



# Stress and Coping Mechanisms among Generation Z in the Workplace: A Synthesized Study

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## Abstract

This paper presents a comprehensive study examining the prevalence of stress and the diverse coping mechanisms employed by Generation Z within contemporary workplace environments. Drawing upon a systematic aggregation and analysis of existing quantitative data from a wide array of academic literature and industry reports, this investigation aims to provide a nuanced understanding of this burgeoning demographic's unique experiences. Key findings reveal an alarmingly high prevalence of stress and mental health challenges among Gen Z, with significant percentages reporting chronic anxiety, burnout, and depression. Identified primary workplace stressors include low work-life balance, financial strain, unreasonable performance expectations, lack of autonomy, toxic work environments, and pervasive loneliness, particularly in hybrid or remote settings. In terms of coping, Gen Z demonstrates a notable openness to professional mental health support and a strong reliance on social networks. However, the analysis also uncovers a statistically significant tendency towards avoidant coping strategies when confronted with toxic workplace dynamics. This study underscores the critical importance of understanding Gen Z's distinct characteristics and values—such as their digital nativity, social consciousness, and prioritization of mental well-being—as these factors profoundly shape their stress perceptions and coping responses. The aggregated evidence offers valuable, data-driven insights for organizations, human resource professionals, and policymakers seeking to cultivate more supportive, psychologically safe, and productive work environments tailored to the needs of this vital generation.

**Keywords:** Gen z, Workplace stress, coping mechanism, Work-Life Balance, Mental Health

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background: Generation Z in the Contemporary Workforce

Generation Z, broadly defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012, represents a demographic cohort that is rapidly integrating into and significantly reshaping the global labor market. Their growing presence is undeniable, with projections indicating that Gen Z will constitute approximately 27% of the workforce by 2025.<sup>1</sup> This demographic shift necessitates a profound understanding of their unique characteristics, values, and expectations, as these elements fundamentally influence their experiences within professional settings.

A defining characteristic of Generation Z is their status as "digital natives." Having grown up entirely immersed in a hyper-connected world, their formative years have been inextricably linked to the internet, social media, and ubiquitous digital technologies.<sup>2</sup> This inherent digital fluency shapes not only their comfort with technology but also their expectations for its seamless

integration into their work environment, influencing their attitudes and behaviors.<sup>3</sup> Their constant exposure to online content and perpetual updates from peers can, however, also contribute to phenomena like the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), which has been linked to a decline in well-being.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, Generation Z's worldview has been profoundly shaped by significant global events, including the COVID-19 pandemic and various economic shifts.<sup>4</sup> These experiences have fostered a heightened social consciousness, leading them to adopt strong ethical stances and prioritize issues such as diversity, equity, and inclusion.<sup>2</sup> They actively seek workplaces that align with their values, viewing genuine commitment from employers to social and environmental causes as a critical factor in their professional engagement.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps one of the most prominent aspects of their generational identity is their pronounced prioritization of mental health and well-being. Unlike previous generations, Gen Z is remarkably open about their struggles and more inclined to seek professional help, largely due to a reduced societal stigma surrounding mental health.<sup>2</sup> This openness translates directly into their workplace expectations, where they demand robust mental health support from employers.<sup>2</sup>

The convergence of these characteristics—digital native fluency, strong social and ethical values, and an unprecedented focus on mental well-being—creates a distinct profile for Gen Z in the workforce. Understanding this background is not merely descriptive; it is essential for interpreting their responses to workplace demands, their susceptibility to specific stressors, and their preferred coping mechanisms. This foundational understanding is crucial for organizations aiming to effectively attract, engage, and retain this rapidly growing segment of the global labor force.

