

## Relationship Between Work-Life Balance, Role Ambiguity, and Burnout in Generation Z

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### ABSTRACT

This research is designed to examine the interrelationships between work-life balance, role ambiguity, and burnout among Generation Z. It aims to investigate how work-life balance correlates with burnout and how role ambiguity contributes to burnout within this demographic. Burnout is defined as a state of mental, emotional, and physical exhaustion resulting from prolonged work pressure. Work-life balance refers to an individual's capacity to strike a healthy balance between job responsibilities and personal life. Role ambiguity occurs when individuals face uncertainty about their job roles, including tasks, duties, and expectations. The study employs three measurement scales: burnout, work-life balance, and role ambiguity. The sample size, derived using the G-power application, consists of 120 Generation Z workers. Multiple regression analysis was applied to the data. The findings indicate a significant relationship between work-life balance, role ambiguity, and burnout in Generation Z. Specifically, a negative relationship was identified between work-life balance and burnout, where lower work-life balance corresponds to higher burnout, and vice versa. Furthermore, a positive correlation was found between role ambiguity and burnout, with higher levels of role ambiguity being linked to increased burnout levels.

**Keywords:** *Generation Z, Burnout, Work-Life Balance, Role Ambiguity*

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## INTRODUCTION

Based on data from the International Labour Organization (2018), of the 58,115 worker samples, 32.8% or approximately 18,828 workers suffer from burnout. In Indonesia, 77.3% of respondents reported having experienced burnout (CNN Indonesia, 2021). Maslach & Jackson (1981) define burnout as a psychological condition characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a decline in personal achievement, typically resulting from prolonged work stress. Burnout is experienced by individuals working in high-demand environments without adequate support, leading them to feel both physical and emotional exhaustion and a loss of meaning or interest in their work (Lailani et al., 2005).

Burnout is a significant psychological issue in modern workplaces, particularly among Generation Z (born between 1997-2012), which is now beginning to dominate the workforce (Dhaniswari & Sudarnice, 2024). A significant portion of Generation Z has entered the workforce, with 52% of them joining the workforce between the ages of 15-30 (Radio

Republik Indonesia, 2024). Many Generation Z individuals have already started working right after finishing high school, and even those who graduated from college have entered the workforce at an early age (Radio Republik Indonesia, 2024). Burnout among Generation Z has increased significantly, with a report by Deloitte (2023a) indicating that 46% of Generation Z feels stressed almost all the time. This figure is also accompanied by an increase in burnout, with 52% of respondents from Generation Z reporting experiencing burnout due to higher work demands and challenges in maintaining work-life balance (Deloitte, 2023b). The most common burnout symptoms among Generation Z in Indonesia include constant fatigue, as shown by survey data where 27% of 1,190 respondents between July 24-27, 2023, reported such symptoms (dataindonesia.id, 2023). Burnout among Generation Z is often a result of facing high career expectations, the desire for rapid success, and economic uncertainty (Schroth, 2019). According to Khalish (2024), social media also plays a significant role in increasing their vulnerability to burnout, as intense exposure to social media can cause feelings of insecurity, negative social comparisons, and pressure to remain constantly active online. Generation Z exhibits several negative characteristics that increase burnout risk, such as perfectionism, dependence on technology, and a lack of work-life balance (Tsabita et al., 2023). Their tendency towards perfectionism causes Generation Z to set very high standards that are often difficult to achieve, leading to physical and mental exhaustion. Dependency on technology and social media also adds pressure, as they feel compelled to appear perfect and socially competitive. Additionally, their inability to separate work time from personal life exacerbates the risk of burnout.

One of the factors contributing to increased burnout in Generation Z is their difficulty in achieving a healthy work-life balance (Tsabita et al., 2023). Umene-Nakano et al. (2013) suggest that individuals who have difficulty achieving a work-life balance are more likely to experience two significant dimensions of burnout: emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Work-life balance is the capacity to manage the responsibilities of both work and personal life (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). For Generation Z, maintaining this balance is especially challenging as they often find themselves caught between work obligations and blurred personal boundaries due to technological advances and social pressures (Mahardika et al., 2022). The constant expectation to be productive and connected, along with the high career demands placed on them, makes it increasingly difficult to distinguish between work and personal time, leaving them more vulnerable to burnout (Mahardika et al., 2022).

