, a lot of private universities in Medan still have leaders who are toxic. People who lead this way generally have authoritarian views, don't care about how well teachers do their jobs, and don't respect how hard they work. Because of this, the workplace becomes less productive, which causes mental tension and makes people less excited about their schoolwork. Faculty members think they don't have enough room to improve both professionally and personally. A work atmosphere like this hurts the culture of the firm, makes people less productive, and raises the possibility of confrontations between employees. In this case, it's not surprising that more faculty members are looking for new schools that better support their health and acknowledge their labor. This is why so many teachers want to leave their jobs.

Toxic leadership is seen to be one of the key reasons why lecturers are more likely to want to leave their jobs. Lack of support, too much control, and not enough recognition of good work are all examples of unhealthy leadership styles that make the workplace uncomfortable and emotionally demanding. In the long run, this can make people less motivated to work, more stressed, and less committed to the institution (Lee et al., 2024). When faculty members feel that they aren't being given the chance to grow or are being treated unfairly by their supervisors, they are more likely to want to find a new job that is more supportive and appreciative. So, bad leadership is a very important part of keeping faculty members happy and staying in the academic environment (Ahmed et al., 2025).

To date, evidence indicates that lecturers across various universities in Medan City continue to experience digital burnout. This condition arises from the constant demand to remain virtually connected through online learning platforms, technology-based administrative tasks, and the expectation for immediate responses to academic emails and messages (Tomczak and Kulikowski, 2024). Such persistent pressures lead to reduced productivity, disrupted work-life balance, and heightened emotional stress. Lecturers often feel overwhelmed by the dual responsibility of managing academic workloads while simultaneously adapting to technological changes without sufficient institutional support (Kaltenegger et al., 2023). This phenomenon affects individual psychological well-

being and diminishes the overall quality of teaching and academic innovation.

Work alienation is one of the crucial factors that drives lecturers' intention to leave the institution where they work. This alienation occurs when individuals feel emotionally and psychologically disconnected from their work, lose a sense of ownership, and lack control over processes or decisions that affect their role as faculty members (Hai et al., 2025). Faculty members experiencing this syndrome typically feel that their contributions are ignored, their tasks lack meaning, and social relationships in the workplace are minimal. This situation leads to a decline in motivation, commitment, and overall job satisfaction. Over time, such feelings can result in frustration and a desire to seek out other institutions that value and involve faculty members in organizational processes (Mohamed et al., 2025).

Right now, things at a few private universities in Medan are showing troubling signals of work alienation. Many teachers say they feel emotionally disconnected from their profession, don't understand the purpose of academic activities, and don't have a say in how their school is run. People who are disengaged are less motivated, frustrated, and committed to the institution. Many times, faculty members feel like their work isn't recognized or valued, which makes them think about looking for a job where they feel more empowered and appreciated.

Geng et al. (2025) identified that work burnout, excessive workload, and weak social support are the main antecedents of quiet quitting, especially among nurses. Furthermore, Chitamba (2025), in its integrative review, showed that workplace bullying is closely related to burnout and work alienation. Building on the concept of relational job design, this study emphasizes that workplace bullying can trigger feelings of alienation and emotional exhaustion, which directly impact turnover intentions. At the same time, Meng et al. (2025) showed how important it is for teachers and AI technology to work together. The study indicated that this kind of teamwork makes CWBs more likely to happen if it isn't balanced out with emotional support from bosses. Low support from leaders makes digital burnout worse and causes psychological stress, especially for digital workers like teachers.

Stawnychko et al. (2025) explored the higher education sector and found that workplace incivility undermines psychological safety, which directly impacts academic staff's reluctance to take on leadership roles. This study revealed that negative leadership behavior significantly increases perceptions of burnout among school-based professionals and undermines organizational commitment. This condition can be linked to experiences of toxic leadership that create high psychological pressure.

Baquero et al. (2025) explicitly confirmed that workplace stressors, such as overload, ambiguity,

and role conflict, contribute significantly to turnover intention. Psychological distress acts as a mediating factor, serving as the primary channel linking work stress to turnover intention. In line with this, [Gündüz Çekmecelioglu et al. \(2025\)](#) emphasized that organizational barriers such as lack of transparency, unfairness, and unrealistic expectations contribute to decreased job satisfaction and increased emotional strain. Faculty members who feel they have no influence over their work will feel alienated and disengaged, supporting the theory of work alienation.

According to the research of [Aydın and Levent \(2025\)](#), silent resignation is generally a sign of a crisis in professional identity. A study of teachers found that people who feel disconnected from their occupations are more likely to say no to extra work and eventually quit. [Ullah et al. \(2025\)](#) investigated the effects of cyberbullying on social relationships at work. The study indicated that faculty members who were victims had less inventive performance, but personal resilience and support from bystanders helped lessen the effects. This study shows how important it is to have inclusive leadership and a friendly workplace to keep people from feeling alone and burned out.

This study aims to fill this gap by examining the influence of digital burnout and work alienation on turnover intention among Generation Y lecturers in higher education institutions, with toxic leadership as a mediating variable. The focus of this study is on five leading higher education institutions in Medan. The approach used in this study is organizational behavior, utilizing toxic leadership theory as the main framework. The findings of this study are expected to provide important contributions in designing better policies to enhance faculty well-being and reduce turnover intention at universities, as well as offer insights for higher education institution management to improve supportive leadership quality and foster a healthy and productive work environment.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Turnover intention

Psychological contracts are becoming increasingly important in today's work relationships, especially when it comes to understanding how faculty expectations and organizational reactions interact ([Martín-Raugh et al., 2023](#)). Psychological contracts aren't written agreements; instead, they are people's views and expectations about what they owe each other and the organization. There is a need for a dualistic approach to understanding psychological contracts, which means looking at them from both a dyadic and a cognitive point of view. The dyadic perspective says that contracts are two-way exchanges in which both parties have expectations and obligations that they agree to, whether they are written down or not ([Bennett and Wibberley, 2023](#)). On the other hand, the cognitive

approach looks at how faculty members personally see the organization keeping or breaking its promises. Both methods show that psychological contracts are neither objective nor universal; instead, they are influenced by how each person sees and interprets things based on their own work experience ([Jun et al., 2023](#)).