## 1.2. The Growing Concern of Workplace Stress

Workplace stress has become an increasingly pervasive issue, impacting employees across all generational cohorts. However, empirical evidence consistently indicates that younger generation, particularly Generation Z, bear a disproportionately heavy burden of this strain. Alarming statistics highlight the severity of this phenomenon. A 2021 Deloitte Global survey, encompassing 23,000 Millennials and Generation Z individuals across 45 countries, revealed that 46% of Gen Z reported feeling stressed or anxious most or all of the time.<sup>1</sup> This figure surpasses that of Millennials (41%), underscoring a heightened vulnerability within the youngest professional demographic. Further corroboration comes from a Cigna International Health survey, which found that a staggering 91% of 18-24 year-old Gen Zers reported experiencing stress, with 23% finding their stress unmanageable and an overwhelming 98% dealing with symptoms of burnout.<sup>9</sup> Calm's annual survey, involving over 4,000 workers worldwide, reinforces these findings, indicating that 90% of Gen Z employees felt anxious or stressed in the past month.<sup>6</sup>

The ramifications of unmanaged workplace stress extend far beyond individual discomfort, manifesting in tangible negative consequences for both employee well-being and organizational performance. Stressed employees are often unable to perform tasks efficiently, leading to lower output, increased error rates, and reduced overall productivity.<sup>9</sup> Chronic stress can also result in higher absenteeism, with a notable 47% of Gen Z employees giving their employers a different reason for time off related to mental health.<sup>1</sup> More broadly, high stress levels significantly impair employees' physical and mental health.<sup>6</sup> A particularly concerning statistic reveals that employees under the age of 30 lose an average of 60 productive days per year, primarily attributable to mental health challenges.<sup>6</sup> This demonstrates that the high prevalence of stress among Gen Z is not merely a subjective experience but a quantifiable impediment to their functional capacity and an escalating cost to businesses. The pervasive nature of burnout symptoms (98%) among Gen Z, as reported by Cigna, serves as a profound indicator of systemic stress within their work environments, signaling an urgent need for comprehensive intervention strategies.

## 1.3. Purpose of the "Study" and Significance

This paper aims to provide a comprehensive, data-driven overview of workplace stress and coping mechanisms among Generation Z by systematically analyzing existing quantitative studies and industry reports. Instead of a new survey, it compiles and interprets key statistics like mean, median, and mode from previous research to present an integrated perspective. The study addresses a clear gap by bringing together scattered findings to understand Gen Z's unique workplace challenges, such as poor work-life balance, financial stress, and toxic environments. These insights can help employers, HR professionals, and policymakers design more supportive and effective strategies to enhance Gen Z's well-being and productivity in the workplace.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Defining Generation Z: Characteristics, Values, and Expectations

Generation Z brings a distinct set of characteristics, values, and expectations to the workplace, shaped by their unique upbringing in a globally interconnected and rapidly evolving world. These attributes profoundly influence their experiences of stress and their approaches to coping.

Firstly, Gen Z individuals are inherently digital natives and hyper-connected. Born into a world saturated with digital technology, they have spent a significant portion of their lives online, with their perspectives and behaviors heavily influenced by internet culture and social media feeds.<sup>2</sup> This innate digital fluency means they are comfortable with technology and expect it to be seamlessly integrated into their work environment.<sup>3</sup> However, this constant connectivity also exposes them to pressures like the Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) and excessive screen time, which have been linked to a decline in well-being.<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, this generation exhibits a strong social consciousness and ethical stance. Having grown up witnessing various social justice movements, gender issues, and environmental exploitation, Gen Z has developed a pronounced sensibility for equity, diversity, and ethical business practices.<sup>2</sup> They prioritize environmental issues, with 58% expressing a desire for their company to be more environmentally responsible, and 68% finding it important to work for an organization actively committed to social causes.<sup>2</sup> This commitment extends to their personal lives, with 75% having bought second-hand clothes to reduce consumption.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, they seek workplaces that genuinely align with their values, and a perceived lack of such alignment can be a significant source of stress and disillusionment.<sup>2</sup>

Thirdly, Gen Z is characterized by high self-awareness and a strong desire for authenticity. They are notably open about their struggles and vulnerabilities, valuing environments where they can express themselves freely and authentically. A significant 73% of Gen Zers agree that a great place to work is one where people are allowed to be authentic and spontaneous.<sup>2</sup> They often challenge traditional views on gender and personality, with 75% stating their race, gender, or sexuality cannot be easily categorized.<sup>2</sup>

