

# New wine in the old bottle: Effects of leadership styles on turnover intention through mediator and moderator analysis using PLS-SEM

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**Abstract** Despite the extensive study conducted on turnover intention in the field of human resource management, there remain a dearth of studies investigating the relationships among leadership style, employee health, mindfulness, and turnover intention. Underpinned by social exchange theory and conservation of resources theory, this study will address the gap by examining the effects of authoritarian leadership on police officers' turnover intentions directly and indirectly through employee health under the different level of employee mindfulness. Data were collected from a sample of 351 police officers serving at the Royal Malaysian Police training centre using self-administered online survey questionnaire. Descriptive analysis was conducted using the SPSS Version 29.0 software and partial least squares structural equation modelling was run to test research hypotheses using SmartPLS4. Results of the study showed that, authoritarian leadership has a significant relationship with turnover intention, yet it has a stronger effect on employee health. The study also found significant partial mediation whereby employee health mediated the relationship between authoritarian leadership and turnover intention. However, employee mindfulness did not significantly moderate the relationship between authoritarian leadership and employee health. This finding suggested that there are other factors that have a greater influence in mitigating the effects of the relationship. The findings contribute to the extension of knowledge corpus and provide benefit to organisations in understanding the effect of authoritarian leadership style and employee mindfulness on employee health and turnover intention. An organisation can take necessary action to mitigate the negative effect of authoritarian leadership towards employee health and turnover intention. Using social exchange theory and conservation of resources theory, this study examines an authoritarian leadership as the predominant factor influencing turnover intention among police officers. Furthermore, this study investigates the mediating effect of employee health on the relationship between authoritarian leadership with turnover intention, and the moderator effect of employee mindfulness on the relationship between authoritarian leadership and employee health, which this relationship was not previously explored in the existing literature within this field.

**Keywords:** authoritarian leadership, employee health, mindfulness, turnover intention, police officer

## 1. Introduction

Turnover intention has been extensively explored by researchers from diverse disciplines, aiming to gain a comprehensive understanding of the concept and enhance their ability to effectively manage and retain their employees (Giao et al., 2020; Hom et al., 2017; Tran et al., 2020). Despite this extensive body of research, turnover intention remains a relevant and timely issue, as contemporary organisations operate within rapidly changing socioeconomic and technological environments that continuously reshape employees' work experiences and expectations (Jabeen et al., 2020). The increasing prevalence of turnover poses substantial challenges for human resource management due to its adverse organisational consequences, including the loss of experienced and skilled employees and the substantial costs associated with recruitment and replacement (Giao et al., 2020; Srivastava & Agrawal, 2020). These challenges are further amplified in dynamic work contexts, where employees are more exposed to alternative employment opportunities and heightened job mobility (Lyons & Bandura, 2020). While turnover can have detrimental effects on an organisation, focusing on turnover intention is more beneficial for organisations. It is because turnover intention is the phase in which employees are contemplating leaving the organisation and it is the precursor to the actual act of quitting (Lyons & Bandura, 2020). During this crucial phase, human resource management has the chance to implement strategies that will help retain employees within the organisation (Pandita & Ray, 2018).

Previous studies have identified several factors that contribute to turnover intention. These include conflicts between work and family resulting from long working hours, (Jabeen et al., 2020); the effect of masculinity culture on psychological disorders in the workplace, (Workman-Stark, 2020); dissatisfaction with work experience and physical ability for carrying out tasks (B. Kim & Xu, 2020); work stress (Hu et al., 2021; Kanitha & Naik, 2021; Khawaja et al., 2021); and leadership styles (Hwang et al., 2022; W. H. Kim et al., 2022). While there have been numerous studies on turnover intention, there remains an area that requires further exploration, specifically in the realm of leadership, specifically authoritarian leadership (Koveshnikov et al., 2020). Authoritarian leadership should be conceptually distinguished from other negative leadership constructs such as abusive supervision and autocratic leadership. Authoritarian leadership primarily emphasises hierarchical authority, centralized decision-making, and strict control over subordinates (Cheng et al., 2004). In contrast, abusive supervision refers to sustained hostile verbal and non-verbal behaviours toward subordinates, such as ridicule or public criticism (Tepper, 2000). Autocratic leadership, meanwhile, involves unilateral decision-making with limited subordinate participation, but does not necessarily entail the strong obedience expectations and hierarchical dominance that characterize authoritarian leadership. These conceptual distinctions are important because each leadership style may influence employee outcomes through different psychological and relational mechanisms.

Consistent with social exchange theory, leadership styles that promote creativity and employee involvement in decision-making encourage reciprocal responses from employees, resulting in higher levels of prosocial behaviour and organisational loyalty, as evidenced in prior studies (Abdillah et al., 2022; Hameed et al., 2021). In contrast, authoritarian leadership may create perceptions of imbalance in the leader-employee relationship due to its emphasis on control, authority, and limited employee autonomy. Such leadership behaviours may foster negative reciprocity among employees, leading to adverse outcomes such as turnover intention (Azizah et al., 2020; Saleem et al., 2018). According to Piwowar-Sulej and Iqbal (2022), there has been a significant emphasis on positive leadership outcomes, leaving a gap in empirical research on negative leadership outcomes. Examining authoritarian leadership is therefore important because it remains prevalent in highly hierarchical and rule-bound organisations, such as law enforcement agencies, where formal authority and obedience are embedded in organisational structures. Based on the preceding arguments, this study seeks to examine the relationship between leadership style and turnover intention, as leadership represents one of several organisational factors that may influence employees' withdrawal cognitions. Understanding this relationship can provide employers with insights into how leadership practices are associated with turnover intention and may inform the development of more targeted retention strategies.