Psychological contracts are becoming more important in schools and colleges, especially for keeping teachers committed and doing well ([He et al., 2023](#)). Higher education institutions that keep their psychological contracts with faculty members are more likely to keep them and make them happy at work. In surveys of faculty members at Chinese universities, faculty members said that they anticipate institutions to meet certain implicit expectations, such as clear roles, professional recognition, and chances for career growth ([Abousoliman and Mahmoud Hamed, 2024](#)). If these expectations aren't satisfied, staff members sometimes lose motivation and may even think about relocating to a different school ([Li, 2023](#)). Because of this, people who run colleges and universities need to know about and deal with these unspoken expectations to avoid psychological dissonance that could undermine the stability of the institution.

Violating psychological contracts is a big problem that has a direct effect on how lecturers act and how they feel. Lecturers think that the organization has broken its implied commitments, and they are quite emotionally drained. This problem gets worse when the company doesn't create a work atmosphere that is ethical and trustworthy. If faculty members feel deceived by management, they may stop coming to work, show little interest, and even do things that are bad for the organization, including not showing up or working less. These results show that breaking the psychological contract not only affects cognitive elements but also lowers faculty members' emotional job motivation.

[Wang et al. \(2023\)](#) have shown that breaking a psychological contract might lead to higher turnover intention. When people don't follow unwritten rules at work, it can lead to organizational cynicism, which is a bad attitude that makes people feel like the organization doesn't care about the well-being of its employees ([Baquero et al., 2025](#)). This skepticism then becomes a strong force that makes faculty members more likely to want to leave the organization. In other words, if the organization doesn't handle implicit expectations well, it might set off a chain reaction that leads to higher turnover rates, especially among younger workers who care more about justice and openness.

The way psychological contracts work has changed a lot since the pandemic. Faculty members' expectations of organizations have changed because of global crises like COVID-19. Before the epidemic, faculty members may have cared more about money and career promotion, but today they care more about things like work-life balance, flexible work hours, and mental health assistance ([Mehra et al.,](#)

2024). Organizations need to move quickly by changing their policies and encouraging open communication to keep the psychological contract up to date. If an organization doesn't pay attention to these changing expectations, it can make people feel alienated, unhappy, and even resistant, which can hurt overall productivity.

## 2.2. Toxic leadership

Toxic leadership is defined as an authoritarian, manipulative leadership style that lacks empathy and tends to blame subordinates. In higher education, this phenomenon is known to damage the morale of lecturers, trigger internal conflicts, and reduce the psychological well-being of academic staff. Studies show that many faculty members experience falsified-show behavior and authoritarianism as dominant aspects of toxic leadership in universities, with significant impacts on work engagement.

Research in the Middle East suggests that toxic leadership makes academics less happy at work. Trust in leaders and the culture of the organization are two important factors that affect this relationship (Hassanein et al., 2025). These results are in line with a global meta-analysis that found a link between toxic leadership and more counterproductive work behavior (CWB), organizational stagnation, and a sense of injustice that makes employees angry and cynical (Ahmed et al., 2025).

A study in Indonesia that looked at Generation Z in West Java discovered that toxic leadership directly lowers job satisfaction and, in the end, raises the desire to resign. Job satisfaction was a major factor in this (Cai et al., 2025).

Theoretically, the Toxic Triangle framework says that toxic leadership behavior comes about and grows through the interaction of three main factors: leaders with harmful traits (like narcissism, authoritarianism, or manipulation), subordinates who are vulnerable (like those who are stressed out, have low self-esteem, or depend on the organization), and an environment that is supportive (like a permissive organizational culture, external pressure, or weak oversight systems). All three of these things happen at the same time, making it easy for a harmful cycle to start in the organization. In higher education, this theory helps explain why toxic conduct can continue and affect the mental health of faculty members, especially those in Generation Y, who are more sensitive to harmful work conditions and may want to leave their jobs or get burned out (Hassanein et al., 2025).

**H1:** Toxic leadership has a significant effect on turnover intention.

## 2.3. Digital burnout

Digital burnout is when you feel tired, mentally, and emotionally from using too much technology at

work. When the responsibilities of a job are too much for a person to handle, they can get burned out (Kaltenegger et al., 2023). Using technology like email, Learning Management System (LMS) platforms, and video conferencing might make this problem worse by keeping people busy all the time. There are three primary parts to digital burnout: emotional weariness, depersonalization, and feeling like you're not doing enough.

Digital burnout is a form of work fatigue that is increasingly common with the rapid adoption of digital devices and flexible work systems, which demand unlimited connectivity. This phenomenon is also known as technostress, which is triggered by the demands of always being connected and responding quickly, multitasking across various digital tasks, and the blurring of boundaries between work and personal time (Cao et al., 2023).

The effects of digital burnout are not only felt mentally and emotionally, such as fatigue, stress, and loss of motivation, but also affect performance, creativity, and engagement in work (Dang et al., 2024). Lecturers who experience digital burnout often experience decreased productivity, difficulty focusing, and difficulty meeting work expectations (Li and Yu, 2022). This is further exacerbated by the intensity of digital technology use in the learning process, which requires faculty members to master various digital tools, such as LMS and video conferencing applications (Lei et al., 2025). Digital burnout also has negative effects on faculty members' mental well-being, including stress, boredom, and emotional exhaustion, which can reduce teaching effectiveness and increase the risk of turnover intention. Although Generation Y is more familiar with digital technology, faculty members are more vulnerable to digital burnout due to high social and professional expectations to always be connected and adapt quickly to technology-based work demands.

