



THE INTERPLAY OF TOXIC WORK CULTURE, WORKLOAD, AND BURNOUT: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW ON STRESS MANAGEMENT AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

Toxic work culture, workload, and burnout are major challenges in human resource management that directly affect employee wellbeing and performance. However, the relationships among these variables and the role of stress management have not been comprehensively synthesized. This study reviews empirical evidence on the interplay between toxic work culture, workload, burnout, stress management, and employee performance using a systematic literature review approach. Sixty-one relevant studies published between 2006 and 2026 were synthesized following PRISMA guidelines. The findings consistently show that toxic work culture and excessive workload function as primary sources of job stress that elevate burnout risk, with burnout acting as a key mediating mechanism linking organizational stressors to declines in employee engagement, satisfaction, and performance. Conversely, stress management practices, organizational support, and individual psychological resources serve as protective factors that mitigate these negative effects. Grounded in the Job Demands–Resources and Conservation of Resources frameworks, this review highlights how balancing job demands and resources is critical for sustaining employee performance. Practically, the findings provide guidance for HR managers and organizations in designing stress management strategies and healthier work environments to support long-term employee wellbeing and performance.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of work-related stress has become a universal challenge in modern human resource management. A report by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) indicates that approximately 60% of the global workforce experiences psychological pressure due to excessive workload, role conflict, and economic uncertainty, leading to declines in productivity and overall wellbeing. This condition has been further exacerbated by drastic post-COVID-19 changes, including the widespread adoption of hybrid work arrangements, massive digitalization, and heightened performance expectations (Grawitch & Ballard, 2022; Sonnentag, 2023). Within this context, work stress is no longer viewed as an individual issue but rather as a structural organizational problem that critically determines performance sustainability and workplace culture. Organizations that fail to manage work-related stress face increased risks of high turnover, reduced employee engagement, and reputational crises (Cooper & Quick, 2022).

One of the primary antecedents of work stress is toxic work culture, defined as a work environment characterized by destructive communication, unethical behavior, unhealthy competition, and the absence of managerial support (Frost, 2019; Kusy & Holloway, 2019). Such environments generate psychological strain and emotional exhaustion that serve as precursors to burnout (Leiter & Maslach, 2021). In parallel, excessive workload that is disproportionate to employees' capacities accelerates physical and psychological deterioration (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015). When these two factors co-occur, individuals become trapped in a cycle of chronic stress that undermines intrinsic motivation and work effectiveness (Schaufeli, 2020). Recent studies indicate that burnout functions as a mediating variable linking organizational stressors to employee performance (Chowdhury et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2023). Consequently, examining the interrelationships among toxic work culture, workload, and burnout is essential for understanding the root causes of declining performance in contemporary organizations.

Despite the rapid growth of the work stress literature, several research gaps remain evident. First, most studies emphasize individual-level factors such as coping strategies, emotional regulation, and resilience, while cultural and structural organizational aspects are often overlooked (Leiter & Maslach, 2021; Bakker & Costa, 2014). Second, the simultaneous and integrative examination of toxic work culture, workload, and burnout remains limited, even though interactions among these variables can illuminate the complex mechanisms influencing employee performance (Schaufeli, 2020; Chowdhury et al., 2022). Third, research positioning work stress within digital or hybrid workplace contexts is still scarce, despite the emergence of new stressors such as technostress and blurred work-life boundaries (Tarafdar et al., 2019; Molino et al., 2020). The lack of integration across disciplines organizational psychology, organizational behavior, and human resource management has resulted in fragmented theoretical and methodological understanding. Yet, work stress is inherently multidimensional and requires an integrative approach to generate comprehensive solutions.

Addressing these gaps requires an integrative theoretical lens capable of linking organizational context, job demands, and employee psychological responses. A

multidisciplinary perspective is therefore crucial for explaining the complex relationships among toxic work culture, workload, burnout, and employee performance. From an organizational behavior perspective, toxic work culture is viewed as the outcome of interactions among value systems, leadership styles, and social norms within organizations (Ashkanasy et al., 2017). Meanwhile, the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) theory posits that stress emerges when job demands (e.g., workload) exceed available personal and organizational resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Complementing this view, Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) asserts that individuals experience stress when they lose valuable resources such as energy, social support, or recovery time. Integrating these three theoretical perspectives positions burnout not merely as a psychological phenomenon but as a systemic reflection of imbalances among job demands, organizational culture quality, and the effectiveness of stress management policies (Leiter, 2021). Accordingly, work stress can be understood as an ongoing process shaped by interactions between organizational contexts, employee experiences, and applied coping strategies.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study contributes by consolidating three core domains: toxic work culture, workload, and burnout within an organizational stress management framework. The novelty of this research lies in its conceptual integration of organizational stressors and psychological responses as determinants of employee performance, while also illuminating stress management dynamics in digital work environments. Methodologically, this study adopts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020). By analyzing international literature published between 2015 and 2025, this review identifies research trends, dominant theoretical approaches, and scientific gaps that may inform future empirical studies, particularly in the Indonesian context. Ultimately, the findings are expected to produce a conceptual model explaining the causal relationships among work stressors, burnout, and employee performance, while offering strategic recommendations for more sustainable human resource management practices oriented toward employee wellbeing.

