

# The mediating role of organizational fairness in the relationship between toxic leadership and organizational trauma in education teachers of Yasouj city

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# Abstract

Background and purpose: Today's organizations face wide challenges in the field of behavior and ethics among their members, and attention and solving them is considered an outstanding advantage for an organization. Toxic leaders (selfish people who do not care about the peace of their subordinates) can affect other behavioral variables of employees and their desire to express their opinions and beliefs or their moral courage. This research was conducted to determine the mediating role of organizational moral courage in the relationship between toxic leadership and organizational trauma in employees of the Ministry of Education. **Methodology:** The design of the research was descriptive and structural equations type. All managers and official and unofficial employees of the Ministry of Education in 1401 formed the statistical population of the research. Among the statistical population, 260 people were selected and studied by simple random sampling. To collect data, the toxic leadership questionnaires of Schmidt (2000), and the moral courage of Sekarka et al. After collecting and extracting the data, the participants' scores were analyzed using Pearson correlation and path analysis and statistical analysis software (SPSS). **Results:** The results showed a significant positive correlation between toxic leadership and organizational trauma and its subscales (0.01). There is a negative correlation between moral courage and organizational trauma (0.01). Conclusion: The results showed that organizational moral courage plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between toxic leadership and organizational trauma in the Ministry of Sports and Youth employees.

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### Introduction

Today, emotional trauma is considered a phenomenon that occurs widely in organizations. However, it needs to be better understood, and the lack of necessary control and management in this regard causes destructive consequences. Organizations, as creatures that seek survival, must have the necessary ability to manage the blows to their bodies so that they can continue to live in the current turbulent environment. Providing the necessary grounds for more vitality and adopting solutions to prevent mental and emotional pressures is important for organizations. Mental and psychological shocks in the organization can provide grounds for the organization's loss of talents and energy analysis by affecting people's abilities (Hormann and Vivian, 2005). Organizations in which mental and emotional shocks occur usually become stagnant. In case of lack of proper management and inability to use appropriate technology, they become bankrupt and disappear from the competition scene (Liisa, Martin, and Micheal, 2019).

Due to the special nature of their activity, service provider organizations are one of the most prone to organizational trauma. In organizations that suffer from trauma, an atmosphere of hopelessness and despair dominates the organization, employees and managers lose their work motivation and the organization's focus on satisfying the needs of customers decreases. As a result, the pessimism of the organization is widespread. Organizational trauma was taken from medical science and entered management and organization science. In general, any damage, blow, injury, shock, or incident on the body is called trauma, provided that it is not internal and has an external origin. Organizations are exposed to trauma just like people. Mental blows and trauma can occur directly or indirectly, or gradually or all at once (Hopper, 2013).

Organizational trauma is defined as dysfunction in the behavior patterns of different levels of the organization. Traumatic organizations refer to organizations whose employees and managers are exposed to various mental and physical injuries due to the specific nature of the organization's activity. Organizational morale is a phenomenon that is increasing in organizations today; this concept has not been properly examined so far (Venugopal, 2016). Employees working in organizations that suffer from trauma will also be affected by the side effects of these conditions; it may affect their skills and, consequently, their motivation and job satisfaction. As a result, if you are dissatisfied with your job, it will lead to the pessimism of the employees towards your organization. In addition, if employees perceive organizational decisions and management actions as fanatical and unfair, they are more likely to feel resentful, transgressive, and even angry, which in turn causes the creation of the theory of organizational trauma that leads to success. (Hormann and Vivian, 2015). Organizations that have suffered organizational trauma and anomie will suffer from exhausted human resources and cause many problems. Traumatized organizations are usually stagnant, do not have the right technology, and decline with reduced performance.

In their studies, DeKlerk et al. (2007) discussed trauma at the individual level, considered the occurrence of trauma as a result of the individual's feelings, and examined it within the framework of a recovery program.