**H2:** Digital burnout has a significant effect on toxic leadership.

**H3:** Digital burnout has a significant effect on turnover intention.

**H4:** Digital burnout has a significant effect on turnover intention through toxic leadership.

## 2.4. Work alienation

Work alienation is a condition in which individuals feel psychologically and socially detached from their work. In academia, lecturers who experience alienation lose their sense of meaning in their work, control over institutional decisions, and social connections, which leads to a decline in motivation and commitment to work (Wang, 2025). According to Wang (2025), a study in China identified work alienation as a significant predictor of burnout and turnover intention through psychological stress and emotional exhaustion. Faculty members experiencing alienation exhibit higher levels of burnout and a strong tendency to

leave the institution. Recent research in Indonesia backs up what other researchers have found on work alienation around the world. It is demonstrated that academic alienation makes teachers less motivated and satisfied with their jobs, especially among younger people, and makes them more likely to quit. When lecturers feel disconnected from the institution, aren't involved in decision-making, and don't perceive the value in their job, they are more likely to lose interest in their profession. It is indicated that colleges should come up with institutional plans that encourage academics to get involved, provide them with more academic freedom, and make it possible for everyone to have a say in decisions. This is very important to lower the risk of turnover and make sure that academic achievement stays high.

Theoretically, work alienation is consistent with the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model (Bakker et al., 2014), which states that high job demands without adequate resource support can lead to burnout and turnover intention. According to Zhang et al. (2023), role ambiguity and weak job control trigger emotional exhaustion, which in turn drives work alienation. The study indicates that role clarification and autonomy are crucial in preventing psychological alienation in the workplace. These findings emphasize that organizations, including higher education institutions, must establish systems that provide both structural and emotional support to help faculty maintain their motivation, engagement, and well-being at work.

**H5:** Work alienation has a significant effect on toxic leadership.

**H6:** Work alienation has a significant effect on turnover intention.

**H7:** Work alienation has a significant effect on turnover intention through toxic leadership.

### 3. Methods

This research uses a quantitative approach and a structured survey method as its major way of collecting data. The study took place in the city of Medan and focused on five of the best private universities: the University of Muhammadiyah North Sumatra, Prima Indonesia University, Panca Budi Development University, Islamic University of North Sumatra, and Potensi Utama University. Generation Y professors (those born between 1981 and 1996) from the five universities took part in this survey. To be eligible, they had to be permanent professors, have at least two years of teaching experience, and be involved in academic activities that use technology. 293 people answered the survey because of the purposive sampling method utilized. But this study had a few problems. First, purposive sampling can lead to sampling bias because not everyone in the population has the same chance of being chosen. This means that the sample may not be a good representation of all faculty members. Second, this study uses self-reported data, which could be biased if people offer answers that are influenced by the desire to give answers that are socially acceptable or because they don't know enough about some of the things that are being asked.

We got primary data by giving people a closed-ended questionnaire based on ideas from other studies. We used a five-point Likert scale to rate all the items, from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). The study looked at the following variables (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Variable measurement scale

Variables	Code	Example statement
Digital burnout (X1)	DB1	I feel exhausted from constantly using digital technology for work.
	DB2	I feel stressed about having to be responsive to digital messages outside of work hours.
	DB3	I have a hard time separating work time and personal time because of digital connectedness.
	DB4	I feel overwhelmed by the number of apps and digital platforms I have to manage.
	DB5	I feel demotivated due to fatigue from excessive use of technology.
	DB6	I feel my mental health is being affected by the stress of using digital technology.
Work alienation (X2)	WA1	I feel like I have no control over my day-to-day work.
	WA2	I consider the tasks I undertake to be meaningless.
	WA3	I feel emotionally disconnected from my work.
	WA4	My job doesn't feel like it reflects my personal values.
	WA5	I felt my job was too administrative and not creative.
	WA6	I lost interest in my work activities.
Toxic leadership (M)	TL1	My boss is often authoritarian and not open to criticism.
	TL2	I feel emotionally pressured by my boss's leadership style.
	TL3	My boss often uses intimidation in leading.
	TL4	I feel unappreciated for the contributions I make.
	TL5	My boss doesn't care about the emotional well-being of his subordinates.
	TL6	My boss's leadership style hinders collaboration and innovation.
Turnover intention (Y)	T11	I often think about resigning from this institution.
	T12	I feel interested in looking for a job at another institution.
	T13	I don't see my long-term future in this institution.
	T14	I feel unmotivated to continue working at my current job.
	T15	I have a strong desire to leave my current job.
	T16	I have seriously considered leaving this institution.

Referring to Table 1, the data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling with the Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) approach. This analytical technique was deemed appropriate due to its

capacity to assess complex interrelationships among latent constructs and its robustness in handling data that deviates from normal distribution. SEM-PLS was employed to investigate the direct effects of digital

burnout and work alienation on turnover intention, as well as to assess the mediating influence of toxic leadership within this structural relationship.

**4. Research results**

**4.1. Respondent description**

Referring to Table 2, the study involved 293 participants, all of whom were Generation Y lecturers employed at five leading private universities in Medan: Muhammadiyah University of North Sumatra, Prima Indonesia University, Panca Budi Development University, North Sumatra Islamic University, and Potensi Utama University. Respondents were selected through purposive sampling, with the inclusion criteria requiring that they belong to Generation Y (born between 1981 and 1996), possess at least two years of teaching experience, and be actively engaged in digital academic activities such as utilizing learning management systems (LMS), conducting video conferences, and using other online platforms.

The gender distribution was relatively balanced, with a slight predominance of female academics (52.2%) compared to male lecturers (47.8%), indicating that both genders are equally engaged in technology-based academic tasks. Most respondents were within the productive mid-career age range, with the largest proportion aged 31–35 years (37.5%), followed by those aged 36–40 years (27.3%), 26–30 years (26.6%), and 20–25 years (8.5%). This demographic profile underscores the relevance of digital adaptation and associated psychological challenges among mid-career academics.