Thus, this study contributes to the literature on turnover intention in several ways. First, it advances existing knowledge by examining leadership style as one organisational antecedent of employees' turnover intention, thereby extending prior research that has predominantly focused on individual and job-related predictors. Second, by grounding the proposed relationships in social exchange theory and conservation of resources theory, this study offers a clearer theoretical explanation of how leadership practices may shape employee withdrawal cognitions. Finally, by providing empirical evidence from public-sector law enforcement, this study enriches the contextual understanding of leadership-turnover intention relationships.

## 2. Literature Review and hypotheses development

### 2.1. Social exchange theory

Social exchange theory posits that workplace relationships are governed by norms of reciprocity, whereby employees respond to favourable or unfavourable treatment from their organisation or leaders with corresponding attitudes and behaviours (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1961). Within this framework, leadership behaviours serve as salient social cues that shape employees' perceptions of how they are valued and treated in the organisation. Empirical studies grounded in social exchange theory demonstrate that supportive and considerate leadership behaviours foster positive reciprocal responses, such as organisational trust, citizenship behaviour, and employee loyalty (Fan et al., 2021; Kaur & Randhawa, 2021; Liborius & Kiewitz, 2022). Conversely, when leadership behaviours are perceived as harsh or unsupportive, employees may reciprocate through negative attitudinal and health-related outcomes. Drawing on this theoretical logic, authoritarian leadership which characterised by control, dominance, and limited consideration for employee well-being may disrupt social exchange relationships, thereby undermine employee health and increase withdrawal cognitions such as turnover intention. Employee health is therefore conceptualised as a key mediating mechanism through which authoritarian leadership influences turnover intention, as deteriorating health reflects employees' negative reciprocal response to unfavourable leadership treatment.

### 2.2. Conservation of resources theory

Authoritarian leadership is characterised by strict control, unilateral decision-making, and limited employee autonomy, which may place sustained psychological demands on employees. Drawing on conservation of resources theory, such leadership behaviours can be understood as threats to employees valued psychological resources, including emotional stability and well-being. COR theory posits that individuals experience stress when their resources are threatened or depleted and must expend additional resources to cope with these demands (Hobfoll, 2001; Hobfoll, 1989). In highly controlling leadership

contexts, employees may be required to continuously regulate their behaviour and emotions, leading to resource depletion and poorer employee health. Accordingly, authoritarian leadership is expected to be negatively associated with employee health.

The conservation of resources theory perspective, personal resources may help individuals manage or buffer the effects of resource loss (Hobfoll 1989). Mindfulness, as a personal psychological resource, enables individuals to maintain present-moment awareness and regulate stress responses, thereby supporting resource conservation. Prior research suggests that mindfulness can reduce the adverse effects of organisational stressors by helping employees manage resource depletion (Murtaza et al., 2022). However, COR theory also suggests that personal resources may be insufficient when stressors are intense or persistent. In the context of authoritarian leadership, the chronic and structural nature of control may limit the extent to which mindfulness can protect employee health, potentially explaining the weak or non-significant moderating effects observed in prior studies (Klug et al., 2022)

### 2.3. Turnover intention

Turnover means the movement of employees from the boundaries of the social system of the organization that is either inside or out of the organization to leave their position or position to find a new position, change workplace or leave the workplace due to the negative psychological motivation of the employee (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977; Lin & Huang, 2020; Mobley, 1977; Toksöz, 2021). From the definition, the turnover intention can be interpreted as the thought and intention of an employee to leave the workplace to find a new position or change workplace due to negative psychological motivation. Turnover intention has been included in past studies as a proxy for actual quitting behaviour (Giao et al., 2020; Simard & Parent-Lamarque, 2022). It has various negative effects on individual employees and organisations. For example, turnover intention can generate adverse consequences at both the individual and organisational levels, even before actual employee departure occurs. From an individual perspective, employees who remain in the organisation often experience increased workloads due to staff shortages and the loss of experienced colleagues or mentors, which can persist over extended periods (Sepeng et al., 2020). These conditions may heighten stress levels and increase the likelihood of negative workplace experiences, such as bullying and job dissatisfaction, ultimately leading to declines in employee work performance (Tran et al., 2020).

At the organisational level, turnover intention and subsequent turnover impose substantial costs related to recruitment, selection, and training of new employees. In addition, organisations may suffer from reduced productivity, loss of strategic knowledge, and disruption to operational continuity (Lyons & Bandura, 2020). Collectively, these consequences highlight the importance of understanding turnover intention as a critical precursor to employee turnover and its associated costs. From an individual aspect, employees who are still working need to bear the workload of being left behind for a long time periods (Sepeng et al., 2020) and losing a mentor. This may cause stress, incidents of bullying, job dissatisfaction and decreased work performance (Tran et al., 2020). For an organization on the other hand, have to bear the high costs of recruitment, selection and training of new employees, as well as costs related to lost productivity, possible loss of strategic knowledge and theft of trade secrets (Lyons & Bandura, 2020; Paul & Kee, 2020).

According to Dayal and Verma (2022), there are various factors of turnover intention such as demographics, salary, organizational culture, work pressure, organizational commitment, organizational justice, organizational climate, promotion opportunities, job satisfaction, co-worker relationships, communication, reputation and organizational policies, as well as leadership style. Baquero (2022) also mentioned several other factors such as harsh supervision, fatigue and job insecurity that cause the turnover intention. While the turnover intention literature documents multiple influencing factors (Baquero, 2022; Dayal & Verma, 2022) the role of leadership style in shaping employees' turnover intentions remains insufficiently examined, particularly in terms of its underlying mechanisms. This gap suggests the need for additional research on leadership-turnover intention relationships. Past studies have focused on transformational leadership styles (Alhashmi et al., 2017; Alkarabsheh et al., 2022; Ghufuran Ali Khan et al., 2022; Qi et al., 2022); transactional leadership (Aldarmaki & Kasim, 2019; Sehanovic et al., 2022); laissez-faire leadership (Ahmad et al., 2018; López-Cabarcos et al., 2021; Magbity et al., 2020); ethical leadership (McKenna & Jeske, 2021; Suifan et al., 2020); paternal leadership (Martins et al., 2022); servant leadership (Peng et al., 2021); and abusive leadership (Simard & Parent-Lamarque, 2022) in understanding employee attitudes and behaviours in organisational settings, including well-being, performance, and withdrawal-related outcomes.