Accordingly, this systematic literature review aims to synthesize empirical evidence on how toxic work culture and workload interact to generate burnout, and how stress management mechanisms influence employee performance outcomes. By integrating insights from organizational psychology and human resource management, this review seeks to clarify dominant patterns, theoretical linkages, and research gaps within the existing literature, thereby providing a coherent foundation for future research and organizational practice.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) guidelines. This approach was selected to ensure that the processes of article identification, selection, and synthesis were conducted in a systematic, standardized, and replicable

manner. The review focuses on literature examining the interrelationships among toxic work culture, workload, and burnout within the context of modern organizations. To achieve comprehensive literature coverage, searches were conducted across four major international databases Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar covering publications from 2015 to 2025 to ensure relevance to post-pandemic digital and hybrid workplace settings.

The literature search was conducted by constructing search strings using combinations of keywords such as “toxic work culture,” “toxic workplace,” “workload,” “job demands,” “stress management,” “employee performance,” and “burnout,” linked through Boolean operators. These keywords were designed to capture empirical, theoretical, and systematic review studies addressing organizational stressors and their effects on emotional exhaustion and employee psychological health. All initial search results were exported into reference management software to identify and remove duplicate records before proceeding to the preliminary screening stage.

The selection process followed a three-stage procedure consistent with the PRISMA framework. First, title and abstract screening was conducted to assess topical relevance to the study focus. Second, articles that passed the initial screening underwent full-text review to evaluate eligibility based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, including the presence of key variables, organizational research context, methodological rigor, and peer-reviewed publication status. Articles that were irrelevant, methodologically insufficient, or failed to examine relationships among the core variables were excluded. Third, studies meeting all criteria were included in the final synthesis stage. Throughout the process, PRISMA transparency principles were applied by documenting the number of articles included and excluded at each stage.

Studies that met the inclusion criteria were subsequently analyzed using thematic synthesis techniques to identify recurring patterns, relationships, and overarching themes within the literature, such as the role of toxic work culture as a social stressor, the impact of workload on emotional exhaustion, and the mediating function of burnout in influencing employee outcomes. In addition, descriptive bibliometric analysis was conducted to examine research trends, publication distribution over time, and dominant theoretical perspectives emerging over the past decade. Collectively, the PRISMA-based methodology ensures that the resulting literature review is comprehensive, credible, and methodologically robust in mapping the evolution of knowledge on work stress dynamics in modern organizational environments.

Table 1. Results of the Systematic Literature Review Selection Process

Stage	Number of Articles
Identified through database searches	1,240
Duplicates removed	320
Screened by title and abstract	920
Excluded due to irrelevance	710
Full-text articles assessed	210

Stage	Number of Articles
Excluded (inadequate methods / incomplete variables)	149
Final studies included in the SLR	61 articles

The literature selection process followed the PRISMA 2020 flow. The initial search across four major databases yielded 1,240 articles. After removing 320 duplicate records, 920 articles were screened based on titles and abstracts. At this stage, 710 articles were excluded for lacking relevance to the study focus on toxic work culture, burnout, workload, stress management, and employee performance. A total of 210 articles were subsequently evaluated through full-text assessment. Of these, 149 articles were excluded due to inadequate research methods, insufficient coverage of key variables, or failure to meet other inclusion criteria. Consequently, 61 articles met all eligibility requirements and were included in the final analysis of this systematic literature review

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section synthesizes findings from 61 studies included in the systematic literature review, focusing on the interrelationships among toxic work culture, workload, burnout, stress management, and employee performance across multiple sectors. The reviewed literature consistently identifies toxic work culture and excessive workload as the primary sources of work-related stress, with destructive leadership, unsupportive organizational climates, and disproportionate job demands triggering psychological strain. Burnout—particularly emotional exhaustion—emerges as a central mediating mechanism linking these stressors to adverse outcomes, including reduced job satisfaction, lower engagement, increased turnover intention, and diminished performance. Conversely, stress management practices and organizational support function as protective factors that mitigate burnout and sustain employee performance, highlighting the critical role of balanced job demands and organizational adaptive capacity in shaping employee wellbeing and performance outcomes.