In terms of educational attainment, the majority held at least a bachelor’s degree, with 70.9% possessing an S1 qualification, 23.9% holding an S2, and 3.4% holding an S3. Only a small fraction reported holding a diploma, and none had only completed high school. These findings suggest that respondents possess sufficient academic background to critically engage with complex issues such as digital burnout, work alienation, and leadership dynamics in higher education.

**4.2. Measurement model analysis (outer model)**

The analysis of the measurement model (outer model) was carried out through two main tests, namely: (1) reliability and construct validity test, and (2) discriminant validity test. The following presents the results of the two tests as the basis for the feasibility of the research instrument.

Table 3 shows the results of the analysis of the measurement model (outer model). It shows the loading factor values for each indicator that measures the latent variables: Digital Burnout (X1), Work Alienation (X2), Toxic Leadership (M), and Turnover Intention (Y). The loading factor values are mostly over the suggested cutoff of 0.70, which

means that each indicator accurately represents the measured construct. For the Digital Burnout (X1) construct, six indicators (DB1–DB6) have loading values that range from 0.914 to 0.986. Indicator DB2 has the highest value of 0.986, which means that it is a very good indicator of the digital burnout construct. There are six further indicators (WA1–WA6) for the Work Alienation (X2) construct, and their loading values range from 0.902 to 0.987. The work alienation construct gets the most help from indicator WA6 (0.987). All the indicators show that they are quite good at convergent validity. At the same time, Toxic Leadership (M), the mediating variable, is quantified by six indicators (TL1–TL6), with loading values ranging from 0.788 to 0.925. TL1 has the greatest value (0.925), and TL3 has the lowest value (0.788), but both values are still within a statistically acceptable range. All the indicators for the Turnover Intention (Y) construct (TI1–TI6) have high loading values, from 0.913 to 0.955. TI3 is the strongest indicator at 0.955. Based on these results, we can say that all the measuring tools used in this study meet the requirements for convergent validity. This means that they can be used for more analysis in the structural model (inner model).

**Table 2: Respondent demographics**

Variables	Scale	N	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	140	47.8
	Female	153	52.2
Age	20–25 years	25	8.5
	26–30 years	78	26.6
	31–35 years	110	37.5
	36–40 years	80	27.3
	High school/equivalent	0	0
Education	Diploma (D3)	5	1.7
	Bachelor’s degree (S1)	208	71
	Master’s degree (S2)	70	23.9
	Doctoral degree (S3)	10	3.4
Total respondents		293	100

Table 4 shows the findings of testing the reliability and validity of each research variable. The Cronbach’s Alpha and Composite Reliability values for the four constructs, Digital Burnout (X1), Work Alienation (X2), Toxic Leadership (M), and Turnover Intention (Y), are all higher than the minimum level of 0.70. This means that the measurement tools used in this study are very reliable. Also, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all variables are higher than the minimum criterion of 0.50. This means that each concept passes the requirements for convergent validity. Digital Burnout has an AVE score of 0.893, and Turnover Intention has an AVE value of 0.732. This means that these constructions can explain more than 50% of the variance in the indicators. So, all the constructions in this study have been shown to be statistically reliable and valid. This means that they may be tested further using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to look at the inner model.

The external load analysis (load factors) for 1 for each indication connected to the latent variable constructs: Digital Burnout (X1), Work Alienation

(X2), Toxic Leadership (M), and Turnover Intention (Y)—as shown in Table 5.

Most of the load values are higher than the suggested threshold of 0.70. This means that these indicators are good at measuring their respective components. Some indicators from the Digital Burnout variable, including DB3 (0.980) and DB4 (0.985), have very high load values, which means that these indicators are very good at showing what the digital burnout variable is. Also, indicators from the Job Switching Intention variable, like TI2 (0.986),

demonstrate that they are also a big part of the job switching intention construct.

Some indicators, like DB2 or WA1, have load values that are a little lower than others, but they are still in an acceptable range and can be used for further study. So, we can say that the measurement model (external model) in this study fits the requirements for convergent validity and may move on to the next step, which is structural model analysis (internal model) using the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) method.

**Table 3: Outer model results**

Indicator	Digital burnout (X1)	Work alienation (X2)	Toxic leadership (M)	Turnover intention (Y)
DB1	0.934			
DB2	0.986			
DB3	0.966			
DB4	0.954			
DB5	0.914			
DB6	0.914			
WA1		0.905		
WA2		0.978		
WA3		0.954		
WA4		0.964		
WA5		0.902		
WA6		0.987		
TL1			0.925	
TL2			0.795	
TL3			0.788	
TL4			0.789	
TL5			0.814	
TL6			0.86	
TI1				0.939
TI2				0.926
TI3				0.955
TI4				0.913
TI5				0.926
TI6				0.933

**Table 4: Composite reliability**

Variable	Cronbach's alpha	rho_A	Composite reliability	AVE
Digital burnout (X1)	0.969	0.971	0.974	0.893
Work alienation (X2)	0.958	0.962	0.966	0.841
Toxic leadership (M)	0.945	0.949	0.954	0.818
Turnover intention (Y)	0.938	0.942	0.947	0.732