Applying the correct leadership and management styles in the organization can help prevent the occurrence of organizational trauma. By adopting appropriate styles, leaders and managers can provide a favorable environment to create a sense of hope, strengthen optimism, reduce stress and anxiety, and increase employee job satisfaction. However, in some organizations, managers need to use more productive styles or they want to avoid using such styles. The result of such decisions in the long term leads to the creation of an environment in which employees are not very satisfied, and working in the organization will be accompanied by fear, stress, and anxiety. One of the undesirable leadership styles is the toxic leadership style. Toxic leaders suffer from management deficiencies and lack expertise and experience. Toxic managers appear to depend on other managers and are indebted to other groups and individuals (Hadavinejad and Kalvandi, 2017). They do not tolerate constructive criticism, and with threats and autocracy, they do not leave room for questions and judgments about their actions and suppress critical thinking (Schmidt, 2008). The fear of toxic managers from negative feedback and preventing them from providing critical thinking leads to a lack of understanding of organizational fairness in employees. Fairness and its implementation is one of the basic and natural human needs, which has always provided a suitable platform for the development of human societies throughout history. In the literature on organization and management, the term organizational fairness was first used by Greenberg (1987). According to Greenberg, organizational fairness is related to employees' perception of the level of equality or work fairness in the organization (Greenberg, 1990). Various studies show that organizational fairness and quality of work life have been among the concepts researchers have been interested in. It is very clear that fairness is the highest human value and a precious gem in the way of realizing human rights as a fundamental value (Spell and Arnold, 2007). It is often referred to as organizational fairness in organizations (Farmer, 2003). Organizational fairness is the stage when employees feel that the rules, procedures, and organizational policies related to their work are fair (Bies, 2001). Usually, in the division of fairness, three concepts of distributive, procedural, and transactional fairness are proposed (Ghalavandi and Kooshki, 2020), in which fairness processes play an important role, so how people are treated in organizations may be beliefs, attitudes and their feelings, especially affect people's perception of equality and how to deal fairly in the field of work (Moorman, 1991). Therefore, according to the stated content, the main question of the research will be this. "Does organizational fairness play a significant mediating role in the relationship between toxic leadership and organizational trauma in education teachers in Yasouj city? And can organizational fairness and toxic leadership predict organizational trauma in education teachers in Yasouj city?" "

# Methodology

The current research is of applied purpose type and, in terms of methodology, descriptive-correlation type of structural equations. The statistical population of the current research was formed by all the teachers (teachers and principals) of the Department of Education in Yasouj city in 1401. The sample size of the present study was 285 teachers of Yasouj city, who were selected using the available sampling method and answered organizational fairness questionnaires on the relationship between toxic leadership and organizational trauma. After collecting the raw data, it was analyzed with SPSS software at two descriptive and inferential levels. At the descriptive level, indicators such as the average standard deviation were calculated. At the inferential level, the research questions were investigated and tested using the correlation coefficient test and path analysis.

### **Materials**

- 1- Niehoff and Moorman organizational fairness questionnaire (1993). The organizational fairness questionnaire was prepared and designed in 1993 by Niehoff and Moorman to evaluate organizational fairness. The said questionnaire contains 20 questions and has three components. Procedural and distributive fairness studies show that leaders perceived as procedurally fair are rated more favorably by subordinates, even when the allocation is unequal (Eskandura, 1999). Cropanza and Folger presented a two-element model of fairness that includes distributive and procedural forms of fairness. Distributive fairness (questions 1-5): a person's perception that what he receives is fair. Procedural fairness (Questions 6 to 11): Employees' perception that the procedures followed by the organization determine the benefits received. Niehoff and Moorman added transactional fairness (Questions 12 to 20) to this model. This questionnaire has 20 questions and its purpose is to measure organizational fairness and its dimensions (distributive fairness, procedural fairness, transactional fairness). The response range is of Likert type, and the score for each option is such that the option completely disagree = 1 point, the option disagree = 2 points, the option has no opinion = 3 points, the option agree = 4 points and the option completely agree = 5 points. Higher scores indicate higher organizational fairness and vice versa. Naami and Shokrkon (2006) calculated the validity (structural) and reliability (Cronbach's alpha) coefficients of this questionnaire and they were 0.42 and 0.85 for overall organizational fairness, 0.46 and 0.78 for distributive fairness, respectively. They have reported 0.57 and 0.82 for the procedure and 0.40 and 0.64 for fairness.
- 2- Schmidt's toxic leadership questionnaire (2000). The toxic leadership questionnaire was designed by Schmidt (2008). This questionnaire has 28 questions and 5 components and measures toxic leadership based on the Likert scale with questions such as (the manager of this department makes fun of his subordinates). The components of toxic leadership are as follows:

Abusive supervision includes questions 1 to 7

Autocratic leadership includes questions 7 to 13 Narcissism includes questions 14 to 18 Ambition includes questions 19 to 23 Unpredictable includes questions 23 to 28

The scoring of the toxic leadership style questionnaire is based on a five-point Likert scale. The options are very high (5 points), high (4 points), somewhat (3 points), low (2 points) and very little (1 point). The reliability of a tool is its degree of stability in measuring whatever it measures, that is, how much the measuring tool gives the same results under the same conditions (Sarmad et al., 2011). Cronbach's alpha coefficient calculated in the research of Hadavinejad and Kalvandi (2016) for this questionnaire was estimated to be above 0.7. Also, in the research of Zare and Sepahvand (2019), the reliability of this tool was calculated using Cronbach's alpha method of 0.83, which indicates acceptable reliability.