A defining hallmark of this generation is their prioritization of mental health. Gen Z is significantly more likely to seek professional help for mental health issues than previous generations, largely due to a reduced societal stigma around mental health.<sup>2</sup> This translates into clear workplace expectations: 82% find mental health days important, and half (50%) desire mental health training from their employers.<sup>2</sup> This emphasis on well-being directly impacts their retention, as burnout and lack of work-life balance are primary reasons for Gen Z to quit their jobs, second only to unsatisfactory salary.<sup>2</sup>

Despite their digital fluency, Gen Z places significant value on workplace relationships and in-person socialization. Seven out of ten Gen Zers find in-person socialization with colleagues important, compared to 59% for virtual socialization.<sup>2</sup> They view these bonds as a crucial support network, and the absence of such relationships is a reason for 19% of Gen Zers to quit their jobs.<sup>2</sup> Concurrently, they strongly desire

flexibility in work arrangements, with 81% finding it important and a majority preferring a hybrid work model.<sup>2</sup> This desire for flexibility, however, can sometimes clash with a simultaneous need for in-person connection, leading to feelings of loneliness in remote settings.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, Gen Z tends to be ambitious with well-defined career expectations. They exhibit a strong inclination towards leadership and career advancement, with leadership training being the most in-demand skill for half of them.<sup>2</sup> They are motivated by opportunities to expand their skills and find their "dream job," and are often ready to change jobs immediately if they do not like something.<sup>11</sup> This reflects a pragmatic and individualistic approach to their careers, prioritizing personal preferences over long-term organizational loyalty.<sup>3</sup>

While intelligent, Gen Z may sometimes encounter challenges in interpersonal skills and maturity.<sup>3</sup> Research using the Emotional Quotient Inventory 2.0® (EQ-i 2.0®) indicates that Gen Z scores lower in Independence, Problem Solving, and Stress Tolerance compared to older generations, suggesting potential areas for development in managing workplace challenges.<sup>14</sup> This generation also exhibits a degree of

Cynicism and a lack of trust in leaders, stemming from growing up amidst rampant misinformation and perceived dishonesty in media and leadership.<sup>15</sup> This inherent skepticism can translate into caution in the workplace, where they are wary of being taken advantage of and may consciously prevent emotions from interfering with their work.<sup>15</sup>

These multifaceted characteristics are not merely descriptive; they are fundamental drivers of Gen Z's workplace experiences. Their strong values, digital upbringing, and emphasis on mental well-being directly influence their perceptions of stress, their preferred coping mechanisms, and their expectations of employers. This intricate interplay creates a unique context for understanding and addressing their workplace stress.

## 2.2. Theoretical Frameworks of Stress and Coping

Understanding how individuals perceive and respond to stress requires a robust theoretical foundation. Several psychological frameworks offer valuable lenses through which to analyze Generation Z's experiences in the workplace.

### Lazarus & Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping

One of the most influential models in stress research is Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping. This model posits that stress is not an inherent quality of an event itself, but rather a dynamic interaction between the individual and their environment.<sup>16</sup> The core of this model lies in

Cognitive appraisal, a two-stage process where individuals evaluate a situation based on its perceived impact on their well-being.<sup>16</sup>

The first stage, primary appraisal, involves assessing whether a situation is irrelevant, benign-positive, or stressful. If deemed stressful, it is further categorized as a challenge, threat, or harm/loss. The second stage, secondary appraisal, involves evaluating one's available resources and options for coping with the perceived stressor.<sup>18</sup> It is this subjective interpretation of the situation and one's resources that determines the subsequent coping response.<sup>17</sup>

Coping itself is defined as "constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person".<sup>16</sup> Lazarus and Folkman identified two primary functions of coping strategies:

1. Problem-focused coping: These strategies are aimed at directly managing or altering the source of the stress. This involves taking active steps to solve the problem, such as planning, confronting the issue, or seeking instrumental social support.<sup>16</sup>
2. Emotion-focused coping: These strategies are directed at regulating the emotional response to the stressor, rather than changing the situation itself. This can involve adapting one's thoughts and feelings, such as through acceptance, positive reappraisal, emotional distancing, or seeking emotional social support.<sup>16</sup>

Examples of specific coping strategies within this framework include self-control, confrontation, seeking social support, emotional distancing, escape and avoidance, radical acceptance, positive reappraisal, and strategic problem-solving.<sup>16</sup> The choice and effectiveness of these strategies are highly individualized, depending heavily on the resources available to the person and their personal beliefs and goals.<sup>16</sup> For Generation Z, their digital native status and hyper-connectivity can influence their cognitive appraisals, potentially leading to heightened perceptions of threat due to constant social comparison or information overload. Their comfort with expressing vulnerability, however, might facilitate emotion-focused coping through social support or professional help. Conversely, their reported lower scores in problem-solving and stress tolerance could indicate a predisposition to appraise certain workplace demands as exceeding their resources, potentially leading to less effective problem-focused coping.

### Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory

Developed by Stevan Hobfoll (1989), the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory offers another pertinent framework for understanding workplace stress and coping. COR theory posits that individuals are fundamentally motivated to obtain, retain, and protect their "resource reservoirs".<sup>18</sup> These resources are broadly defined and can include:

- Object resources: Tangible assets like a home or possessions.
- Condition resources: States of being, such as job security, marital status, or seniority.
- Personal resources: Characteristics like self-efficacy, resilience, optimism, hope, and self-esteem.
- Energy resources: Such as time, money, and knowledge.<sup>18</sup>

Stress, according to COR theory, arises when these valued resources are threatened with loss, actually lost, or when there is a failure to gain resources after investing them.<sup>18</sup> The theory emphasizes that individuals are driven to protect their existing resources and acquire new ones, even when not actively experiencing stress.<sup>18</sup>

Coping, within this framework, is understood as a process that involves both actively acquiring new resources and preventing the depletion or loss of existing ones.<sup>18</sup> For Generation Z, this theory is highly relevant. Stressors such as financial instability, burnout, lack of autonomy, and limited career progression can be directly interpreted as threats or actual losses of critical resources (e.g., financial stability, energy, career growth opportunities). The high prevalence of financial stress among Gen Z, often compounded by student loan debt and rising living costs, represents a significant drain on their energy resources, leading to constant worry.<sup>9</sup> Their reported difficulty with work-life balance and high rates of burnout signify a depletion of personal and energy resources.

Furthermore, Gen Z's observed tendency for frequent job-switching and lower organizational loyalty<sup>12</sup> can be understood as a resource-protective strategy. When an organization fails to provide adequate resources (e.g., fair compensation, meaningful work, supportive environment) or actively depletes their existing resources (e.g., through micromanagement, lack of recognition), Gen Z employees may opt to leave in an effort to conserve or acquire resources elsewhere. Their explicit demands for mental health support, mental health days, and work-life balance are direct requests for resource replenishment and protection, aligning perfectly with the core tenets of COR theory.

## Positive Psychological Capital (PsyCap)

Building upon the concept of personal resources, Positive Psychological Capital (PsyCap) is a higher-order construct that integrates four key positive psychological states: self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience.<sup>18</sup>

- Self-efficacy: The confidence to undertake challenging tasks and invest the necessary effort to succeed in them.<sup>18</sup>
- Optimism: Making positive attributions about succeeding in the present and future.<sup>18</sup>
- Hope: Persevering toward goals and redirecting paths to goals in order to succeed.<sup>18</sup>
- Resilience: The ability to adapt and recover from problems or difficulties and even transcend them.<sup>18</sup>

PsyCap is considered a personal resource that significantly influences coping strategies. Individuals with higher PsyCap are hypothesized to be more likely to choose adaptive coping strategies, such as "change" (problem-focused) or "acceptance" (emotion-focused), rather than "withdrawal" (maladaptive).<sup>18</sup> This framework suggests that these positive psychological states act as a buffer against stress and enable more constructive responses.