**Table 5: Discriminant validity results**

Indicator	Digital burnout (X1)	Work alienation (X2)	Toxic leadership (M)	Turnover intention (Y)
DB1	0.752	0.615	0.722	0.814
DB2	0.606	0.835	0.95	0.986
DB3	0.981	0.877	0.812	0.676
DB4	0.985	0.871	0.715	0.739
DB5	0.742	0.649	0.654	0.714
DB6	0.972	0.736	0.882	0.868
WA1	0.947	0.866	0.763	0.963
WA2	0.664	0.633	0.905	0.663
WA3	0.753	0.848	0.744	0.881
WA4	0.956	0.698	0.689	0.947
WA5	0.741	0.964	0.896	0.653
WA6	0.832	0.911	0.856	0.946
TL1	0.743	0.801	0.985	0.912
TL2	0.627	0.629	0.895	0.946
TL3	0.744	0.858	0.919	0.669
TL4	0.869	0.701	0.899	0.837
TL5	0.858	0.91	0.988	0.816
TL6	0.770	0.650	0.956	0.854
TI1	0.775	0.759	0.935	0.679
TI2	0.708	0.873	0.614	0.725
TI3	0.798	0.811	0.911	0.895
TI4	0.801	0.921	0.943	0.903
TI5	0.642	0.956	0.685	0.882
TI6	0.848	0.866	0.912	0.619

**4.3. Structural model analysis (inner model)**

Table 6 reveals that the toxic leadership concept has an R-squared value of 0.482. This means that

digital exhaustion and work alienation can explain 48.2% of the differences in how Generation Y professors see toxic leadership. Personality traits or the culture of the organization are two examples of

things that affect the other 51.8% that are not included in this model. The R-squared value of 0.914 for the turnover intention construct shows that digital weariness, work alienation, and toxic leadership can account for 91.4% of the differences in turnover intention. This suggests that the algorithm can correctly guess how many millennial teachers will leave their jobs. The adjusted R-squared value (0.912), which is about the same as the R-squared value, shows that the model is stable and not too affected by the number of indicators. This suggests that the model can be used for more research. Based on the results presented in Table 7 of the *t*-statistics, the hypothesis testing indicates that all proposed relationships (H1–H7) are statistically significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level. Digital burnout (X1) has a significant positive effect on toxic leadership (M) ( $t = 4.853$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ), and work alienation (X2) also has a significant positive effect on toxic leadership (M) ( $t = 5.530$ ;  $p = 0.003$ ). Furthermore, digital burnout ( $t = 3.971$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ) and work alienation ( $t = 3.832$ ;  $p = 0.002$ ) directly increase turnover intention (Y). Toxic leadership is a strong predictor of turnover intention ( $t = 7.862$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ) and serves as a significant mediator between digital burnout and turnover intention ( $t = 3.504$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ) as well as between work alienation and turnover intention ( $t = 3.949$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ). These findings suggest that toxic leadership not only has a

direct impact but also amplifies the negative effects of burnout and alienation on turnover intention among Generation Y lecturers.

**Table 6:** Determination coefficient (R-squared)

Endogenous variables	R-squared	R-squared adjusted
Toxic leadership (M)	0.482	0.471
Turnover intention (Y)	0.914	0.912

Based on the results presented in Table 7 of the *t*-statistics, the hypothesis testing indicates that all proposed relationships (H1–H7) are statistically significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level. Digital burnout (X1) has a significant positive effect on toxic leadership (M) ( $t = 4.853$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ), and work alienation (X2) also has a significant positive effect on toxic leadership (M) ( $t = 5.530$ ;  $p = 0.003$ ). Furthermore, digital burnout ( $t = 3.971$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ) and work alienation ( $t = 3.832$ ;  $p = 0.002$ ) directly increase turnover intention (Y). Toxic leadership is a strong predictor of turnover intention ( $t = 7.862$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ) and serves as a significant mediator between digital burnout and turnover intention ( $t = 3.504$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ) as well as between work alienation and turnover intention ( $t = 3.949$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ). These findings suggest that toxic leadership not only has a direct impact but also amplifies the negative effects of burnout and alienation on turnover intention among Generation Y lecturers.

**Table 7:** Hypothesis testing

Interrelationship among the variables	T-statistics	P-values	Decision
Digital burnout (X1) → toxic leadership (M)	4.853	0.000	H1 accepted
Work alienation (X2) → toxic leadership (M)	5.53	0.003	H2 accepted
Digital burnout (X1) → turnover intention (Y)	3.971	0.000	H3 accepted
Work alienation (X2) → turnover intention (Y)	3.832	0.002	H4 accepted
Toxic leadership (M) → turnover intention (Y)	7.862	0.000	H5 accepted
Digital burnout (X1) → toxic leadership (M) → turnover intention (Y)	3.504	0.001	H6 accepted
Work alienation (X2) → toxic leadership (M) → turnover intention (Y)	3.949	0.001	H7 accepted

#### 4.4. The influence of digital burnout on toxic leadership

This study indicated that digital burnout has a big effect on how Generation Y teachers at five well-known colleges in Medan think about toxic leadership styles. In other words, when teachers are stressed out because they must deal with too much technology, including having to answer digital messages all the time, working on various online platforms, and not having clear work-time boundaries, they tend to have an unfavorable impression of their bosses' leadership. People who are dictatorial, unsupportive, or apathetic when they are mentally tired or stressed are seen as poisonous.

Digital burnout happens when the demands of a tech-based job are too high for the resources available, which causes emotional stress and mental exhaustion (JD-R Model). Overuse of digital communication makes vertical disputes worse in the workplace and strengthens negative views of toxic leadership styles, which lowers faculty satisfaction and performance. Schools and colleges need to make rules that focus on mental health, like setting up appropriate work hours, teaching students how to

utilize technology, and educating leaders to be kind and helpful. These tactics are necessary for making an academic work atmosphere that is balanced, helpful, and productive in the long term.

Several earlier studies have shown that burnout can make people feel like they are in an uncomfortable work environment, which supports this finding. Digitalization of work can make people tired, which can affect their emotional stability and lead to more conflict in work interactions. Digital weariness makes it harder for workers to get along with their bosses, especially in companies that rely significantly on digital communication. When there isn't enough organizational support for the demands of work, it can make people think less of their leaders. When people are stressed out at work, it can lead to verbal confrontations. High expectations for infinite digital work without clear deadlines put more stress on relationships between faculty members and supervisors (Wang et al., 2023).