Table 2. Thematic Synthesis of Core Variables and Representative Studies

Main Variable	Dominant Cross-Study Patterns	Implications for Employee Performance	Representative Sources*
Toxic Work Culture	Destructive leadership, organizational injustice, bullying, and lack of managerial support consistently elevate psychological strain and emotional exhaustion across sectors.	Lower job satisfaction and engagement; increased turnover intention; declining performance quality.	Alsadaan & Alqahtani (2024); Hossny et al. (2023); Labrague et al. (2020); Reyhanoglu & Akin (2021); Reslan et al. (2025)

Main Variable	Dominant Cross-Study Patterns	Implications for Employee Performance	Representative Sources*
Workload	Excessive quantitative and qualitative demands, time pressure, and role overload act as major structural stressors triggering job stress.	Reduced productivity, weakened motivation, and heightened burnout risk.	Dasgupta et al. (2013); Inegbedion et al. (2020); Schouten et al. (2025); Martins et al. (2025); Gan (2025)
Burnout	Emotional exhaustion emerges as the dominant burnout dimension, mediating the effects of job demands and toxic environments on employee outcomes.	Declines in engagement and task effectiveness; increased absenteeism and turnover intention.	Chowdhury et al. (2022); Liu et al. (2023); Shanafelt et al. (2025); Osterholm et al. (2025)
Stress Management	Individual (coping, mindfulness, resilience) and organizational (social support, leadership, workload redesign) interventions mitigate stress and burnout.	Improved psychological wellbeing, stabilized performance, and stronger organizational commitment.	Park et al. (2020); Bastien et al. (2025); Liu et al. (2025); Wang et al. (2023)
Employee Performance	Performance outcomes depend on the interaction between job demands, burnout, and available organizational resources.	Sustainable performance achieved under balanced demands and effective stress management.	Ajayi et al. (2025); Husainah (2023); Zhang et al. (2025)

A systematic review of 61 collected journal articles indicates that research on the dynamics of contemporary work environments increasingly focuses on how structural and psychological factors interact to shape employee behavior and performance. In general, these articles can be grouped into five main variables that form the foundation of this study, namely toxic work culture, workload, burnout, stress management, and employee performance. Each article provides a different perspective on how working conditions, job demands, psychological adaptive capacity, and organizational managerial practices contribute to employee wellbeing and productivity. Cross-national studies covering Asia, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and North America demonstrate that despite differences in cultural context and industry sectors, the patterns of relationships among these variables show strong consistency and global relevance.

Furthermore, the reviewed studies reveal a tendency in modern research to understand workplace phenomena through a multidimensional approach. Articles addressing toxic work culture emphasize the impact of destructive leadership, organizational injustice, and negative work climates on employees' psychological conditions. Meanwhile,

journals focusing on workload explore how excessive demands, time pressure, and task complexity can trigger emotional exhaustion and reduced motivation. Burnout emerges as the most prominent psychological outcome, linking job stress to consequences such as declining performance and increased turnover intention. At the same time, studies on stress management demonstrate that coping strategies, social support, and organizational interventions have protective capacities to mitigate these negative effects. Collectively, these findings provide a strong foundation for conducting a more in-depth thematic analysis that maps relational patterns and mechanisms among variables in a structured manner.

Toxic Work Culture and Workload as Primary Sources of Workplace Stress

Findings across the 61 articles indicate that toxic work culture and excessive workload are two primary sources of stress that consistently emerge across organizational contexts. Toxic work culture is frequently manifested in the form of destructive leadership (toxic leadership), unsupportive organizational climates, demeaning communication, bullying, and unfair managerial practices (Alsadaan & Alqahtani, 2024; Hossny et al., 2023; Labrague et al., 2020; Reyhanoglu & Akin, 2021; Reslan et al., 2025; Yavas, 2016). On the other hand, excessive workload is not only understood as the quantity of work but also encompasses task complexity, time pressure, role conflict, and administrative demands that are not balanced with available resources and support (Dasgupta et al., 2013; Budiman & Putranto, 2015; Akob, 2016; Inegbedion et al., 2020).

Studies in the healthcare sector, particularly among nurses and other healthcare professionals, show that toxic leadership and negative work climates are correlated with increased job stress, reduced job satisfaction, and lower intention to remain in the organization (Hossny et al., 2023; Labrague et al., 2020; Ofei & Paarima, 2022). In this context, toxic leadership is characterized by authoritarian behavior, self-promotion, abusive supervision, and unpredictability, which weaken psychological safety and foster perceptions of an unhealthy organizational climate. Similar findings emerge in the service and education sectors, where supervisors exhibiting manipulative, unethical, and unsupportive behaviors are associated with increased turnover intention and weakened organizational commitment (Reyhanoglu & Akin, 2021; Reslan et al., 2025; Orunbon et al., 2022).