3- Kolivand and Sarlak organizational trauma questionnaire (2015). This questionnaire has ten questions, and its purpose is to measure the level of organizational trauma. The response range is of Likert type, and the score corresponding to the option is very low (1 point), low (2 points), medium (3 points), high (4 points), and very high (5 points). In Kolivand and Sarlak's study (2015), this questionnaire's face and content validity was checked and confirmed by professors. Also, the reliability or reliability of the present questionnaire was obtained using Cronbach's alpha method of 0.95, which indicates the good reliability of the questionnaire.

## Results

The results of the organizational fairness, toxic leadership, and organizational trauma questionnaires based on the mean and standard deviation are given in the following tables. Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of the organizational fairness variable.

Table 1: Descriptive findings of organizational fairness variable

Statistical index	Mean	Standard deviation
Scale		
Organizational fariness	51/32	7/75
Distributive fairness subscale	17/86	3/53
Procedural fairness subscale	17/54	3/9
Relational fairness subscale	17/08	3/49

The results of table (1) show the mean and standard deviation of organizational fairness and its dimensions. According to the above table, the highest score related to the distributive fairness dimension is 17.86 (3.35). The lowest average is related to the relational fairness dimension, with a mean and standard deviation of 17.08 (3.49).

Table 2: Descriptive findings of toxic leadership variable

Table 2. Descriptive minings of toxic leadership variable				
Statistical index	Mean	Standard deviation		
Scale				
Toxic leadership	57/42	4/97		
Abusive supervision	8/84	1/55		
Autocratic leadership	11/36	1/87		
narcissism	12/91	3/02		
ambition	12/85	2/49		
unpredictable	11/45	2/31		

The results of table (2) show the mean and standard deviation of toxic organizational leadership and its dimensions. According to the above table, the highest score is related to the dimension of narcissism 12.91 (3.02) and the lowest average is related to the abusive supervision dimension with a mean and standard deviation of 8.84 (1.44).

Table 3: Descriptive findings of organizational trauma variable

Statistical index Scale	Mean	Standard Deviation
Organizational trauma	38/29	4/69

Table 3 shows that the mean and deviation of the organizational trauma score is 38.29 (4.69).

To investigate the hypothesis that toxic leadership through organizational fairness has a direct and indirect effect on organizational trauma. First, Pearson's correlation coefficient method and then path analysis was used.

Table 4: Pearson correlation coefficient between organizational fairness and toxic leadership with organizational trauma

with organizational trauma				
Variable	Organizational	Organizational trauma		
	Correlation	Sig		
	coefficient			
organizational fairness	-0/21**	0/010		
Distributive fairness	-0/13*	0/040		
Procedural fairness	-0/18*	0/032		
fairness	-0/13*	0/041		
Toxic leadership	0/23**	0/001		
Abusive supervision	0/18**	0/001		
Autocratic leadership	0/17**	0/001		
narcissism	0/16**	0/001		
ambition	0/13**	0/038		
unpredictable	0/15**	0/012		

The results of Table 4 show a negative correlation between the organizational fairness score and organizational trauma at the 0.01 level and a significant negative correlation at the 0.05 level between the subscales of distributive fairness, procedural fairness, and transactional fairness with organizational trauma. Also, there is a significant positive correlation between the total score of toxic leadership with organizational trauma and its subscales at the level of 0.01.

In order to examine the direct and indirect effects of the researched variables, the conceptual model of each path analysis has been designed and presented based on the research background. The exogenous, mediator, and endogenous variables of the first model are:

External variables: Zoharakin's leadership Mediating variable: organizational fairness Internal variable: organizational trauma

Table 5: Value and significance of path coefficients of the initial model of the proposed path

Paths		Undstandard effects	Standard effects	Standard deviation	T	Path significance
From	On					
Toxic	organizational	-0/03	-0/14	-0/05	2/67	0/040
leadership	fairness					
Toxic	Organizational	0/21	0/22	0/05	3/73	0/001
leadership	trauma					
organizational	Organizational	-0/08	-0/11	-0/04	2/75	0/031
fairness	trauma					

The results of the path coefficients model showed that toxic leadership had a negative direct relationship with organizational fairness and a significant positive direct relationship with organizational trauma. Also, there is a significant negative direct relationship between organizational fairness and organizational trauma. Analysis of the effect of mediating variables was done using the bootstrap test, which is reported in Table 6.