In contrast, authoritarian leadership has received comparatively less empirical attention, despite its prevalence in highly hierarchical and rule-bound organisations (Farh & Cheng, 2000). Prior scholars have noted that authoritarian leadership remains underexplored relative to other leadership styles, particularly in contemporary organisational research that increasingly emphasises empowerment-oriented leadership approaches. Examining authoritarian leadership remains important because it reflects a distinct leadership logic characterised by control, obedience, and power distance, which continues to shape employee experiences in many public-sector and high-authority contexts. Understanding its effects is therefore necessary to provide a more balanced and can expand the existing body of knowledge related to the turnover intention especially from the aspect of its relationship with mediating variables (Afshan et al., 2022; Koveshnikov et al., 2022).

### 2.4. Authoritarian leadership and turnover intention

Authoritarian leadership is a style of leaders who use absolute power to control and demand unconditional obedience from their subordinates and ensure that subordinates accept and respect a strict and centralized hierarchy (Cheng et al., 2004; Wang et al., 2019). Such leaders closely monitor employees, withhold critical information, discourage participation, and frequently criticize subordinates' performance (Islam et al., 2022). This leadership style reflects a dominance-oriented approach emphasising control, hierarchy, and unilateral decision-making, often described as "firmly authoritative" and "power-and control-oriented" (Cheng et al., 2004). Based on social exchange theory perspective, employment relationships are governed by reciprocal exchanges, whereby positive treatment from leaders fosters favourable employee attitudes and behaviours, while negative treatment triggers withdrawal responses (Kaur & Randhawa, 2021; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Authoritarian leadership, by limiting autonomy, trust, and socio-emotional resources, signals an imbalanced exchange relationship. Employees who perceive such leadership behaviours are less likely to feel valued or supported, thereby weakening their sense of obligation toward the organisation. As a result, employees may seek to restore balance in the exchange relationship by reducing their commitment and increasing their intention to leave the organisation.

Consistent with this theoretical reasoning, prior empirical studies predominantly associate authoritarian leadership with adverse employee outcomes. For instance, Pizzolitto et al. (2023) demonstrate that authoritarian leadership negatively affects leader-follower relationships, employee performance, self-efficacy, and innovative behaviour. Similarly, Islam et al. (2022) and Chu (2014) report that leaders' disregard for employee input and excessive control heighten dissatisfaction and psychological strain among subordinates. Further evidence suggests that authoritarian leaders create perceptions of unfair treatment, fear of blame, and psychological insecurity, which undermine employees' ability to function effectively and safely at work (Briker et al., 2021; Fang et al., 2019). Drawing on SET, such negative exchanges act as a stimulus for withdrawal cognitions, leading employees to develop stronger turnover intentions as a response to persistent dissatisfaction with authoritarian leadership (Islam et al., 2022). Therefore, the research hypothesis is stated as follows:

H1: Authoritarian leadership have a relationship with turnover intention.

### 2.5. Authoritarian leadership and employee health

According to the World Health Organisation (1948), health is an overall well-being of an individual encompassing physical, mental, and social aspects, and not being in a state of illness or helplessness. An individual's health is comprised of several components, such as physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional well-being, which can be affected by the society, economic and physical abuse, and even a characteristics and behaviour of others. Furthermore, the overall well-being of an employee is significantly related to their personal health (Grawitch et al., 2006). The relationship is an ongoing process that involves self-awareness and making positive choices to improve one's lifestyle (Stoewen, 2015).

Previous studies revealed that leadership style has an impact on employee health, but the emphasis is on the role of leaders in creating a healthy work environment (Giordano-Mulligan & Eckardt, 2019); as well as the relationship between leaders and employee well-being (Farr-Wharton et al., 2021; Koon & Ho, 2021); mental health (Warszewska-Makuch et al., 2015); and fatigue (Mcpherson et al., 2022; Mete et al., 2022). This emphasises create a gap for further research on the relationship between leadership and employee health, particularly mental and physical health, in order to work more efficient employees is crucially should have a good health. In accordance with the argument, this study will examine the relationship between authoritarian leadership style and employee health. Employees experience a lack of motivation, fatigue, and low self-esteem, which ultimately affects their overall well-being. Therefore, the research hypothesis is stated as follows:

H2: Authoritarian leadership have a relationship with employee health.

### 2.6. Employee health and turnover intention

Good health is associated with greater efficiency of job performance, providing an advantage in competitiveness and a lower level of turnover intention (Olafsen et al., 2021). As such, employees who suffer from poor health often disrupts their activities, making it difficult for them to work effectively and impacting their job performance. When employees' health is affected, it contributes to an increase in the intention to quit (Saah et al., 2021). For instance, the health of law enforcement personnel is crucial in maintaining the mission of ensuring public safety (Mumford et al., 2021). If law enforcement officers do not have good health, it becomes challenging for them to carry out their entrusted responsibilities, and it may even lead them to quit their jobs (Khattak et al., 2021; Teng et al., 2021).

Prior research indicates that employee health plays a significant role in shaping workplace attitudes and behaviours. For example, Ki et al. (2020) demonstrate that employee health is closely associated with behavioural outcomes at work. From a withdrawal perspective, employees who experience poorer physical and psychological health are more likely to develop negative work-related attitudes, which may increase their intention to leave the organisation (Olafsen et al., 2021; Saah et al., 2021; Steffens et al., 2018). Conversely, workplace stress has been shown to undermine employees' physical, psychological, and emotional health, thereby intensifying withdrawal cognitions such as turnover intention (Majeed et al., 2021). Taken together, these findings suggest that employee health functions as an important psychological condition influencing employees' intentions to remain with or leave their organisation. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Employee health has relationship with turnover intention.