Meanwhile, workload-related research confirms that excessive workload represents a significant structural stressor across various industries. In hospital environments, high workload manifests through imbalanced staff-to-patient ratios, long shifts, overtime, and multitasking demands related to service quality and the risk of missed care (Schouten et al., 2025; Lea et al., 2012; Herminingsih & Kurniasih, 2018). In education and higher education contexts, workload is expressed through a combination of teaching responsibilities, research obligations, community service, and administrative tasks that are often invisible and formally unrecognized, leading to perceptions of injustice and chronic exhaustion (Astuti & Navi, 2018; Budiman & Putranto, 2015; Martins et al., 2025). Similar patterns are also evident in the private sector, where performance targets, time pressure, and role conflict contribute to increased job stress and tension (Inegbedion et al., 2020; Nwinyokpugi, 2018).

Conceptually, these findings align with the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) framework, in which toxic work culture and workload function as job demands that deplete employees' psychological energy when not balanced by adequate resources. The configuration of a toxic work culture combined with excessive workload creates an internal organizational environment rich in stressors both social (interpersonal) and structural that cumulatively increase the risk of impaired psychological wellbeing. Thus, the first theme confirms that the combination of toxic work culture and workload constitutes the primary starting point of a causal chain that ultimately leads to burnout and declining employee performance (Labrague et al., 2020; Hosny et al., 2023; Dasgupta et al., 2013; Inegbedion et al., 2020).

Burnout as a Mediating Mechanism Between Organizational Stressors and Employee Performance

The second theme positions burnout as a central psychological mechanism mediating the relationship between toxic work culture, workload, and various employee outcomes. Most of the analyzed articles indicate that burnout particularly the emotional exhaustion dimension is an accumulative response to chronic stressors originating from unhealthy work climates and excessive job demands (He et al., 2025; Osterholm et al., 2025; Porreca & Simonelli, 2025; Angelini et al., 2026; Turan et al., 2025). Burnout is described not merely as an individual outcome but as an indicator of systemic damage reflecting organizational failure to manage work demands and provide adequate support to employees (Shanafelt et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2025).

Several studies explicitly test burnout as a mediating variable linking job demands (toxic culture, workload, job stressors) with negative outcomes such as turnover intention, reduced commitment, mental health disturbances, and counterproductive work behaviors (Ajayi et al., 2025; Nwinyokpugi, 2018; Herminingsih & Kurniasih, 2018; Cuyper & Witte, 2006; Zhang et al., 2025). For example, research in the healthcare sector shows that the combination of toxic leadership, poor organizational climate, and high workload increases nurses' burnout, which in turn correlates with higher absenteeism, declining service quality, and weakened intention to stay in the organization (Labrague et al., 2020; Hosny et al., 2023; Ozkan et al., 2022). In other contexts such as education, banking, and manufacturing, burnout is identified as the pathway through which prolonged work pressure results in decreased engagement, motivation, and productivity (Turan et al., 2025; Martins et al., 2025; Ajayi et al., 2025).

In addition to its mediating role, several studies highlight burnout as a variable interacting with psychological resources such as resilience, psychological capital, and organizational support. Studies across Asian countries show that burnout tends to be lower when employees possess high levels of psychological capital, strong social support, and perceptions of organizational justice, even when facing significant job demands (Jia et al., 2025; Yin et al., 2025; Brennan et al., 2025). Other research emphasizes that burnout mediates the effects of toxic leadership and job insecurity on mental health disturbances and turnover intention (Cuyper & Witte, 2006; Reslan et al., 2025; Reyhanoglu & Akin,

2021). These patterns reinforce the understanding of burnout as a critical nexus where multiple organizational pressures converge into tangible psychological consequences.

The implication of these findings is that efforts to improve performance and employee retention cannot focus solely on surface-level areas such as technical training or procedural improvements, but must address burnout as a key variable in organizational intervention design. By understanding burnout as a mediator, organizations can map how changes in work culture, workload policies, and leadership styles are connected to changes in employee wellbeing and performance. In other words, the second theme confirms that without systematic burnout management, performance improvement initiatives tend to be merely cosmetic and fail to address the root causes of organizational problems (He et al., 2025; Shanafelt et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2025; Ajayi et al., 2025).

The Role of Stress Management and Organizational Resources in Shaping Employee Performance

The third theme focuses on the role of stress management and various organizational resources as protective factors that determine whether work pressure leads to performance decline or, instead, performance sustainability. Several articles in this SLR show that stress management interventions at both individual and organizational levels play a crucial role in reducing the negative effects of toxic work culture and workload on burnout (Park et al., 2020; Tu et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2024; Jadidi et al., 2024). Identified interventions include coping and mindfulness training, resilience enhancement programs, strengthening workplace social support, and developing supportive leadership styles that encourage open communication and organizational justice (Bastien et al., 2025; Phanniphong et al., 2024; Panumasvivat et al., 2025).