Another important factor contributing to the increased risk of burnout in Generation Z is role ambiguity (Aprianti & Yusuf, 2023). Unlike work-life balance, which concerns the boundaries between work and personal life, role ambiguity focuses more on an individual's understanding of their duties and responsibilities at work. According to Luthfiana (2024), many Generation Z workers are new to the workforce and lack sufficient experience to clearly understand their role within an organization, leading to confusion about the responsibilities they are expected to fulfill. Furthermore, their dependence on technology and digitization contributes to role ambiguity, as roles and responsibilities

rapidly change in line with technological advancements (Nurhasanah et al., 2024). The high demands of multitasking often leave them unsure about task priorities and who is responsible for what. Generation Z also frequently works in flexible environments, such as freelance or remote jobs, which lack clear hierarchical structures, creating confusion about the expectations they must meet (Aprianti & Yusuf, 2023). Their desire for flexibility and independence often exacerbates this issue, as they struggle to define boundaries and responsibilities. Additionally, an unclear organizational culture regarding role distribution in collaborative teams may worsen this role ambiguity (Laksana et al., 2024). These factors highlight how Generation Z's characteristics, such as work experience, dependence on technology, and preference for flexibility, increase the role ambiguity they face in the workplace. According to Ghorpade et al. (2011), role ambiguity contributes to increased depersonalization and decreased personal achievement, both of which are aspects of burnout. Role ambiguity occurs when individuals do not have a clear understanding of their tasks, responsibilities, or the expectations of them in their work (Rizzo et al., 1970).

The interaction between work-life balance and role ambiguity creates a complex psychological dynamic for Generation Z, especially in the context of burnout (Mukhdar et al., 2024). When individuals struggle to achieve a balance between work demands and personal life, they are often trapped by pressure to always be productive and stay connected to work (Greenhaus & Allen, 2013). Constant connectivity through technology adds psychological stress and can lead to feelings of guilt when taking time for themselves, resulting in emotional exhaustion and stress that lead to burnout (Derks et al., 2008). This situation is worsened by role ambiguity, where individuals do not fully understand the tasks and responsibilities expected of them, leading to confusion and anxiety that diminish self-esteem and motivation (Rizzo et al., 1970). This uncertainty makes them feel disconnected from their work and colleagues, leading to burnout (Parker et al., 2021). The interaction between these two factors can reinforce each other, where role ambiguity makes it difficult for individuals to achieve a healthy work-life balance, while increased work demands can disrupt role clarity (Cahyadi & Prastyani, 2020). This condition creates a negative cycle that results in deeper psychological impacts, such as increased anxiety and depression, and heightens the risk of severe burnout (Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Therefore, it is crucial for organizations to understand and address these dynamics with strategies that support role clarity and a better balance between work and personal life, so Generation Z can feel more connected and empowered in their work environment (Kahn, 1990).

An overview of burnout among Generation Z was also obtained from interviews conducted by the researcher with six Generation Z individuals working in the Surabaya area. The results of these interviews revealed burnout symptoms such as feeling emotionally exhausted as if their energy was completely drained, decreased motivation, sleep problems, constant anxiety about work, loss of interest in work activities, reduced social interaction at work, increased indifference toward work outcomes, avoiding responsibilities with a careless attitude, feeling inadequate in completing tasks, low job satisfaction despite hard efforts, and an overall decrease in productivity along with procrastination. These burnout symptoms are strongly influenced by the actual conditions faced by workers regarding