### 2.7. Mediating role of employee health

Prior research suggests that leadership styles shape employees' psychological and physical states, which in turn influence their work-related attitudes and withdrawal cognitions. Drawing on social exchange theory, leadership behaviours signal the quality of the exchange relationship between leaders and employees, thereby shaping employees' well-being and subsequent behavioural responses. Supportive and considerate leadership behaviours are associated with enhanced employee health, which fosters positive reciprocal attitudes such as commitment and intentions to remain with the organisation (Olafsen et al., 2021; You et al., 2021).

In contrast, authoritarian leadership is characterised by excessive control, limited autonomy, and unilateral decision-making, which may undermine employees' psychological and emotional resources. Empirical evidence indicates that authoritarian leadership is associated with heightened stress, emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and depressive symptoms, all of which adversely affect employee health (Chiang et al., 2021; Erskine & Georgiou, 2017; Islam et al., 2022; Nie & Lämsä, 2018).

Employee health, in turn, has been shown to play a critical role in shaping turnover intention. Employees experiencing poorer physical and psychological health are more likely to develop withdrawal cognitions and intentions to leave the organisation, whereas healthier employees tend to report stronger intentions to remain (Song et al., 2021; Tayama et al., 2018; Teng et al., 2021). Consistent with this mechanism, prior studies have demonstrated that health-related states such as emotional exhaustion function as mediators in the relationship between leadership styles and turnover intention (López-Cabarcos et al., 2021; Saleh et al., 2022). Building on this evidence, employee health is expected to transmit the effects of authoritarian leadership to turnover intention. Accordingly, employee health is proposed as a mediating mechanism linking authoritarian leadership and turnover intention. Therefore, the research hypothesis is stated as follows:

H4: Employee health mediates the relationship between authoritarian leadership and turnover intention.

### 2.8. Moderating role of mindfulness

Mindfulness can be described as a state of heightened awareness in which individuals attend to their thoughts and emotions in the present moment in a non-judgmental manner (Baer et al., 2006; Kabat-Zinn, 2005). In organisational settings, mindfulness has been recognised as an important psychological capability that enhances employees' attention, emotional regulation, and coping capacity when facing challenging work situations (Amina et al., 2021; Hwang et al., 2022). Employees with higher levels of mindfulness are better able to observe workplace events objectively, regulate emotional reactions, and respond to stressors with greater cognitive flexibility (Olafsen et al., 2021). As a result, mindfulness enables individuals to manage work-related pressures more effectively and maintain better psychological functioning.

According to the conservation of resources theory, an individual's personal resources play a crucial role in protecting individuals from resource depletion caused by workplace stressors (Hobfoll, 1989; Tafvelin et al., 2019). In this study, mindfulness is conceptualised as an important personal resource that can influence how employees interpret and respond to authoritarian leadership behaviours. Authoritarian leadership is characterised by strict control, dominance, and limited employee autonomy, which may create stressful work environments and negatively affect employee health through psychological strain and emotional exhaustion (Brown et al., 2007; Chiang et al., 2021; Islam et al., 2022). However, employees with higher levels of mindfulness are more capable of regulating emotional responses and maintaining psychological balance when confronted with such leadership behaviours.

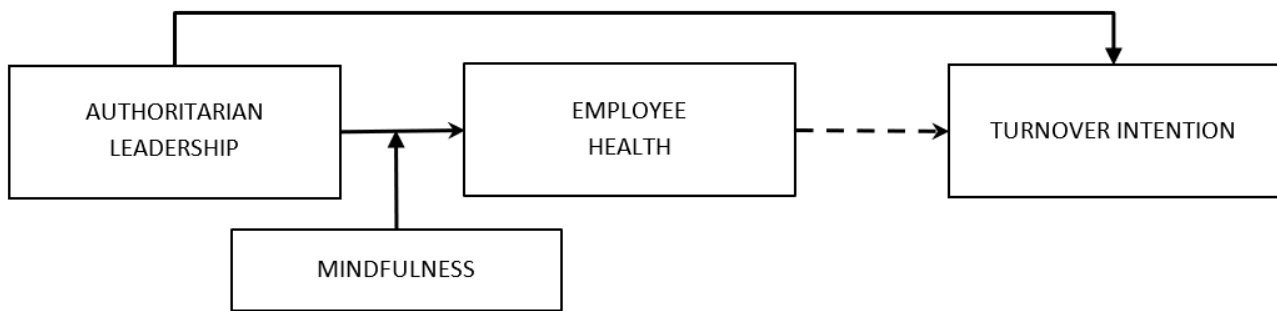
Prior studies demonstrate that mindfulness enhances psychological resilience and adaptive coping, enabling individuals to buffer the negative health consequences arising from unfavourable work environments (Chen et al., 2022; Hollas et al., 2022). For instance, Shan et al. (2022) found that authoritarian leadership contributes to employee health problems by fostering perceptions of an unhealthy work environment, yet employees with stronger internal coping resources are less vulnerable to such adverse effects. Specifically, mindfulness enables employees to remain attentive to present experiences without overreacting to negative stimuli, thereby reducing the likelihood that authoritarian leadership behaviours will be interpreted as overwhelming or personally threatening. Thus allows employees to conserve and replenish psychological resources by preventing excessive emotional depletion when confronted with authoritarian leadership behaviours (Diamond, 2013; Feng, 2022). Therefore, mindfulness as a moderation factor in the relationship between authoritarian leadership and employee health. In line with the argument, the hypothesis of this study is stated as follows:

H5: Mindfulness moderates the relationship between authoritarian leadership and employee health such that this relationship is weaker when mindfulness is high compared to when it is low.