The results of this study show how important it is for institutions to have procedures in place to deal with the effects of digital burnout. Colleges and universities need to make standards about how to use technology in a healthy way, such as work



schedules that don't put too much strain on students' digital lives. Also, it is important to train leaders in leadership styles that are caring and helpful. It's also necessary to try to find and stop burnout, for example, by having frequent psychiatric tests and open conversations with academic personnel. To make a work environment that lasts and doesn't have bad leadership dynamics, it will be important to create a culture at work that combines academic expectations with mental health.

#### **4.5. The influence of work alienation on toxic leadership**

The results of this study indicate that work alienation significantly influences perceptions of toxic leadership among Generation Y lecturers at five renowned universities in Medan. When faculty members feel a loss of meaning in their work, lack control over their tasks, or feel emotionally disconnected from their work environment, they are more likely to perceive their superiors as authoritarian, unempathetic leaders who tend to damage workplace relationships.

This study backs up the idea of work alienation, which says that feeling alienated at work might make people less attached to the company and more likely to see leaders as a source of stress. When teachers think their jobs have lost purpose, they don't have control over their work, or they're emotionally disengaged, they are more likely to see leaders as strict and less caring. People who feel like they don't belong to the organization will be unhappy and think badly of leaders who don't help them. In higher education, faculty members need room to learn and grow and make a difference. Also, these results are in line with transactional and transformational leadership theories, which say that more humanistic and transformative leadership styles can make people feel less alienated at work, get faculty more involved, improve healthy vertical relationships, and make people feel less like they are being led by toxic leaders.

This conclusion is in line with what other research has found: that feeling alienated at work has a big effect on how people see vertical relationships in companies. People who don't feel linked to the organization often see their leaders as sources of stress instead of as helpers or professional mentors. This is especially important for colleges and universities because their faculty members not only have formal tasks but also need mental freedom to grow and contribute intellectually. When faculty members think that their work doesn't match their own values or is too administrative, their connection with leaders tends to go worse (Ye and Chen, 2024). This feeling of being cut off from others leads to suspicion and cynicism toward leaders, especially when they don't show emotional concern or include faculty members in decision-making.

These results have substantial implications for university management, especially when it comes to

managing Generation Y instructors. To cut down on feelings of alienation at work and perceptions of toxic leadership, schools need to make their workplaces more open and involve teachers in decision-making. They also need to give teachers meaningful and flexible workspaces. To better meet the emotional needs of faculty members, a more humanistic and transformative style of leadership also needs to be established. Also, campuses should have ways for students to give comments and get psychological help that helps them connect with other people. By following these methods, schools can get faculty more involved, help them build good working relationships, and keep good young faculty members who are dedicated to their work for a long time.

#### **4.6. The influence of digital burnout on turnover intention**

The hypothesis testing shows that Digital Burnout has a big effect on Turnover Intention among Generation Y instructors at five top colleges in Medan City. This indicates that the more digital weariness lecturers feel because of the high expectations of technology, the more likely they are to quit their jobs. This shows that using technology without enough support from the company can make people want to leave, especially people who are very dependent on digital gadgets but who value work-life balance.

Burnout happens when there is an imbalance between the demands of a profession and the resources that are available. Using technology without enough assistance in a digital setting can make people more stressed and tired, which is bad for their mental health and makes them want to leave. Recent studies show that digital tiredness is directly linked to lower commitment to the organization and higher levels of disengagement and the intention to leave (Chen et al., 2024). When people have a lot of work to do and don't get help, they lose control, which makes them less likely to stay, especially for Generation Y faculty members who rely heavily on technology and want to balance work and life. Using technology without limits makes mental health poorer and makes people less committed to the institution faster.

This finding is supported by several previous studies stating that digital fatigue directly contributes to the desire to leave a job, especially when there are no boundaries between work and personal time (Kaltenegger et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2025). The use of technology after working hours can increase stress and lead to disengagement (Li et al., 2025). Digital fatigue indirectly increases turnover through reduced psychological well-being. Digital burnout accelerates the decline in organizational commitment, particularly in the education sector. Burnout caused by high job demands not supported by adequate resources triggers the intention to leave. Faculty members constantly exposed to digital tasks without breaks

feel a loss of control over their work and express a desire to move to another institution. Uncontrolled technological burdens can accelerate the intention to leave, even among young professionals.

It's evident what these results mean for managers. Universities need to set reasonable expectations for digital work, make rules for online work that are fair, and give teachers emotional and technical support. Institutions can also offer digital detoxes, training on how to manage time with technology, and make sure that using technology helps people get things done instead of stressing them out. Adaptive leadership that thinks about digital balance can help keep teachers in the field for a long time. By following these guidelines, schools will not only keep good teachers, but they will also create a healthy and long-lasting work environment.

#### **4.7. The influence of work alienation on turnover intention**

The results of the hypothesis testing in this study indicate that work alienation significantly influences turnover intention among Generation Y lecturers at five leading universities in Medan. This means that when lecturers feel they have no control over their work, feel emotionally disconnected from their academic duties, or lose meaning in their profession, they tend to have a higher desire to leave the institution where they work. This alienation makes lecturers feel psychologically and socially disconnected from the work environment.

These results support the idea of work alienation, which says that people become alienated from their work when they feel disconnected from it, lose control, and don't see the point in what they're doing. Lecturers who feel alienated at work are more likely to be unhappy and want to leave school. This separation makes lecturers less emotionally and mentally involved in their work, which changes how they see the organization. These results also come back with [Allen and Meyer's \(1990\)](#) theory of organizational attachment, which says that emotional involvement and a sense of belonging can affect how loyal people are to an organization. Lecturers who feel alone are less likely to stay at the school, which makes them more likely to leave.