work-life balance and role ambiguity. Some Generation Z workers reported having to bring work home due to high office demands, while at the same time feeling they did not have enough time to rest or socialize with family and friends. This drains their emotional and physical energy, leading to burnout symptoms such as deep fatigue, sleep difficulties, and decreased motivation to work. Meanwhile, role ambiguity is also an important factor. Some workers reported going to the office every day without clear direction regarding their responsibilities. Sometimes they were asked to perform tasks outside their scope, but there were no clear guidelines about what their duties actually entailed. This uncertainty caused anxiety, incompetence, and hesitation in making decisions. When tasks were not completed well, they began to lose confidence, feel unsatisfied with their work outcomes, and experience decreased productivity. This condition led them to avoid work, procrastinate tasks, and become trapped in the burnout cycle. The combination of excessive workload without adequate time to balance personal needs and uncertainty about the roles they need to fulfill at work creates pressure on Generation Z workers, which can exacerbate the burnout they experience.

## **METHOD**

This research is a correlational study using a quantitative methodology, aimed at investigating the relationships among the variables being examined. The independent variables in this study are work-life balance (X1) and role ambiguity (X2), with burnout serving as the dependent variable (Y). The population for this study consists of Generation Z workers, defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012. The study specifically targets Generation Z workers who are actively employed, whether on a full-time, part-time, or freelance basis, and have been working for at least one year in the Surabaya region.

Sample size is the number of samples that will be taken from a population. The minimum sample size in this study was 115, obtained from calculations using the gpower application with an effect size according to Cohen's (1988) table of 0.3. The respondents collected were 120 respondents obtained from distributing questionnaires online, namely using Google forms through various social media.

Data collection in this study utilized a Likert scale, which is a scale comprising a series of statements where participants were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with the statements, as outlined by Azwar (2019). The psychological scales employed in this study were divided into three categories: burnout, work-life balance, and role ambiguity. The burnout scale was developed by the researchers based on the operational definitions and components proposed by Schaufeli et al. (2020). The work-life balance scale was designed by the researchers using the operational definitions and aspects proposed by Fisher et al. (2009). The role ambiguity scale was created based on the operational definitions and aspects suggested by Khan et al. (1981). Participants' responses to both favorable and unfavorable statements on the three research scales were measured using the 5-point Likert scale. To analyze the data and test the hypotheses proposed in this study, parametric analysis techniques were employed. The data analysis was performed using multiple regression tests, processed with the IBM SPSS Ver 29 for Mac OS application.

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

### RESEARCH RESULT

The research was conducted by distributing questionnaires *online*, namely using *google forms*. The aim of conducting simultaneous regression analysis was to test the first research hypothesis, which posits a relationship between work-life balance and role ambiguity. The research findings were derived from multiple linear regression analysis, performed using the IBM SPSS Ver 29 for Mac OS software. The simultaneous regression analysis yielded an F coefficient of 13.867 with a p-value of 0.001 ( $p < 0.05$ ), indicating statistical significance. These findings demonstrate a significant relationship between work-life balance, role ambiguity, and burnout in Generation Z. Based on these results, the first hypothesis of this study is confirmed.

**Table 1:** Simultaneous Analysis Test Results

| F      | p     | Description                |
|--------|-------|----------------------------|
| 13,867 | 0,001 | Significant ( $p < 0,05$ ) |

Source: Statistical Output Program IBM SPSS Ver 29 for Mac OS

The purpose of the partial regression analysis is to evaluate the second research hypothesis, which proposes a relationship between work-life balance and burnout in Generation Z, as well as the third hypothesis, which suggests a connection between role ambiguity and burnout within the same group.

The results of the partial regression analysis show a t-value of -4.056 and a p-value of 0.001 ( $p < 0.05$ ) for the relationship between work-life balance and burnout. These results indicate a significant connection between work-life balance and burnout in Generation Z. As a result, the second hypothesis of this study is confirmed.