The proposed conceptual framework showing all the hypothesized relationships is illustrated in Figure 1.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Data collection and Sample Size



**Figure 1** Proposed theoretical framework.

The questionnaire for this study was self-administered and distributed through the WhatsApp application by appointed police officers after obtaining permission to conduct the study from the commanding officer of the formation. Data were collected from police officers who are easily accessible or willing to participate. Participants were rank from Corporal to Deputy Superintendent and work in Royal Malaysia Police training centre. The selection of the ranks due to it high turnover rates. A total of 422 police officers voluntarily participated in the questionnaire. However, the final number of questionnaires used was 351 for further analysis.

### 3.2. Measurement

The questionnaire for this study uses a 7-point Likert scale, as recommended by Taherdoost (2019) and Green and Rao (1970). It is more accurate measurement tool because it has an optimal level of reliability (McKelvie, 1978; Preston & Colman, 2000; Symonds, 1924) and can reduce the problem of biased feedback or response bias (Weijters et al., 2010). To measure turnover intention, the 6-item turnover intention scale by Bothma and Roodt (2013) was used. This scale has the advantage of assessing employees' intention to quit or predicting actual quitting behaviour (Bothma & Roodt, 2013). Authoritarian leadership is measured using the paternalistic leadership scale developed by (Cheng et al., 2004). The selection of this instrument was because it has a high alpha coefficient value between  $\alpha = 0.88$  and  $0.91$  (Huang et al., 2023; Tu et al., 2023) and its validity is certified for the context of studies in Asia (Islam et al., 2022). Employee health in this study is conceptualised as a multidimensional construct encompassing both psychological and physical well-being. In occupational settings, employees' mental and physical health conditions are often interrelated and jointly influence work outcomes such as stress, performance, and turnover intention. Consistent with the World Health Organization's definition of health as a state of complete physical and mental well-being rather than merely the absence of disease (World Health Organization, 1948). Therefore, measuring both dimensions provides a more comprehensive representation of employee health. Mental health was measured using the Malay version of GHQ-12 measurement scale by Yusoff, Abdul Rahim and Yaacob (2009); and physical health was measured using a combination of the Swiss Health Questionnaire (SHQ) by Gaudenz et al. (2019); and the Physical Health Questionnaire (PHQ) by Schat, Kelloway, and Desmarais (2005). The selection of those scales is because they have a high reliability value between  $\alpha = 0.69$  and  $0.92$  (Abdul Rahman & Asmad, 2023; Gaudenz et al., 2019; H. Kim et al., 2011; Samsudin & Hong, 2016). This study also used the Freiburg Anxiety Inventory (FMI) by Walach et al. (2006).

### 3.3. Instrument Translation

The authoritarian leadership, employee health, mindfulness and turnover intention questionnaires used for this study were written in English. Thus, the English questionnaires were translated into the Malay language through the back translation process suggested by Brislin (1970). This is to ensure that the questionnaire is understood by the respondents, from the police officers in the ranks of Corporal to Deputy Superintendent.

## 4. Data Analysis and result

The data obtained from 351 respondents were analysed using descriptive analysis and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) statistical techniques. In doing so, SPSS 29.0 and SmartPLS 4.0 were used. PLS-SEM was selected as the primary analytical technique because the research model includes formative measurement and complex structural relationships, which are more appropriately estimated using variance-based SEM techniques. Unlike covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM), which is primarily designed for reflective measurement models, PLS-SEM provides a robust approach for estimating models that include formative constructs and multiple structural paths (Hair et al., 2014; Hair et al., 2019). In addition, PLS-SEM places minimal distributional assumptions on the data and is suitable for analysing behavioural research data that may deviate from multivariate normality. Given the study's objective of explaining variance in turnover intention and employee health, PLS-SEM offers an appropriate and robust analytical approach for estimating the hypothesised relationships (Dash & Paul, 2021; Hair et al., 2014; Hair et al., 2011).

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the study respondents. The results indicate that the majority of participants were Malay (88%), married (79%), and male (83%). Most respondents were aged between 36 and 45 years (38%) and held a Malaysian Certificate of Education (MCE) as their highest academic qualification (64%). Regarding their professional experience, around 49% of the participants had worked for 16 or more years and 81% of them were either a Corporal or a Sergeant.

**Table 1** Demographic profile.

Demographic profile	No. of respondents = 351	(%)
<b>Race</b>		
Malay	310	88
Cina	3	1
India	14	4
Others	24	7
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single	67	19
Married	276	79
Widow or Widower	8	2
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	291	83
Female	60	17
<b>Age</b>		
Below 25	48	14
26 - 35	103	29
36 - 45	135	38
46 -50	21	6
Above 51	44	13
<b>Academic</b>		
MCE	236	67
MHSC	31	9
Diploma	39	11
Bachelor's degree	29	8
Master's degree	16	5
<b>Years of employment</b>		
Less 5 years	68	19
5 – 10 years	56	16
11 – 15 years	54	15
More than 16 years	173	49
<b>Rank</b>		
Corporal - Sergeant	283	81
Sergeant Major – Sub Inspector	33	9
Inspector – Assistant Superintendent of Police	27	8
Deputy Superintendent of Police - Superintendent	8	2

*Note:* MCE = Malaysian Certificate of Education; MHSC = Malaysian Higher School Certificate.