Table 6: Macro bootstrap and Preacher and Hayes test results for all mediating paths in the initial model

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Independe	Mediator	Dependent	Data	Bootstr	Bias	Std	%95	,
nt variable	variable	variable		ap		err.	confide	ence
							interva	1
							Lower limit	Upper limit
Toxic leadership	Organization al fairness	Organization al trauma	0/140	0/147	0/0001	0/01	0/038	0/079

In the above table, bootstrap was used to mediate relationships. Table 6 shows the results obtained from bootstrap in Preacher and Hayes macro program for all indirect (intermediate) paths. The contents of Table 6 indicate the significance of mediating paths. The confidence level for the confidence interval is 95, and the number of bootstrap resampling is 5000. Considering that zero is outside the confidence interval (upper and lower limits), these mediating relationships are significant. This way, the hypotheses related to indirect paths (mediation) were confirmed.

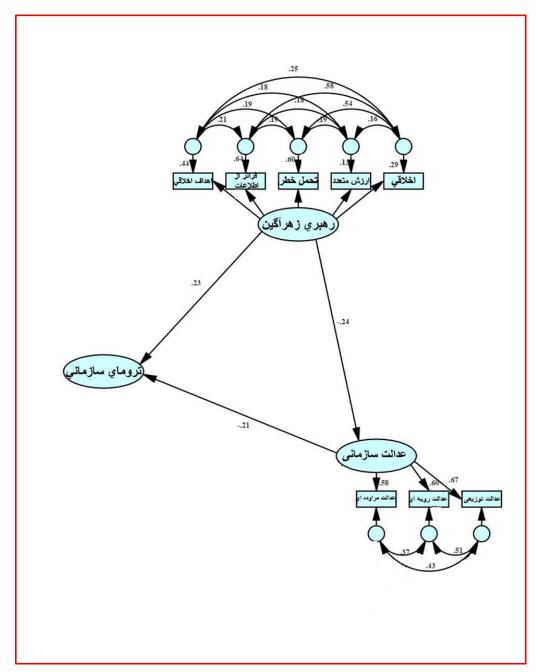


Figure 1: Final fitted model of standardized coefficients

**Table 7: Model fit indices** 

$X^2$	X <sup>2</sup> /df	CFI	GFI	RMSEA
21/39	1/88	0/98	0/97	0/067

As seen in Table 7, the goodness of fit index (GFI) was equal to 0.97, and the adjusted goodness of fit index (CFI) equal to 0.98 was obtained. The size of the indices obtained from the structural model fit test indicates that the model fits well. The root mean square error approximation (RMSEA) is equal to 0.01 and is less than 0.067, and this index also indicates the good fit of the model.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

This research was conducted to determine the mediating role of organizational fairness in the relationship between toxic leadership and organizational trauma among the teachers of education in Yasouj city. The results showed a significant positive correlation between toxic leadership and organizational trauma and its subscales (0.01). There is a negative correlation between organizational fairness and organizational trauma (0.01). Also, the results showed that organizational fairness plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between toxic leadership and organizational trauma in the Ministry of Sports and Youth employees. In the following, we will discuss the results and conclusions.

The findings of the present study are implicitly consistent with the results of Zare and Sepahvand (2019), Mortazavi and Nikkar (2013), Golparour and Nadi (2010), Amini et al. (2016), Lambert et al. (2018), Sendjaya et al. (2016), Hannah et al. (2011) are consistent. The behavior of toxic leaders and managers is one of the factors that cause mistrust in the employees of different organizations. If teachers distrust and are suspicious of their managers and supervisors, they prefer to remain silent. When teachers see their manager or supervisor as someone who easily insults them, they prefer to stay away from him and choose a passive position for themselves in the organization, which will affect the quality of education. Because toxic leadership tries to advance its interests by humiliating and destroying its employees and inflicting physical and mental harm on them, many behavioral variables of an organization's employees can be affected by this leadership style. When today's successful organizations seek to strengthen their members' moral virtues and competencies as much as possible, leaders with toxic styles create severe challenges to achieving organizational goals. On the other hand, employees objectify silence and organizational trauma by refusing to express ideas, opinions, and facts related to the organization to people who can make effective changes. In this context, employees feel that expressing their opinions and views does not make a difference in the situation or has negative consequences for them, so they refrain from expressing views and opinions to avoid possible harm. Therefore, organizational fairness can significantly mediate the relationship between toxic leadership and organizational trauma.