The partial regression analysis also reveals a t-value of 2.110 with a p-value of 0.037 ( $p < 0.05$ ) for the relationship between role ambiguity and burnout. These findings demonstrate a significant association between role ambiguity and burnout in Generation Z. Therefore, the third hypothesis of this study is supported. A summary of all the partial regression analysis results can be found in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Partial Regression Analysis Test Results

| Variables                   | t      | p     | Description                |
|-----------------------------|--------|-------|----------------------------|
| Work-life balance - Burnout | -4,056 | 0,001 | Significant ( $p < 0,05$ ) |
| Role ambiguity - Burnout    | 2,110  | 0,037 | Significant ( $p < 0,05$ ) |

Source: Statistical Output Program IBM SPSS Ver 29 for Mac OS

The regression line equation test results can be done with the following equation formula:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2$$

$$Y = 224,186 + -1,040 X_1 + 0,925 X_2$$

Description :

$Y$  = Burnout

$\beta_0$  = Constant

$\beta_1$  = Regression Coefficient X1

$\beta_2$  = Regression Coefficient X2

$X_1$  = Work-Life Balance

$X_2$  = Role Ambiguity

These findings indicate that the baseline burnout value of 224.186 occurs when there is no work-life balance and role ambiguity. The regression coefficient for work-life balance is -1.040, meaning that each point increase in work-life balance reduces burnout. Conversely, the regression coefficient for role ambiguity is 0.925, suggesting that every additional point in role ambiguity leads to an increase in burnout levels. The results of correlation and regression analysis are presented in the following table:

**Table 3:** Contributions of Each Independent Variable to the Dependent Variable

| Variables                  | Coefficient $\beta$ | Cross Product | Regression<br>(sum of<br>Squares) | SE<br>Total<br>(R <sup>2</sup> ) |
|----------------------------|---------------------|---------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Work-life balance -Burnout | -1,040              | -7854,150     | 11125,264                         | 0,192                            |
| Role ambiguity -Burnout    | 0,925               | 3197,575      |                                   |                                  |

Source: Statistical Output Program IBM SPSS Ver 29 for Mac OS

According to the data in Table 19, the total effective contribution value is 0.192, indicating that the combined influence of work-life balance ( $X_1$ ) and role ambiguity ( $X_2$ ) accounts for 19.2% of burnout. The remaining 80.8% is attributed to other factors. The effective contribution (SE) of each variable  $X$  is as follows:

$$SE_{xi} = \left( \frac{b_{xi} \cdot \text{Cross Product} \cdot R^2}{\text{Regression}} \right) \times 100\%$$

The effective contribution of *work-life balance* variables ( $X_1$ ) to *burnout* ( $Y$ ) is:

$$SE_{x1} = \left( \frac{-1,040 \times -7854,150 \times 0,192}{11125,264} \right) \times 100\%$$

$$SE_{x1} = 14,1 \%$$

The effective contribution of the *role ambiguity* variable ( $X_2$ ) to *burnout* ( $Y$ ) is:

$$SE_{x2} = \left( \frac{0,925 \times 3197,575 \times 0,192}{11125,264} \right) \times 100\%$$

$$SE_{x2} = 5,1\%$$

The total Effective Contribution (SE) can be calculated as follows:

$$SE \text{ (Total)} = SE(X_1) + SE(X_2)$$

$$SE \text{ (Total)} = 14,1 \% + 5,1\%$$

$$SE \text{ (Total)} = 19,2\%$$

From the calculations above, it is clear that the effective contribution of the work-life balance variable to burnout is 14.1%, while the effective contribution of role ambiguity to burnout is 5.1%. This suggests that work-life balance has a greater influence on burnout compared to role ambiguity. The total combined effective contribution of both variables, work-life balance and role ambiguity, is 19.2%.

