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ORGANISATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY MASTERS, UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND



Toxic leadership, social support and individual and organisational outcomes.

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28 161

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A research report submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters in Psychology by Coursework and Research Report in the field of Organisational Psychology in the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg on 15 March 2018

Plagiarism Declaration

I, Sarah Jesse Middleton, declare that this research project is my own, unaided work. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or for examination at this or any other university.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Acknowledgements

I never thought this day would come, but here it is, and I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the following people, whose collective assistance and support made the completion of this research study possible:

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Abstract

Growing numbers of studies point to the negative impact and stress of Toxic Leadership (TL) on employees, both in their personal and work wellbeing. Such negatives include high levels of stress, reduced self-esteem and increases in alcohol and drug abuse. TL has also been found to reduce job satisfaction, organisational commitment behaviour and organisational citizenship behaviours. In addition, TL has been thought to result in severe health outcomes including; post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal ideation and extreme forms of physical illness such as cancer and heart attacks.

This South African study, based on a sample of 258 employees working across a wide range of industries, was conducted to explore Toxic Leadership and its effect on three dependant/outcomes variables. These outcome variables included Voluntary Turnover Intention, Work Engagement and Organisational Commitment Behaviour. In addition, Social Support and its role as a moderator was investigated. Consenting participants filled out six questionnaires namely; a Self-Developed Demographic Questionnaire, Schmidt's Toxic Leadership scale (2008), Kantor's (2013) Voluntary Turnover Intention (VTI) Scale, Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), Mowday, Steers & Porter (1979) Organisational Commitment Behaviour Questionnaire (OCQ) and Procidano and Heller's (1983) Perceived Social Support Scale (PSI) (Adapted version).

The results of the study indicated that Toxic Leadership was significantly correlated to the outcome variables. The simple regression also showed that Toxic Leadership raised levels of Voluntary Turnover Intention and lowered levels of Work Engagement, Organisational Commitment Behaviour and Social Support. While Social Support was directly related to the three dependant/outcomes variables with it having a positive effect on Work Engagement and Organisational Commitment Behaviour and decreasing levels of Voluntary Turnover Intention within the regressions. However, within the moderated multiple regressions, Toxic leadership relationship with Social Support actually had an inverse effect on the outcome variables. This is because instead of improving levels of Voluntary Turnover Intention, Work Engagement and Organisational Commitment Behaviour, it made negative effects of Toxic Leadership even worse. Some possible reasons for this was argued in this research. Finally, in addition to these findings, limitations and further contributions for future research into Toxic Leadership was also discussed.

Keywords: Toxic Leadership, Employees, Leadership, South Africa, Voluntary Turnover Intention, Work Engagement, Organisational Commitment Behaviour, Social Support.

Rationale

Growing numbers of studies point to the negative impact and stress of Toxic Leadership (TL) on employees, both in their personal and work wellbeing (Lipman-Blumen, 2006). Such negatives include high levels of stress, reduced self-esteem and increases in alcohol and drug abuse (Ashforth, 1994; Burton & Hoobler, 2006; Lian, Ferris, & Brown, 2012; Tepper, 2007). TL has also been found to reduce job satisfaction, organisational commitment behaviour and organisational citizenship behaviours (Aryee, Sun, Chen & Debrah, 2007; Rafferty & Restubog, 2011; Steele & Bullies, 2009; Tepper, 2007). In addition, TL has been thought to result in severe health outcomes including; post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal ideation and extreme forms of physical illness such as cancer and heart attacks (Asbery, 2015; Wilson, 2014).

Research has found TL to be present and to affect a range of organisations globally such as in the medical services (Rouse, 2009), education (Mahlangu, 2014) and in the miltary (Reed, 2004; Wilson, 2014). The presence of Toxic Leaders are not limited in terms of hierarchy of command. Despite TL's growing exposure in a range of organisations worldwide, the quantity of research does not appear to align with the severity of the problem, especially in South Africa. There is a notable dearth of research within the South African context, with only a few studies being conducted and published such as Mahlangu's study (2014) on Toxic Leadership in township schools. Some South African theorists recently have begun conversations around TL (Ngambi, 2011; Booysen, 2001, as cited in Robbins, 2001; Ronnie, 2017; Tsele, 2017). Despite this small emerging focus on this topic, the amount of the research still does not seem to align with the severity of TL and its potential negative outcomes for the South African workplace.

Thus, given the lack of research in South Africa, there needs to be more research on the existence and extent of TL and its possible impact. As a result, this research was aimed to examine the prevalence of TL and its outcomes within South African organisations. The outcomes which included Voluntary Turnover Intention, Work Engagement and Organisational Commitment Behaviour, a possible factor that could potentially mitigate these outcomes was discussed namely; Social Support.