These findings align with previous studies indicating that work alienation weakens the emotional connection to the organization, thereby increasing the intention to leave. Individuals who feel their work is not meaningful will more quickly experience emotional exhaustion and consider resigning ([Ye and Chen, 2024](#)). Work alienation is positively correlated with turnover intention, especially in jobs with low autonomy. Alienation in academic work can undermine loyalty to the institution ([Wang, 2025](#)). Lecturers who are not involved in campus policies tend to feel unappreciated, which encourages turnover intention. Continued alienation decreases engagement and increases the desire to seek a more supportive work environment. Lecturers with high

levels of alienation show an interest in moving to institutions that provide more autonomy and recognition.

From a management point of view, these results show how important it is to create a work atmosphere that is welcoming and purposeful. Leaders in higher education need to set up work processes that make it easier for teachers to get involved, give them time to think about what their job means, and make the academic environment more social. Lecturer development programs should not only focus on making people more skilled, but also on helping them feel like they are part of the institution. When professors feel appreciated, listened to, and involved in the academic process, they are less likely to want to leave the school, and they will be more loyal in the long run.

#### **4.8. The influence of toxic leadership on turnover intention**

A full analysis of the study's results demonstrates that toxic leadership has a statistically significant effect on Generation Y teachers' intention to leave their jobs at the five top colleges in Medan City. This directly confirms the proposed hypothesis, which says that a bad leadership style makes people more likely to want to leave an academic institution. Also, Transformational and Transactional Leadership Theory says that transformational leaders can inspire and encourage their followers by giving them support, a clear goal, and paying attention to each person's growth ([Chi et al., 2023](#)). Transactional leadership, on the other hand, focuses on the exchange of duties and rewards between leaders and followers. Authoritarianism and manipulation are examples of toxic leadership styles that go against the values taught in transformational leadership. Psychological Contract Theory says that if lecturers, like Gen Y lecturers, don't get what they want from a leader, such as fairness and support, they would feel disappointed and may want to leave the organization. So, a bad way of leading can make teachers want to leave their jobs more.

The results of this study are in line with previous research, which stated that toxic leadership, which often involves negative and destructive behavior from a leader, can contribute to increased burnout among lecturers and decreased levels of lecturer engagement in work ([Hassanein et al., 2025](#)). Lecturers under toxic leadership tend to feel depressed and unmotivated, and lose the spirit to perform well. Furthermore, abusive supervision, such as intimidation or unfair decision-making, can increase lecturers' intention to resign, because lecturers feel unappreciated and marginalized in the organization ([Huang et al., 2023](#)). Leaders with a dominant style and a lack of emotional support and attention to their subordinates worsen the situation and accelerate turnover. This is because lecturers feel unappreciated and lack an emotional connection with the leader. Lecturers led by authoritarian figures, who provide less space for individual

autonomy and contribution, have a higher tendency to show turnover intention. This study highlights that supportive and empathetic leadership is important in reducing dissatisfaction and intention to leave the organization, especially in the educational context.

This research shows that schools and colleges need to do leadership style audits at the department or faculty level to see how different styles of leadership affect the well-being of teachers. One key thing to do is to give leaders training in empathy that focuses on being conscious of their own feelings, fairness in the workplace, and open communication. This training helps leaders better meet the needs of teachers and makes the workplace more welcoming to everyone. Also, schools should give teachers feedback without being afraid of getting in trouble. This system makes open vertical communication even stronger. Psychological support for teachers who need it is very important to help them deal with the stress that comes from bad leadership. Finally, methods for keeping lecturers based on well-being and inclusion should be put into place. Lecturers feel valued and are more likely to stay at the school if the workplace encourages work-life balance and values diversity. This lowers turnover rates.

#### **4.9. The influence of digital burnout on turnover intention through toxic leadership**

The study's findings show that toxic leadership is a big factor in the link between digital burnout and turnover intention among Generation Y instructors at five top colleges in Medan City. This study reveals that digital burnout, or the loss of digital well-being, does not directly lead to the desire to leave the institution, but it is made worse by toxic leadership styles. According to the stress and burnout idea, burnout happens when someone must work too hard for too long, which makes them feel emotionally drained, depersonalized, and less accomplished (Moore et al., 2024). Digital burnout among teachers, which is made worse by bad leadership, makes these effects even worse. Stress from leaders who don't support you or who are harmful can make you more mentally and emotionally tired, which will make you want to leave the institution. Bass's philosophy of leadership also makes a difference between transformational and transactional leadership. Transformational leadership focuses on caring for the well-being of subordinates, while toxic leadership, which includes authoritarian and manipulative approaches, is obviously against leadership styles that promote individual growth and mental health (Cai et al., 2025).

This study's conclusions are in accordance with other studies that found that toxic leadership directly leads to higher levels of burnout and disengagement, which in turn hurts people's performance and well-being (Fang et al., 2024). This bad way of leading people makes people burn out faster by making the workplace difficult and

uncomfortable. This lowers the morale and involvement of the lecturers. Also, strict and authoritarian management makes burnout worse and makes people want to quit their jobs faster. Lecturers learned that abusive supervision might make them more stressed and tired, which makes them want to leave their employment faster. Finally, leaders who are controlling and don't help can make burnout worse. Leaders who don't give emotional support or don't pay attention to the lecturer's requirements for growth can make them more tired, both physically and mentally.

Managerial implications show that academic leaders in higher education need to be understanding and focus on emotional well-being and work-life balance. This will help them keep lecturers from wanting to quit school. To help with this, we need to create leadership training programs that focus on emotional awareness and two-way communication. These kinds of initiatives can help teachers deal with stress and burnout better and get more support from their superiors. In addition, it is also important to make the workplace welcoming and supportive of lecturers' mental health. Creating a safe space for teachers to talk about the stress they are under, whether it's from too much work or a bossy style of leadership, can lower the risk of burnout and the desire to leave. Universities can also teach their professors about digital health to help them deal with the negative effects of digital burnout and improve their ability to handle the demands of technology-based jobs. These procedures are very important for making the workplace healthy and helping teachers do well in the long term.