Descriptive analysis in this study was conducted by comparing the empirical mean with the hypothetical mean for each research variable: burnout, work-life balance, and role ambiguity. The burnout variable has an empirical mean of 235.76 and a hypothetical mean of 168, indicating that burnout is classified as high. The work-life balance variable, with an empirical mean of 52.65 and a hypothetical mean of 69, is classified as low. For role ambiguity, the empirical mean is 71.68, while the hypothetical mean is 60, suggesting that role ambiguity is also classified as high. The following table presents the results of the descriptive analysis:

**Table 4:** Comparison of Empirical Mean and Theoretical Mean Values

| <b>Variable</b>          | <b>Empirical Mean</b> | <b>Hypothetical Mean</b> | <b>Description</b>           |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>Burnout</i>           | 235,76                | 168                      | <i>High burnout</i>          |
| <i>Work-life balance</i> | 52,65                 | 69                       | <i>Low work-life balance</i> |
| <i>Role ambiguity</i>    | 71,68                 | 60                       | <i>High role ambiguity</i>   |

Source: Statistical Output Program IBM SPSS Ver 29 for Mac OS

## DISCUSSION

The second hypothesis is supported by the finding that there is a negative correlation between work-life balance and burnout in Generation Z. This implies that individuals with a higher work-life balance tend to experience lower levels of burnout, while those with a lower work-life balance experience higher levels of burnout. This finding aligns with the study conducted by Volk et al. (2024), which highlights work-life balance as a key factor in mitigating burnout. People who effectively manage their professional and personal responsibilities generally report lower burnout levels compared to those who struggle with this balance. Similarly, a study by Bodendieck et al. (2022) on German general practitioners found that those with a better work-life balance were less likely to experience burnout. Wicaksono et al. (2024) also reported a significant negative relationship between work-life balance and burnout, further supporting the idea that a higher work-life balance leads to lower burnout. Additionally, research by Lestari & Purba (2019) found a negative link between work-life balance and burnout, suggesting that improved balance can reduce burnout levels.

The third hypothesis is confirmed, with the result showing that role ambiguity is positively related to burnout in Generation Z. The greater the level of role ambiguity an individual experiences, the higher their level of burnout. Role ambiguity, which refers to a lack of clarity regarding job responsibilities, increases pressure on individuals, causing confusion about meeting work expectations and uncertainty about what is required of them. These findings are consistent with the research by Ghorpade et al. (2011), which

indicated that role ambiguity leads to greater depersonalization and diminished personal achievement, both of which are central aspects of burnout. The study also shows that individuals with higher role ambiguity report higher depersonalization and lower personal achievement. Similarly, research by Yürür & Sarikaya (2012) found that increased role ambiguity correlates with higher levels of burnout. Fadli et al. (2024) also demonstrated that role ambiguity has a positive impact on burnout, with unclear job roles heightening stress and emotional exhaustion, which are key elements of burnout. Supporting this, Tunc & Kutanis (2009) found that greater role ambiguity increases the likelihood of experiencing burnout.

According to the findings from the multiple regression analysis, the first hypothesis is also accepted. This study found that work-life balance (X1) and role ambiguity (X2) together explain 19.2% of the variance in burnout among Generation Z, with a total effective contribution of 0.192. This indicates that these two variables contribute to the burnout levels experienced by Generation Z. This finding emphasizes the importance of both factors in predicting burnout and reflects the complexity of how work-life balance is connected to role ambiguity in the workplace. When these two factors are present together, their impact on burnout becomes more significant. For example, if an individual experiences work-life imbalance coupled with role ambiguity, they are likely to feel overwhelmed and more prone to burnout. This highlights the need for a more holistic approach to addressing burnout, focusing on work-life balance and role clarity.

Schroth (2019) reveals that Generation Z is vulnerable to burnout due to the high career expectations and economic uncertainty they face. When they find it difficult to achieve optimal work-life balance, they tend to experience burnout more quickly, resulting in fatigue and stress. Additionally, individuals who are unclear about their roles at work may spend more time and energy trying to understand or complete tasks, which sacrifices their personal life. This can also increase the risk of burnout. Therefore, it is important for companies and organizations to pay attention to the psychological well-being of Generation Z employees by providing policies that support work-life balance, such as flexible working hours or the opportunity to work from home.

Burnout can occur in various types of jobs. Research by Leskovic et al. (2024) found that individuals working in nursing homes or as childcare workers are at higher risk of burnout. Another study by Ratih et al. (2023) found that social workers are also vulnerable to burnout. A study by Oktaviani et al. (2023) found that healthcare workers are at higher risk of burnout. Additionally, jobs in education, such as teaching or academia, are also prone to burnout (Purba et al., 2007).