In explaining the mediating role of organizational fairness in the relationship between toxic leadership and organizational trauma, it can be said that, in fact, fairness in the organization is considered a motivational engine for people. Managers must keep fairness in mind in all directions and organizational situations and avoid unnecessary biases that will cause discouragement, decrease energy and decrease mental health in people. It is very important to give clear, relevant, and logical information and clear explanations about how to apply allocations to the people of the organization for more involvement in work and to create a positive view and trust towards the managers; Because the employees feel the value and respect that the manager has for them. By implementing the appropriate leadership style and providing clear information to their employees, successful organizations encourage them to participate, feel more attached, and be more passionate about their work. The sum of these factors can reduce organizational trauma among employees.

In explaining the significant negative relationship between organizational fairness and organizational trauma, it can be said that, according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, one of the basic needs is the material needs that cause job satisfaction. Unfairness in payment and provision of teachers' basic needs, in addition to dissatisfaction with the payment system, can also lead to dissatisfaction with other aspects of job satisfaction and a decrease in their enthusiasm. Also, most factors of employees' mental health and job enthusiasm are related to their type of job. In fact, with organizational fairness and solving problems in the form of cooperation and communication between employees and managers, the organizational trauma of employees is reduced.

Obviously, external factors such as social relations, age, economic factors, family problems, etc., greatly impact the level of organizational trauma of employees. However, we should remember that the organization, as a person's second home and second family, will significantly reduce or increase the happiness and mental health of a person. Existence of friendship groups in the organization; the high spirits of other friends and co-workers; encouraging and appreciating the efforts of employees by the manager; the desirability of the organization's physical environment; and finally, optimal management in the organization and providing appropriate leadership style; they are among the factors that will greatly affect the level of happiness, motivation and organizational trauma of the organization's employees. It is here that despite the organizational fairness along with the appropriate leadership style when entering the organization, a person forgets the problems and shortcomings of life outside the organization; and considers the organization as a safe environment that removes all the worries and pressures of daily life from their shoulders. Undoubtedly, working in such an environment is a source of comfort and encouragement, and considering the positive role of the organization in improving the morale and reducing the organizational trauma of the employees, they will not spare any effort to improve the organizational activities and promote the organization.

In explaining the obtained results, it can be said that employees' perception of fairness (income distribution, processes, and interactions) in the organization will be effective on the level of their organizational trauma. When people perceive organizational procedures as fair, they spend less time complaining about minor issues, do not exaggerate work problems, and present a positive image of their organization. Fair procedures make people feel less dissatisfied when faced with adverse consequences, while the perception of the unfairness of these procedures can cause resentment and anger and, consequently, organizational trauma in employees. In organizations where employees believe that the decision-making processes are unfair, they show less commitment towards employers, do more underwork, their intention to leave the service increases, performance decreases, and organizational behaviors are observed less. The results of the present study also showed that if employees are subjected to a leadership style in which employees have a positive understanding of organizational procedures; In the organization, promotion criteria and procedures for allocating rights and benefits are clearly defined; Decisions should be made away from any discrimination and partiality (fairness of procedures); and generally receive more support from the manager, they will have a higher understanding of organizational fairness and the level of organizational trauma will decrease in them. Therefore, managers who want to create an atmosphere in the organization where people's sense of empowerment increases should pay more attention to fairness in their relationships with employees.

Therefore, it is assumed that perceived organizational support and fairness are a precursor to reducing employee trauma. Because a person's general perception of the nature of support and fairness of the organizational environment and the organization's concern for the needs of employees, their feelings, and well-being promotes psychological security and, as a result, less organizational trauma in them.

The current research, like any other scientific research, has faced obstacles and limitations in practice; Some of these restrictions include the internal and some external aspects of the problem, and financial, administrative, and executive restrictions can be mentioned among these restrictions. This research has been conducted on the teachers of Yasouj City Education Department, and the generalization of its results to other communities should be made with caution. Also, in this research, the most important limitation was the use of correlation methods and self-reporting tools. In this method, the discovered relationships cannot be assumed as causal relationships, and in self-reporting tools, people may need more self-regard and answer the items responsibly. According to the findings, it is suggested that managers pay attention to the signs of organizational fairness and management styles and design programs based on them to reduce the organizational trauma of employees. To increase the organizational fairness of employees, training workshops can be used, and by applying necessary measures such as reducing unhealthy competition,

job tensions can be reduced, and in this way, the increase in organizational trauma of employees can be prevented.

### **Ethics**

This research observed ethical standards, including obtaining informed consent and ensuring privacy and confidentiality. Also, while completing the questionnaires while emphasizing completing all the questions, the participants were free to withdraw from the research at any time and provide individual information. They were assured that the information would remain confidential, which was strictly adhered to.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

According to the authors, this article has no financial sponsor or conflict of interest.

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