#### **4.10. The influence of work alienation on turnover intention through toxic leadership**

The results of this study indicate that toxic leadership plays a significant role as a mediator in the relationship between work alienation and turnover intention among Generation Y lecturers at five leading universities in Medan. The findings reveal that lecturers who feel alienated from their work and feel a lack of meaning, autonomy, or emotional connection to their academic tasks are more likely to resign if they also work under a toxic leader (authoritarian, intimidating, or unsupportive). The main interpretation of these findings is that work alienation is not the sole factor driving turnover intention. Instead, toxic leadership exacerbates existing work alienation and accelerates the process of disengagement or intention to resign.

Job alienation theory says that teachers who feel disconnected from their profession are more likely to be unhappy and not engaged (Liu et al., 2025). People feel alienated when they think their work doesn't mean anything, they don't have any influence over it, and they don't feel emotionally attached to it (Wang, 2025). So, job alienation makes people want to leave their jobs more, especially in hazardous places. Also, authoritarian leadership theory shows how bad it is for subordinates to have leaders who

are strong and authoritarian, because they take away their freedom and power. An authoritarian style of leadership makes professors feel more disconnected from their jobs and more likely to resign. On the other hand, transformational leadership theory stresses how important it is for leaders to be able to motivate people, help them grow, and make the workplace a good place to be (Eaton et al., 2024). Leadership that is not helpful or perhaps harmful makes people feel more alone and disconnected (Wang and Shao, 2024). These results go against the ideas behind transformational leadership, which says that leaders should help people feel more connected to their work (Aslam et al., 2025).

These results are in line with several earlier studies that show toxic leadership can make people feel more alienated at work, which makes them want to leave their jobs faster (Ju and Hyun, 2025; Mohamed et al., 2025). These results are in line with other research that shows a strong link between toxic leadership styles and academics feeling more alienated from their jobs. Job alienation happens when teachers feel emotionally and mentally separated from their work. This leads to unhappiness and disengagement. Job alienation is a clear sign that someone wants to leave their job, especially if they don't get enough support from their boss. Lecturers who feel alienated are more likely to abandon their jobs if they don't have support from their supervisors or the organization (Huang and Bartels, 2025). These two findings show how important it is for leaders to create a healthy and supportive work environment to lower feelings of alienation and the desire to leave.

From a management point of view, these results show that colleges and universities need to create leadership systems that are open and encourage participation to lower feelings of alienation and the desire to leave. Leadership that encourages independence, encourages open communication, and cares about the emotional health of teachers can help people feel less alone. Academic leaders should also get training in transformative and compassionate leadership so that they can help lecturers understand the signs of work alienation and deal with them in a positive way. Also, it is very important for lecturers to be able to communicate their concerns about feeling alone and toxic leadership in higher education institutions via improving communication inside those organizations. Lastly, schools need to create an organizational culture that is welcoming and purposeful, where teachers feel important and have a big part to play. This will make work less alienating, make teachers more involved, and in the end, make them less likely to want to leave.

## 5. Conclusion

To keep good teachers and improve the performance of colleges and universities, it is important to understand the psychological problems they encounter. This study provides empirical

evidence that digital burnout and work alienation significantly influence turnover intention, with toxic leadership as an important mediating variable for Generation Y lecturers at five leading universities in Medan. These results add to the discussion about how organizations work by showing how toxic leadership might make academic contexts more stressful. This study also adds to the body of knowledge in organizational psychology by showing how important good leadership is for keeping lecturers happy and keeping them on staff.

From a management point of view, university leaders and politicians should focus on making the workplace helpful and encouraging, with the mental health of teachers as a top priority. To keep an organization stable, it is important to take steps to prevent digital burnout and work alienation. So, academic human resource development plans need to include training that focuses on emotional intelligence, empathetic communication, and ethical leadership. This will not only make leaders better, but it will also help keep newer generations of teachers and make them more loyal as the problems in higher education become more complex.

It is suggested that future studies use this model in other professional fields and cultural settings to see if the results are consistent across a wider range of situations. Furthermore, a qualitative or mixed methods approach is recommended to delve deeper into individuals' subjective experiences, particularly in understanding the complex psychological dynamics of the workplace. This method is meant to close the gap between theory and practice and provide us with more information about how to create better and more relevant organizational intervention techniques that meet the needs of the millennial workforce.

In conclusion, this study makes a significant contribution to human resource management in the higher education sector by uncovering the link between psychological stressors, toxic leadership, and turnover intentions among Generation Y lecturers. These findings highlight the need for policy interventions that are more sensitive to the psychological well-being of educators, particularly the younger generation, as well as the importance of improving leadership quality in academic environments. The results of this study can serve as a basis for designing more inclusive, adaptive, and sustainable HR management strategies to support lecturer retention and institutional development in the knowledge-based economy era.

## List of abbreviations

AI	Artificial intelligence
AVE	Average variance extracted
CWB / CWBs	Counterproductive work behavior(s)
DB	Digital burnout
DB1-DB6	Indicators measuring digital burnout construct
HR	Human resource
JD-R	Job demands-resources

LMS	Learning management system
M	Mediating variable (toxic leadership)
PLS	Partial least squares
S1	Bachelor's degree
S2	Master's degree
S3	Doctoral degree
SEM	Structural equation modeling
TI	Turnover intention
TI1–TI6	Indicators measuring turnover intention construct
TL	Toxic leadership
TL1–TL6	Indicators measuring toxic leadership construct
WA	Work alienation
WA1–WA6	Indicators measuring work alienation construct
X1	Independent variable (digital burnout)
X2	Independent variable (work alienation)
Y	Dependent variable (turnover intention)

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## Compliance with ethical standards

## Ethical considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of research involving human participants. Participation was voluntary, and respondents provided informed consent prior to completing the questionnaire. Confidentiality and anonymity of all participants were strictly maintained.

## Conflict of interest

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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