Besides the job type, other factors can also contribute to burnout. According to Indiawati et al. (2022), burnout can be caused by various factors. First, age can affect burnout levels, with individuals in early adulthood (20-30 years) often having unrealistic expectations compared to those over 30, who are more mature, stable, and realistic. Second, gender, such as female nurses, who often experience conflicts between family responsibilities and professional duties, which increases the risk of burnout. Third, lower levels of education can increase stress and burnout, especially when tasks and workload

exceed an individual's capabilities. Fourth, work experience can contribute, with individuals with more than 10 years of experience generally having lower burnout levels due to better adaptation skills. Fifth, high workload directly impacts burnout due to prolonged physical exhaustion leading to psychological fatigue. Finally, high organizational commitment can help reduce burnout by encouraging individuals to contribute positively to the organization, achieve goals, and think more optimistically.

The combined effective contribution of work-life balance and role ambiguity, which stands at 0.192, accounts for 19.2% of burnout. The remaining 80.8% is influenced by other factors. Various studies have identified additional factors that can impact burnout, such as work-related elements, social support, work stress, and job intensity. For instance, Tugsal (2017) highlighted the importance of social support in reducing burnout. Similarly, Schwartz et al. (2019) found that a weak safety culture can exacerbate burnout, particularly in the healthcare sector. Moreover, work stress and job intensity are significant contributors to burnout. Kim (2021) demonstrated that work-related stress and intensity are key factors leading to burnout among neurosurgeons in Korea. Thus, while work-life balance and role ambiguity play significant roles in burnout, other factors also contribute to determining an individual's overall burnout level.

The comparison of the empirical and hypothetical means for the burnout variable shows an empirical mean of 235.76 and a hypothetical mean of 168, indicating that the average burnout experienced by Generation Z is relatively high. This suggests that many of the subjects in this study exhibit characteristics of exhaustion, mental distancing, cognitive impairment (such as poor memory, attention, concentration, and cognitive performance), and emotional impairment.

The comparison of empirical and hypothetical means for the work-life balance variable shows an empirical mean of 52.65 and a hypothetical mean of 69, indicating that the average work-life balance experienced by Generation Z is relatively low. This suggests that the subjects in this study tend to struggle with effectively managing time and energy between work demands and personal needs.

The comparison of empirical and hypothetical means for the role ambiguity variable shows an empirical mean of 71.68 and a hypothetical mean of 60, indicating that the average role ambiguity experienced by Generation Z is relatively high. This suggests that the subjects in this study tend to experience confusion in understanding their job roles, although most are still at manageable levels. This condition can affect how they perform tasks and responsibilities at work, potentially impacting the level of burnout they experience.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research investigates burnout among Generation Z, focusing on both internal and external factors. The internal factors analyzed include work-life balance, assessed through its dimensions. The external factor examined is role ambiguity, which is measured by its components.

This study aims to explore the connection between various factors contributing to burnout in Generation Z, specifically focusing on work-life balance and role ambiguity, leading to the following conclusions. The initial hypothesis put forward by the researcher suggests a correlation between work-life balance, role ambiguity, and burnout in Generation Z. The findings from this study show that the independent variables, work-life balance and role ambiguity, are significantly correlated with burnout in Generation Z, thereby supporting the hypothesis.

The researcher's second hypothesis posits a negative correlation between work-life balance and burnout in Generation Z. It suggests that as work-life balance improves, burnout levels decrease, whereas a lower work-life balance leads to higher burnout levels. The results of this research confirm a negative correlation between work-life balance and burnout in Generation Z, thus supporting the hypothesis.

The researcher's third hypothesis suggests a positive correlation between role ambiguity and burnout in Generation Z. The premise is that as role ambiguity increases, so does the level of burnout. The study's findings support a positive correlation between role ambiguity and burnout in Generation Z, thereby validating the hypothesis.

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