Empirical evidence consistently supports PsyCap's positive correlation with desirable organizational outcomes, including job satisfaction, job engagement, well-being, mental health, and employee performance.<sup>18</sup> Conversely, it is negatively related to undesirable outcomes such as stress, turnover intentions, substance abuse, and counterproductive workplace behaviors.<sup>18</sup> Given Gen Z's reported lower scores in stress tolerance and problem-solving<sup>14</sup>, developing components of PsyCap (e.g., fostering resilience, enhancing self-efficacy through training and mentorship) becomes a crucial intervention strategy. This framework shifts the focus from merely managing stress symptoms to proactively building internal strengths that can buffer against its negative impacts and promote psychological growth. For instance, acceptance, which requires significant personal psychological work, is seen as a coping strategy that may enable greater psychological growth than merely attempting to change the situation or withdrawing from it.<sup>18</sup>

## 2.3. Workplace Stressors for Gen Z

Generation Z encounters a complex array of workplace stressors, some of which are universal across generations, while others are exacerbated or unique to their distinct generational characteristics and experiences. Understanding these specific factors is crucial for developing targeted interventions.

One of the most prominent stressors is low work-life balance and burnout. The modern workplace, particularly with the proliferation of remote and hybrid work models, has blurred the traditional boundaries between professional and personal life. This often leads to a constant feeling of needing to be available, contributing significantly to burnout and chronic stress.<sup>9</sup> Burnout and a lack of work-life balance are cited by a substantial 42% of Gen Z as key reasons to quit their jobs, making it the second most common reason after unsatisfactory salary.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, 28% of Gen Z respondents explicitly report difficulty in maintaining a healthy work-life balance.<sup>2</sup> This suggests that the desire for flexibility, while high, is often undermined by an inability to disconnect, leading to resource depletion.

Financial stress is another significant and pervasive concern for Generation Z. Many entered the workforce burdened with substantial student loan debt, and the rising cost of living coupled with often stagnant wages makes achieving financial stability a considerable challenge.<sup>9</sup> This economic pressure contributes to constant worry and stress, directly impacting their well-being. An unsatisfactory salary is, in fact, the top reason for 54% of Gen Z to consider quitting their jobs.<sup>2</sup> Despite their perceived value for purpose over pay, the reality of economic pressures makes fair compensation a non-negotiable factor.

Unreasonable expectations and high pressure to perform also contribute significantly to Gen Z's stress levels. This generation often feels intense pressure, partly fueled by constant exposure to curated images of success on social media, which fosters high self-standards and a profound fear of failure.<sup>9</sup> This internal pressure is compounded by societal expectations for early career decisions and high-stakes testing, creating an environment where perfectionism and continuous achievement are implicitly demanded.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, more than one in three working Gen Zers (between 31% and 33%) report finding it difficult to cope with pressure and stress at work.<sup>2</sup>

Lack of autonomy and poor management practices are also critical stressors. Micromanagement, rigid hierarchical structures, and limited opportunities for employees to contribute unique input can stifle creativity and motivation among young professionals, leading to significant dissatisfaction and stress.<sup>9</sup> Poor management, a lack of recognition for their efforts, the overloading of tasks, and limited chances for career growth collectively contribute to a negative workplace atmosphere.<sup>9</sup> A particularly striking finding indicates that US Gen Z workers are 47% more likely than all other US workers to report that their manager has an extremely negative impact on their well-being.<sup>6</sup> This suggests a disconnect in leadership styles that significantly impacts Gen Z's psychological state.

The presence of a toxic work environment and a lack of psychological safety further exacerbates stress. Factors such as office politics, discrimination, verbal abuse, a lack of appreciation, and unsupportive leadership create unhealthy work atmospheres that detrimentally affect employee well-being and productivity.<sup>9</sup> A significant 63% of Gen Z employees reported not feeling confident expressing their opinions, and 60% disagreed that they could truly be themselves at work.<sup>10</sup> This indicates a profound lack of psychological safety, which directly impairs workplace relationships and increases an employee's intent to leave an organization.<sup>10</sup> This highlights a fundamental mismatch between Gen Z's desire for authenticity and the reality of their workplace experiences.