These studies consistently find that employees who participate in stress management programs or work in organizations with strong psychological support systems tend to exhibit lower levels of burnout and higher levels of work engagement (Liu et al., 2025; Jiang et al., 2025; Yan Gao et al., 2025). In healthcare settings, interventions combining coping training, team support, and workload restructuring contribute to improved nurses' psychological wellbeing and service quality (Bastien et al., 2025; Schouten et al., 2025). In other sectors such as education and public services, strengthening individual coping capacity and role clarity plays a key role in preventing work pressure from developing into chronic burnout (Turan et al., 2025; Martins et al., 2025; Ezemenaka et al., 2025).

The link between stress management and employee performance is also evident in studies that explicitly include performance as an outcome variable. Research conducted in Indonesia, Nigeria, and China shows that high workload and job stress negatively affect productivity and performance quality, but these effects are attenuated when stress management interventions, organizational support, and effective leadership are present (Ajayi et al., 2025; Husainah, 2023; Iskamto, 2023; Luan et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2025). Employee performance in these studies is measured through various indicators such as target achievement, service quality, task commitment, and extra-role behaviors (organizational citizenship behavior). Overall, organizations that successfully manage

employee stress and provide adequate resources tend to achieve higher performance levels and stronger employee retention.

Thus, the third theme confirms that stress management should not be understood merely as an auxiliary or supplementary intervention, but rather as a strategic component of human resource policy and organizational governance. Within the broader relational framework, toxic work culture and workload act as stressors, burnout functions as the mediating mechanism, while stress management and organizational support serve as buffers that determine whether stress diminishes or sustains employee performance. The cross-study evidence from these 61 articles provides a strong empirical foundation for developing a conceptual model that positions employee performance as the final outcome of dynamic interactions among work culture, job demands, psychological conditions, and organizational adaptive capacity (Park et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2025; Husainah, 2023).

Discussion

The discussion and theoretical implications derived from this SLR strengthen the relevance of the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model as a primary lens for understanding the relationships among toxic work culture, workload, burnout, stress management, and employee performance. Findings across the 61 reviewed articles consistently indicate that toxic work culture and workload function as job demands that deplete employees' psychological and physical energy, while stress management and organizational support operate as job resources that protect against the negative effects of these demands (for example, in the context of nurses and healthcare workers facing a combination of high workload and pressurized work climates). Studies examining organizational climate and toxic leadership in hospitals illustrate how authoritarian leadership and unsupportive climates reduce nurses' intention to stay and create "high-demand, low-resource" work environments (Hossny et al., 2023). Findings related to nurses' workload shaped by shift patterns, overtime, and staffing levels further reinforce the position of workload as a structural demand that affects both nurses' health and patient safety (Martins et al., 2025).

Theoretically, these results also enrich the JD-R model by positioning toxic work culture not merely as an additional demand, but as a climate and leadership condition that shapes the configuration of demands and resources within organizations. Toxic leadership and negative organizational climates not only increase demands (e.g., pressure, conflict, uncertainty), but simultaneously erode resources such as social support, organizational justice, psychological safety, and a sense of meaning at work (Hossny et al., 2023). Nursing studies demonstrate that even when workload levels are relatively high, the presence of a supportive climate and fair incentive systems can restrain nurses' intention to leave the organization, whereas the combination of toxic leadership and the absence of support systems accelerates turnover intention. This suggests that organizational climate theory and the toxic leadership literature need to be more fully integrated with the JD-R framework, in which culture and leadership are understood as meta-constructs that shape demand-resource profiles at the unit or organizational level.

Findings regarding burnout as a mediating variable reinforce classical burnout theory (Maslach & Leiter) while simultaneously confirming the JD-R prediction that psychological strain constitutes the primary pathway linking demands to work outcomes. Studies within this SLR repeatedly demonstrate a consistent pattern: toxic leadership, negative organizational climate, and high workload lead to increased burnout (particularly emotional exhaustion), followed by declines in job satisfaction, commitment, engagement, and performance, as well as increases in turnover intention and job mobility intentions. In several studies, burnout is explicitly tested as a mediator between job insecurity, emotional demands, and mental health disturbances, indicating that burnout is not merely an indicator of fatigue but a central “node” within the causal chain linking work design to employee behavior. The theoretical implication is that work behavior models that previously treated job stress as a single mediating variable can be strengthened by distinguishing stress (perceived pressure) and burnout (chronic exhaustion) as two distinct stages within the strain process.