#### 4.1. Measurement Model

Following Hair et al. (2022), the psychometric properties of the measurement scales were evaluated in terms of indicator reliability, construct reliability, and validity. Figure 2 and Table 2 present the descriptive statistics, reliability, and validity of all study variables. Indicator reliability was assessed using factor loadings, with values above 0.70 considered indicative of a strong relationship between an observed variable and its underlying construct (Hair et al., 2022). Loadings between 0.40 and 0.70 were evaluated for potential removal; indicators were only considered for deletion if their removal increased the composite reliability of the construct. In the present study, all indicators exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, except for ANL2, ANL6, and PH5 to PH7. These indicators were retained due to content validity considerations, as they capture important aspects of the constructs that would otherwise be underrepresented. Next, the researcher assessed the internal consistency reliability of each construct using Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) and the Composite Reliability (CR). The results from Table 2 indicated that all variables surpassed the threshold value of 0.70, hence validating the reliability of all constructs (Hair et al. 2014). Then, the

Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was analysed to establish convergent validity and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) to estimate the ratio of between constructs correlation and within construct correlation. It is necessary for the average variance extracted (AVE) value to exceed 0.50, as suggested by Hair and others (2014) and Henseler and others (2016). As shown in Table 2, the AVE values for all constructs were above 0.50, which indicated acceptable convergent validity (Hair et al., 2022) suggested a value below 0.85 if there are conceptually similar constructs in the path model. In addition, discriminant validity is confirmed when all the HTMT values are below 0.9. This study concluded that there is sufficient evidence of discriminant validity for all construct (Table 3).

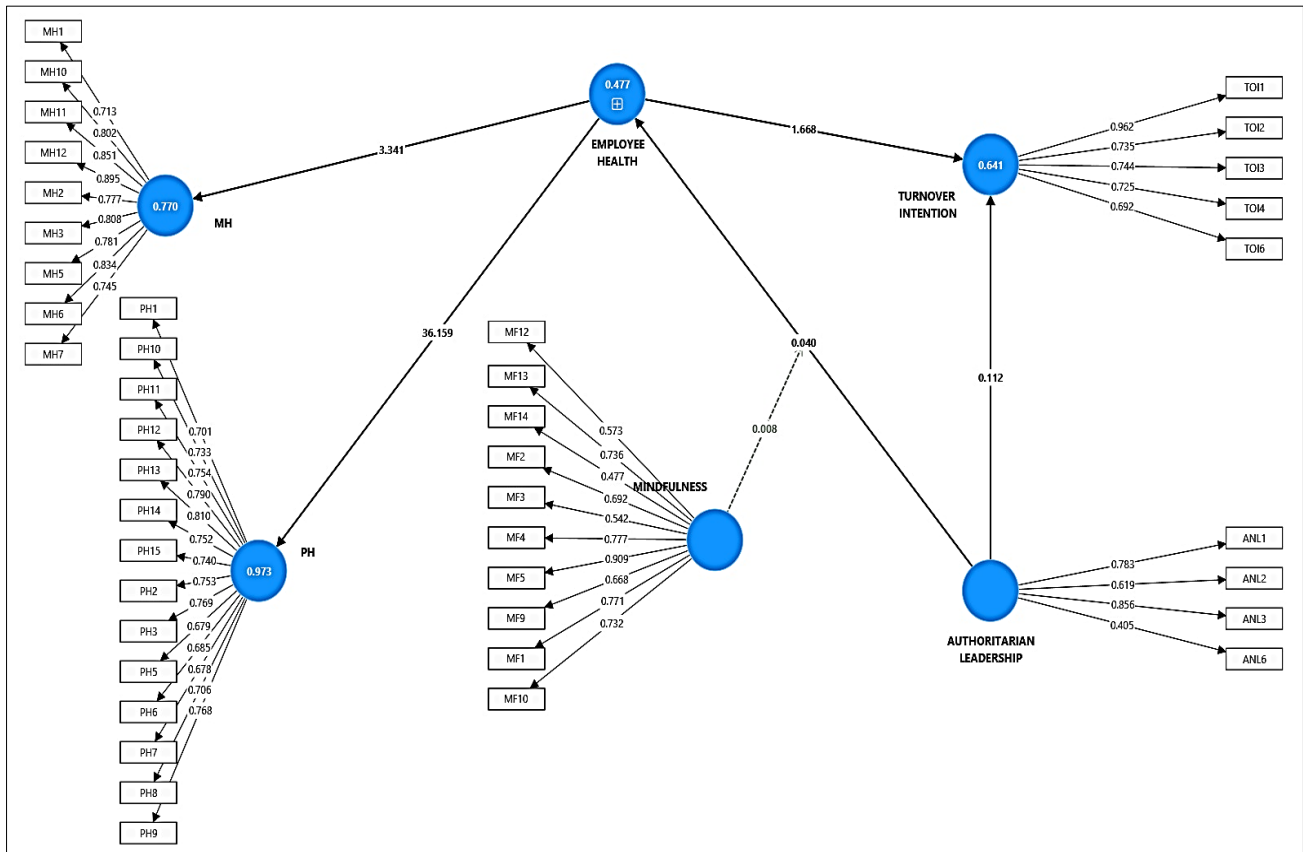


Figure 2 Measurement model.

4.2. Structural model of relationship between ANL, EH, MF and TOI

After the measurement model was confirmed the validity and reliability, the next step was to analyse the proposed structural model. Referring to Hair and others (2022), to analyse the hypothesised model, the researcher run the PLS bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resample on the full model to generate path coefficients and their significance level. Referring to Table 4 below, Authoritarian Leadership (ANL) shows to have significantly positive relationship with Turnover Intention (TOI) ( $\beta = 0.221$ ,  $p\text{-value} = 0.000$ ), with ANL contributing 64.1% of the variance. The effect size ( $f^2 = 0.112$ ) demonstrates a moderate impact, while the predictive relevance ( $Q^2 = 0.020$ ) is relatively low. Therefore, H<sub>1</sub> is supported. The ANL is also identified to have significantly negative relationship with Employee Health (EH) ( $\beta = -0.492$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ,  $R^2 = 0.477$ ), and contributing of 47.7% of the variance. The effect size is small ( $f^2 = 0.040$ ) and predicted a moderate relationship ( $Q^2 = 0.175$ ). Thus, H<sub>2</sub> is supported. While it also shows that EH have a significantly positive relationship with TOI ( $\beta = 0.878$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ,  $f^2 = 1.668$ ) and this supported the H<sub>3</sub> hypothesis.