Paradoxically, despite being digital natives, loneliness and disconnection, particularly in hybrid or remote work arrangements, emerge as major stressors. A substantial 73% of Gen Z individuals report feeling alone sometimes or always.<sup>2</sup> While remote work offers desired flexibility, 44% of working Gen Zers agree that it can make them feel lonely and disconnected.<sup>2</sup> US Gen Z workers are 55% more likely than the general population of workers to state that loneliness negatively affects their mental health.<sup>6</sup> This suggests that for a generation that values in-person socialization and supportive workplace relationships, the isolation of remote work can be a significant psychological burden, especially for those new to the workforce who are missing out on crucial mentoring and bonding opportunities.<sup>6</sup>

Career uncertainty and limited growth opportunities also weigh heavily on Gen Z. Career uncertainty is a more significant concern for this generation than for older workers.<sup>6</sup> Limited career progression opportunities are cited by 34% of surveyed Gen Z as a reason to quit their job.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, 37% report quitting because they are not doing what they are passionate about.<sup>2</sup> This indicates a strong desire for meaningful work and growth that, when unmet, leads to dissatisfaction and turnover.

Finally, specific quantitative data from a study on work-related stress factors among Gen Z (N=120) provides further detail on prevalent stressors. Work overload was reported as causing "a lot of stress" for 18.33% of Gen Z, with 54.17% feeling "a little stress".<sup>21</sup> Women from Gen Z (23.33%) reported stronger reactions to work overload compared to men (13.33%).<sup>21</sup>

Inappropriate organization of work also contributed to significant stress, with 15.83% reporting "a lot of stress".<sup>21</sup> Other notable stressors included improper treatment by superiors (22.50% feeling "a lot of stress"), strong competition in the workplace (11.67% feeling "a lot of stress"), and the need to meet high expectations and continuous improvement (14.17% feeling "a lot of stress").<sup>21</sup> Men from Gen Z were found to be more sensitive to stress related to improper treatment by superiors and the need to meet high expectations compared to men from Gen Y.<sup>21</sup>

This comprehensive analysis demonstrates that Gen Z's workplace stress is not merely a general discomfort but stems from a complex interplay of traditional workplace challenges and factors deeply intertwined with their generational values, digital upbringing, and unique developmental stage. The direct links between these stressors and high turnover intentions underscore their critical impact on organizational stability and productivity, making them imperative areas for organizational focus and intervention.

#### 2.4. Coping Mechanisms among Gen Z

Generation Z employs a diverse range of coping mechanisms to manage stress, exhibiting both adaptive and, in some contexts, maladaptive tendencies. Their approach to coping is notably influenced by their upbringing in a digitally saturated environment and a societal shift towards greater mental health awareness.

In terms of adaptive coping strategies, Gen Z demonstrates a clear preference for certain approaches. They are found to favor social support, mindfulness, and expressive coping approaches.<sup>4</sup> This contrasts with older generations like Generation X, who tend to rely more on problem-solving and pragmatic strategies.<sup>5</sup> Gen Z highly values social support, often relying on close networks of friends, family, and online communities for emotional and practical assistance. They tend to seek out and cling to social support more than previous generations, leveraging it as a key resource for navigating personal and societal challenges.<sup>1</sup> This support has been shown to positively influence their well-being and resilience.<sup>1</sup>

A significant characteristic of Gen Z's coping is their openness to professional help. They display significantly greater openness to seeking professional psychological help compared to Generation X ( $t(198) = -5.50, p < .001$ ).<sup>5</sup> This generation is notably more likely to seek professional help for mental health issues than past generations, a trend largely attributed to a reduced stigma around mental health in their cohort.<sup>2</sup> This openness translates into a desire for employer-provided mental health support, with half of Gen Z respondents wanting mental health training and over 8 out of 10 desiring mental health days at work.<sup>2</sup>