From a stress management perspective, the SLR findings underscore the importance of integrating Conservation of Resources (COR) theory into the understanding of the relationship between demands and outcomes. Stress management interventions such as mindfulness, coping skills training, digital interventions, and resilience programs essentially function as mechanisms for strengthening and restoring individual resources (e.g., energy, emotional regulation, sense of control). Intervention studies reviewed or tested within this SLR show that improvements in coping self-efficacy, emotional regulation, and mindfulness are associated with reductions in distress and burnout, as well as improvements in psychological wellbeing (Bastien et al., 2025). Within the COR framework, such interventions can be interpreted as “resource gain spirals” that counterbalance resource loss resulting from high demands. This implies that stress management theories should not stop at the level of coping techniques, but rather be positioned as an integral component of organizational resource architecture.

Additional theoretical implications emerge from the relationship between stress management, organizational support, and employee performance. Studies examining employee performance within this SLR (including Husainah, 2023) indicate that competence, leadership, and organizational commitment explain a substantial proportion of performance variance, signaling that structural and psychosocial factors are primary drivers of performance rather than individual characteristics alone. When incorporated into a broader model, stress management and organizational support can be interpreted as performance enablers that operate through resource enhancement, burnout reduction, and engagement improvement. In this sense, the employee performance literature traditionally dominated by the Ability-Motivation-Opportunity (AMO) approach can be enriched through integration with JD-R and COR, as ability and motivation cannot be optimally realized when demands are excessive and psychological resources are not adequately maintained.

Overall, findings across the 61 reviewed articles point to the need for an integrated conceptual model linking the five core variables: toxic work culture, workload, burnout, stress management, and employee performance. Theoretically, such a model can be

formulated as follows: toxic work culture and workload increase job demands and accelerate resource loss, triggering burnout as a mediating mechanism that reduces employee performance, while stress management and organizational resources act as moderators that weaken the demand–burnout pathway and the burnout-performance relationship. This model not only integrates multiple theoretical traditions (JD-R, COR, organizational climate, toxic leadership, and performance theory), but also opens space for multilevel approaches in which climate and culture variables are positioned at the team or organizational level, while burnout and performance operate at the individual level.

Finally, from a theory development perspective, this SLR also reveals several gaps that can serve as future research agendas. First, longitudinal and experimental studies capable of causally testing how changes in work culture or stress management programs modify demand resource dynamics and burnout over time remain limited. Second, cross-cultural approaches are highly relevant given the diversity of study contexts across countries with different social norms and managerial practices; this creates opportunities for developing more context-sensitive theories, particularly regarding toxic leadership and justice perceptions. Third, the integration of sustainability (sustainable HRM) and long-term occupational health issues into performance models needs to be strengthened, so that employee performance is not viewed merely as a short-term output, but as the outcome of human-centered, sustainable work design. Accordingly, the main theoretical contribution of this SLR lies in providing a more comprehensive conceptual foundation for understanding how organizations can manage work environments, job demands, and psychological resources to achieve high performance without sacrificing employee wellbeing.

4. CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review of 61 studies demonstrates that employee performance is shaped by a consistent interaction between toxic work culture, excessive workload, burnout, and stress management. Toxic work environments and high job demands function as primary stressors, while burnout particularly emotional exhaustion acts as a key mediating mechanism linking organizational stressors to diminished wellbeing, engagement, and performance. Conversely, effective stress management and organizational support operate as protective factors that sustain employee wellbeing and performance, underscoring the importance of balancing job demands and job resources in promoting organizational health.

The findings reinforce the Job Demands–Resources and Conservation of Resources frameworks while extending them by showing that toxic work culture not only intensifies job demands but also systematically undermines organizational and psychological resources. This highlights work culture and leadership quality as strategic, meta-level determinants of sustainable performance and employee wellbeing, positioning stress management as an integral component of organizational system design rather than a purely individual intervention.

Future research should prioritize longitudinal and experimental designs to examine causal dynamics over time, incorporate cross-cultural perspectives to capture contextual

variations in stress processes, and further integrate sustainable human resource management frameworks to better understand performance as an outcome of long-term, healthy, and humane work systems.

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Appendix A. Matrix of Articles from the Systematic Literature Review Based on Toxic Work Culture, Workload, Burnout, Stress Management, and Employee Performance

No	Authors & Year	Country	Main Variables	Research Method	Publisher / Journal
1	Alsadaan & Alqahtani (2024)	Saudi Arabia	Toxic leadership, conflict management, organizational commitment	Cross-sectional quantitative survey (regression & mediation)	<i>Journal of Nursing Management</i> (Wiley)
2	Hossny et al. (2023)	Egypt	Organizational climate, toxic leadership, intention to stay	Descriptive comparative survey	<i>International Journal of Nursing Studies Advances</i> (Elsevier)
3	Labrague et al. (2020)	Multi-country	Toxic leadership behavior, nurse outcomes, instrument validation	Psychometric instrument development	<i>Journal of Nursing Management</i> (Wiley)
4	Lee et al. (2024)	Malaysia	Toxic leadership, social support, role ambiguity, job insecurity, engagement, performance	Multilevel quantitative survey (mediation)	Elsevier
5	Ofei et al. (2022)	Ghana	Toxic leadership, job satisfaction, productivity	Multi-center cross-sectional survey	<i>Journal of Nursing Management</i> (Wiley)
6	Ramadan & Eid (2024)	Egypt	Toxic leadership, conflict management, organizational commitment	Descriptive quantitative survey	<i>Evidence-Based Nursing Research</i>