4.3. Analysis of the mediating effect

To examine the mediating role of employee health (EH) in the relationship between authoritarian leadership (ANL) and turnover intention (TOI), this study employed mediation analysis using SmartPLS 4 following the procedure recommended by Zhao and others (2010). The results of the specific indirect effect analysis, as reported in Table 4, indicate that the indirect effect of ANL on TOI through EH is statistically significant ( $\beta = -0.435$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). Given that the direct effect of ANL on TOI is positive, the effect of ANL on EH is negative, and EH is positively related to TOI, the mediation pattern is classified as competitive mediation. This suggests that while authoritarian leadership directly increases turnover intention, it



simultaneously reduces employee health, which in turn exerts an opposing indirect effect on turnover intention. Accordingly, the mediating hypothesis (H<sub>4</sub>) is supported.

**Table 2** Reliability and validity.

Construct	Indicators	Mean	SD	Loading	AVEs	CRs	CAs						
Authoritarian leadership	ANL 1	4.98	0.73	0.783	0.500	0.816	0.769						
	ANL 2			0.619									
	ANL 3			0.856									
	ANL 6			0.405									
Employee Health	MH1	2.77	0.86	0.713	0.500	0.954	0.953						
	MH2			0.777									
	MH3			0.808									
	MH5			0.781									
	MH6			0.834									
	MH7			0.745									
	MH10			0.802									
	MH11			0.851									
	MH12			0.895									
	PH1			0.701									
	PH2			0.753									
	PH3			0.769									
	PH5			0.679									
	PH6			0.685									
	PH7			0.678									
Mindfulness	MF1	5.17	0.83	0.771	0.500	0.915	0.904						
	MF2			0.692									
	MF3			0.542									
	MF4			0.777									
	MF5			0.909									
	MF9			0.668									
	MF10			0.732									
	MF12			0.573									
	MF13			0.736									
	MF14			0.477									
	Turnover intention			TOI 1				2.83	1.14	0.962	0.604	0.896	0.886
				TOI 2						0.735			
				TOI 3						0.744			
				TOI 4						0.725			
				TOI 6						0.692			

Note: ANL = Authoritarian Leadership; GH = General health; MH = Mental Health; PH = Physical health; MF = Mindfulness; TOI = Turnover intention.

**Table 3** Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT).

Construct	ANL	EH	MF	TOI
Employee health	0.52			
Mindfulness	0.54	0.66		
Turnover intention	0.19	0.75	0.53	
Mindfulness x Authoritarian leadership	0.064	0.069	0.110	0.066

Note: ANL = Authoritarian Leadership; EH = Employee health; MF = Mindfulness; TOI = Turnover intention.

#### 4.4. Analysis of the moderating effect

The result of the PLS-SEM bootstrapping analysis in Table 4 shows that moderating effect of MF was not significant on the relationship between ANL and EH ( $\beta = -0.050, p = 0.241$ ). The effect size ( $F^2 = 0.008$ ) also can be considered small and



confirming that the moderator has no significant effect. In other words, MF did not moderate the relationship between ANL and EH, as a result H<sub>5</sub> is not supported.

**Table 4** Hypotheses analysis results.

Hypotheses	Relationship	$\beta$	t-statistics	p-value	R <sup>2</sup>	F <sup>2</sup>	Q <sup>2</sup>	Decision
Direct effect analysis								
H <sub>1</sub>	Authoritarian Leadership → Turnover Intention	0.221	4.052	0.000	0.641	0.112	0.020	Supported
H <sub>2</sub>	Authoritarian Leadership → Employee Health	-	8.702	0.000	0.477	0.040	0.175	Supported
H <sub>3</sub>	Employee Health → Turnover Intention	0.492 0.878	22.78	0.000		1.668		Supported
Mediation analysis								
H <sub>4</sub>	Authoritarian Leadership → Employee Health → Turnover Intention	- 0.435	7.06	0.000				Supported
Moderator analysis								
H <sub>5</sub>	Mindfulness* Authoritarian Leadership → Employee Health	- 0.050	1.172	0.241		0.008		unsupported

## 5. General discussion

Previous research on leadership and turnover intention has primarily focused on positive leadership styles, such as transformational, transactional, laissez-faire, ethical, paternalistic, and servant leadership, whereas the effects of negative leadership, particularly authoritarian leadership, remain underexplored. The present study contributes to this gap by examining the influence of authoritarian leadership on turnover intention, the mediating role of employee health, and the moderating effect of mindfulness. The model was developed based on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which provide a theoretical foundation for understanding the mechanisms linking leadership behaviours to employee outcomes.

The results indicate that authoritarian leadership is positively associated with turnover intention, consistent with prior studies suggesting that controlling, rigid, and directive leadership behaviours increase employees' withdrawal cognitions and intentions to leave (Chiang et al., 2021; Erskine & Georgiou, 2017). This relationship can be explained through the lens of social exchange theory: employees perceive authoritarian leadership as a breach of expected supportive treatment, which reduces reciprocal commitment and increases turnover intention. In line with conservation of resources theory, authoritarian behaviours also threaten employees' psychological resources, leading to stress and emotional exhaustion that further contribute to withdrawal intentions.

Employee health was found to partially mediate the relationship between authoritarian leadership and turnover intention. This finding suggests that authoritarian leadership indirectly affects turnover intention through its impact on employees' physical, psychological, and emotional well-being. In particular, employees exposed to authoritarian leadership experience greater health impairments, which in turn heighten their intention to quit. This result extends prior research on health-related mediators in leadership studies, such as emotional exhaustion mediating the relationship between laissez-faire or ethical leadership and turnover intention (López-Cabarcos et al., 2021; Saleh et al., 2022) by demonstrating that similar mechanisms operate under negative leadership contexts. Notably, while authoritarian leadership directly influences turnover intention, the mediating effect of employee health indicates that health-related outcomes may exert a stronger influence on turnover intentions than leadership style alone.