No	Authors & Year	Country	Main Variables	Research Method	Publisher / Journal
7	Reslan et al. (2025)	Lebanon	Toxic leadership, workplace bullying, innovative behavior, affective commitment	SEM-based quantitative survey	<i>Cogent Business & Management</i> (Taylor & Francis)
8	Reyhanoglu & Akin (2021)	Turkey	Toxic leadership, organizational justice, silence, turnover intention	SEM quantitative survey	<i>Journal of Economic and Administrative Sciences</i> (Emerald)
9	Rizani et al. (2022)	Indonesia	Toxic leadership, deviant behavior, organizational performance	Mediation analysis (quantitative)	<i>Strategic Management Business Journal</i>
10	Yavas (2016)	Turkey	Toxic leadership, sectoral perception differences	CFA & comparative quantitative analysis	<i>Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences</i> (Elsevier)
11	Dasgupta et al. (2013)	India	Workload, mental strain, performance	Quantitative survey (NASA-TLX)	<i>International Journal of Computer Applications</i>
12	Budiman & Putranto (2015)	Indonesia	Workload, motivation, performance	Quantitative survey	<i>Jurnal Ilmu Administrasi</i>
13	Astuti & Navi (2018)	Indonesia	Workload, job stress, performance	Quantitative survey	<i>Jurnal Manajemen</i>
14	Akob (2016)	Indonesia	Workload, job stress, job satisfaction	Quantitative survey	<i>Jurnal Aplikasi Manajemen</i>

No	Authors & Year	Country	Main Variables	Research Method	Publisher / Journal
15	Inegbedion et al. (2020)	Nigeria	Workload, role conflict, stress, performance	Cross-sectional quantitative survey	<i>Heliyon</i> (Elsevier)
16	Schouten et al. (2025)	Netherlands	Nurse workload, patient safety, staffing	Multi-site cross-sectional study	<i>BMJ Open</i>
17	Lee et al. (2025)	South Korea	Workload, job stress, psychological wellbeing	Quantitative survey	<i>IJERPH</i> (MDPI)
18	Babaii et al. (2025)	Iran	Workload, emotional exhaustion, service delivery	Quantitative survey	<i>BMC Nursing</i> (Springer)
19	Martins et al. (2025)	Portugal	Workload, job satisfaction, burnout	Cross-sectional quantitative survey	<i>International Journal of Workplace Health Management</i>
20	Gan (2025)	China	Workload, job pressure, turnover intention	Quantitative survey	<i>Frontiers in Psychology</i>
21	He et al. (2025)	China	Burnout, job demands, distress, turnover	SEM quantitative survey	<i>Frontiers in Psychology</i>
22	Osterholm et al. (2025)	Finland	Burnout, job satisfaction, work–life balance	Longitudinal quantitative study	<i>Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health</i>
23	Porreca & Simonelli (2025)	Italy	Burnout, emotional exhaustion, caregiving stress	Clinical quantitative survey	<i>BMC Psychology</i>

No	Authors & Year	Country	Main Variables	Research Method	Publisher / Journal
24	Angelini et al. (2026)	Italy	Burnout, compassion fatigue, occupational stress	Cross-sectional study	<i>IJERPH</i> (MDPI)
25	Turan et al. (2025)	Turkey	Burnout, work pressure, teacher stress	Quantitative survey	<i>Education and Science Journal</i>
26	Shanafelt et al. (2025)	USA	Burnout, workload, organizational climate	Large-scale national survey	<i>Mayo Clinic Proceedings</i>
27	Bonfanti et al. (2025)	Italy	Burnout, organizational support, emotional regulation	Quantitative survey	<i>Journal of Occupational Health Psychology</i>
28	Ajayi et al. (2025)	Nigeria	Burnout, stress, coping, performance	Cross-sectional quantitative survey	<i>African Journal of Management</i>
29	Jia et al. (2025)	China	Burnout, emotional exhaustion, resilience	SEM quantitative survey	<i>Sustainability</i> (MDPI)
30	Zhang et al. (2025)	China	Burnout, JD-R model, mental health	Quantitative survey	<i>IJERPH</i> (MDPI)
31	Yan Gao et al. (2025)	China	Stress management, job stress, workplace support	Quantitative survey	<i>Journal of Workplace Behavioral Health</i>
32	Liu et al. (2025)	China	Stress management, distress, performance	Quantitative survey	<i>International Journal of Stress Management</i>
33	Park et al. (2020)	South Korea	Stress management, mindfulness, burnout	Quasi-experimental study	<i>Stress & Health</i> (Wiley)

No	Authors & Year	Country	Main Variables	Research Method	Publisher / Journal
34	Bastien et al. (2025)	Canada	Stress intervention, wellbeing	Quasi-experimental evaluation	<i>Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation</i>
35	Husainah (2023)	Indonesia	Competence, leadership, commitment, performance	Quantitative regression analysis	<i>DIJEMSS</i>
36	Mudiyanselage et al. (2025)	Sri Lanka	Burnout, job stress, psychological empowerment	Cross-sectional quantitative survey	<i>Global Business Review</i>
37	Nwinyokpugi (2018)	Nigeria	Workload, burnout, job performance	Quantitative survey	<i>International Journal of Human Resource Studies</i>
38	Lea et al. (2012)	United Kingdom	Workload, mental strain, emotional burnout	Quantitative survey	<i>Nursing Times</i>
39	Herminingsih & Kurniasih (2018)	Indonesia	Workload, job stress, burnout	Quantitative survey	<i>Jurnal Administrasi</i>
40	Ford & Jin (2013)	United States	Workload, time pressure, burnout, worker fatigue	Experimental study & survey	<i>Journal of Applied Psychology</i>
41	De Cuyper & De Witte (2006)	Belgium	Job insecurity, workload, stress, burnout	Longitudinal quantitative survey	<i>Journal of Occupational Health Psychology</i>
42	Shanafelt et al. (2025)	United States	Burnout, work hours, job satisfaction	National quantitative survey	<i>Mayo Clinic Proceedings</i>
43	Bonfanti et al. (2025)	Italy	Burnout, emotional regulation, organizational support	Quantitative survey	<i>Journal of Occupational Health Psychology</i>
44	Ajayi et al. (2025)	Nigeria	Burnout, job stress, coping, employee performance	Cross-sectional survey	<i>African Journal of Management</i>

No	Authors & Year	Country	Main Variables	Research Method	Publisher / Journal
45	Jia et al. (2025)	China	Burnout, emotional exhaustion, resilience	SEM-based quantitative survey	<i>Sustainability</i> (MDPI)
46	Zhang et al. (2025)	China	Burnout, job demands–resources, mental health	Quantitative survey (JD–R framework)	<i>International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health</i>
47	Yan Gao et al. (2025)	China	Stress management, job stress, workplace support	Quantitative survey	<i>Journal of Workplace Behavioral Health</i>
48	Liu et al. (2025)	China	Stress management, psychological distress, job performance	Quantitative survey	<i>International Journal of Stress Management</i>
49	Park et al. (2020)	South Korea	Stress management, mindfulness, burnout	Quasi-experimental study	<i>Stress & Health</i> (Wiley)
50	Phanniphong et al. (2024)	Thailand	Stress management, emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction	Quantitative survey	<i>Asian Journal of Behavioral Sciences</i>
51	Bastien et al. (2025)	Canada	Stress management intervention, wellbeing	Quasi-experimental evaluation	<i>Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation</i>
52	Ezemenaka et al. (2025)	Nigeria	Stress management, work pressure, productivity	Quantitative survey	<i>International Journal of Management Studies</i>
53	Jiang et al. (2025)	China	Stress management, burnout risk, emotional regulation	SEM-based quantitative survey	<i>Frontiers in Psychology</i>

No	Authors & Year	Country	Main Variables	Research Method	Publisher / Journal
54	Panumasvivat et al. (2025)	Thailand	Stress reduction training, job stress, resilience	Quantitative survey	<i>Journal of Health Research</i>
55	Kim et al. (2024)	South Korea	Stress management, workplace conflict, emotional fatigue	Quantitative survey	<i>Korean Journal of Occupational Health</i>
56	Tu et al. (2022)	Taiwan	Stress management, work–life balance, emotional exhaustion	Quantitative survey	<i>International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health</i>
57	Wang et al. (2023)	China	Stress management, psychological safety, work engagement	Quantitative survey	<i>Sustainability (MDPI)</i>
58	Jadidi et al. (2024)	Iran	Stress management practices, job stress, burnout	Quantitative survey	<i>Iranian Journal of Psychology</i>
59	Lee et al. (2024)	South Korea	Stress management, coping strategies, burnout	Quantitative survey	<i>Asian Social Science</i>
60	Yan et al. (2024)	China	Stress interventions, job strain, burnout prevention	Quantitative survey	<i>Journal of Behavioral Health</i>
61	Husainah (2023)	Indonesia	Competence, leadership, organizational commitment, employee performance	Quantitative survey (regression analysis)	<i>Dinasti International Journal of Education Management and Social Science</i>