Contrary to expectations, mindfulness did not significantly moderate the relationship between authoritarian leadership and employee health. This finding diverges from previous studies reporting that mindfulness buffers the negative effects of stressful leadership on employee well-being (Chen et al., 2022; Hollas et al., 2022). A possible explanation is that the intensity or pervasiveness of authoritarian behaviours in the studied organisational context may overwhelm individual coping resources such as mindfulness. Alternatively, the role of mindfulness may be more relevant in combination with other organisational support mechanisms, which were not examined in the present study.

Overall, the study demonstrates that authoritarian leadership contributes to turnover intention both directly and indirectly through employee health, highlighting the critical role of health as a mediating mechanism. The results underscore the importance of monitoring employee well-being in environments characterised by high levels of directive or controlling leadership and suggest that interventions aimed at protecting employee health may help mitigate turnover intentions, even in the presence of negative leadership behaviours.

### 5.1. Theoretical implications

This study contributes to several theoretical augmentation to the literature of the implication of leadership on turnover intention. First contribution, by introducing the employee health into the structural model of authoritarian leadership and turnover intention. Even though past study had examined the effect of authoritarian leadership and turnover intention, even

so we found that there is still not enough study investigating the effect of employee health as a mediator on relationship between authoritarian leadership and turnover intention, especially in high impact journal.

Second, this finding contributes to the mindfulness field of studies. Mindfulness can prevent adverse effects on employees' physical and psychological health by reducing work stress, fatigue, depression, and anxiety (Olafsen et al., 2021; Lin et al., 2022). Yet, the result is contradictory with the previous research which showed that mindfulness affected the relationship between leadership and employee health. This study revealed that mindfulness does not affect the relationship between authoritarian leadership and employee health.

## 5.2. Practical implications

The findings of this study have several practical implications for organisations, particularly those with hierarchical structures such as the Royal Malaysian Police. First, the study highlights that authoritarian leadership negatively affects employee health and indirectly increases turnover intention. Leaders in such environments should be aware that excessive control and directive behaviours can compromise employees' physical and psychological well-being, leading to higher intentions to leave. To mitigate these effects, leaders can adopt more supportive and participative approaches, such as providing constructive feedback, recognising employee contributions, and encouraging skill development. These actions can help reduce stress and emotional exhaustion, thereby promoting better employee health and retention.

Second, the findings underscore the importance of integrating employee health into human resource management practices. Training programs focused on stress management, resilience-building, and emotional well-being can equip employees to cope with work demands and the challenges posed by authoritative leadership. For instance, workshops on mindfulness, physical fitness programs, or counselling services can serve as targeted interventions to preserve employee health and reduce turnover intentions.

Finally, the study provides guidance for organisational policy and leadership development in both public and private sectors. Given that authoritarian leadership is not limited to police organisations, the findings suggest that structured leadership development programs should emphasise balancing authority with supportive behaviours. This can include regular leadership evaluations, feedback mechanisms from subordinates, and mentoring programs to cultivate a more health-conscious and retention-focused organisational culture.

By addressing both leadership behaviour and employee health, organisations can foster a work environment that sustains employee well-being, reduces turnover, and enhances overall organisational effectiveness

## 6. Limitation and future research directions

This study has several limitations that provide opportunities for future research. First, the study was conducted solely within the Royal Malaysian Police, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other organisations or sectors. The scope was constrained by budget and timeline limitations, preventing data collection across multiple organisations. Future research could replicate the study in diverse organisational settings, including private-sector organisations, and consider using hierarchical linear modelling (HLM) to account for nested data structures and organisational-level effects.

Second, the study employed a cross-sectional design, capturing data at a single point in time. This approach may introduce temporal ambiguity and common method bias, potentially resulting in overestimation or underestimation of the relationships among variables. Future research could adopt a longitudinal design, collecting data at multiple time points to examine changes in employee health, turnover intention, and leadership perceptions over time, thereby providing stronger causal inferences.

Third, mindfulness was not found to moderate the relationship between authoritarian leadership and employee health. Future studies could explore alternative moderating or mediating factors, such as emotional intelligence, resilience, or other psychological resources, which may influence this relationship. Additionally, investigating other leader-centred leadership styles, such as autocratic, directive, or paternalistic leadership may provide further insights into their effects on employee health and turnover intention.

By addressing these limitations, future research can deepen understanding of how leadership styles impact employee well-being and turnover intentions. Such studies will provide organisations with more precise guidance for developing leadership and human resource strategies that promote employee health and retention.

## 7. Conclusions

The study contributes to the literature by integrating negative leadership, employee health, and mindfulness into a single structural model, providing both theoretical and practical insights for organisations seeking to enhance employee well-being and reduce turnover. The findings underscore the importance of promoting supportive leadership practices and implementing interventions that safeguard employee health to sustain workforce stability and organisational effectiveness.

## 8. Declarations

### 8.1. Ethical considerations

This study was carried out in line with accepted ethical research practices and received the necessary approval from the relevant institutional authorities. All respondents participated on a voluntary basis and were informed of their right to withdraw at any point without any repercussions. Efforts were made to ensure that participants' identities remained confidential, and no identifying information was collected. The data were analysed and presented in a summarized form strictly for academic use. Throughout the study, due care was taken to respect the organizational setting, while maintaining honesty and transparency in reporting, including appropriate citation of all sources.

### 8.2. Use of artificial intelligence (AI)

The authors declare that the generative artificial intelligence (AI) tool Quillbot was used exclusively for language editing and/or grammatical improvement. The use of AI did not influence the scientific content, study design, data analysis, data interpretation, results, or conclusions of the manuscript. Full responsibility for the content remains with the authors.

### 8.3. Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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