Other adaptive strategies identified include relaxation and physical wellness, which are recognized as effective positive coping mechanisms.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, active involvement in Positive reappraisal and planning—such as positive thinking, acceptance of reality, and positive reframing of thoughts—are protective coping strategies that correlate with improved psychological well-being.<sup>17</sup> Internal factors like

Resilience, defined as the ability to adapt and recover from stress, and extraversion, characterized by sociability and positive emotional expression, also positively influence well-being and coping outcomes for Gen Z.<sup>1</sup> Resilience, in particular, is crucial for mitigating the negative impacts of social media-induced anxiety and FOMO.<sup>1</sup>

However, the analysis also reveals a concerning tendency towards maladaptive coping strategies, particularly avoidance and withdrawal. A study on coping with toxic workplace dynamics (N=96 participants) found a statistically significant difference in the use of avoidant coping strategies among generational groups ( $F(3, 92) = 6.07, p < .001, \eta^2 = .165$ ).<sup>20</sup> Post hoc tests confirmed that Generation Z exhibited a greater tendency to withdraw or avoid toxic situations compared to Generation X ( $p = .026$ ) and Millennials ( $p = .012$ ).<sup>20</sup> This tendency is further supported by a significant negative correlation observed between age and Avoidant/Passive Coping ( $\rho = -0.411, p < .001$ ), suggesting that younger individuals, including Gen Z, employ these strategies more frequently.<sup>20</sup> This can manifest as denying the existence of stress, emotional numbing, or retreating into unhealthy comfort zones.<sup>16</sup>

While these maladaptive strategies may offer temporary relief from mental distress, their preferential use and a lack of adaptive coping styles are associated with higher levels of psychopathology and can contribute to long-term psychological illnesses.<sup>17</sup> It is important to note that no statistically significant differences were found among generations for adaptive, emotion-focused, or problem-focused coping strategies in the toxic workplace study, although practical patterns (e.g., Baby Boomers displaying higher emotion-focused coping) emerged.<sup>20</sup> This suggests that while Gen Z may not differ in the use of these strategies, their *efficacy* or *preference* for avoidant strategies in specific contexts is distinct.

Furthermore, a study (N=100 Gen Z) reported a mean (M) of 34.0 and a standard deviation (SD) of 6.55 for coping with stress, with a median of 35.0.<sup>5</sup> In comparison, Generation X scored significantly higher on coping with stress (Mann–Whitney U test:  $U = 2588.00, p < .001, \text{rank biserial correlation} = -0.482$ ), indicating a lower overall coping efficacy for Gen Z.<sup>5</sup> This suggests that while Gen Z is more attuned to mental health and willing to seek help, they may generally struggle with effective coping, not just prefer certain strategies. The effectiveness of coping strategies is highly individualized and context-dependent, and even when implemented, their utility can be compromised by unsupportive or hostile work conditions.<sup>22</sup> This highlights a critical duality in Gen Z's coping behaviors: a progressive openness to professional mental health support and reliance on social networks, contrasted with a concerning tendency towards maladaptive avoidance in challenging workplace situations. This implies that while Gen Z is more aware of mental health, they may lack the robust problem-focused coping skills or feel disempowered to address systemic issues, leading to withdrawal rather than confrontation.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Design: Systematic Synthesis of Quantitative Data

This study is conceptualized as a systematic synthesis of existing quantitative data, rather than the collection of new empirical data. The research design involved a comprehensive and rigorous process of identifying, extracting, and analyzing numerical findings from a diverse array of pre-existing academic studies, research reports, and industry surveys. This approach was employed to fulfil the user's explicit request for a study that includes "all calculation, Mean Median Mode all the things," by meticulously presenting and discussing these metrics as reported in their original sources.

The objective of this design was to aggregate and interpret disparate empirical findings to construct a cohesive and comprehensive understanding of stress and coping mechanisms among Generation Z in the workplace. This methodology is akin to a meta-analysis or systematic review, but it is framed to provide the structured presentation and depth characteristic of a singular primary investigation. This transparent approach ensures academic rigor while directly addressing the specific requirements of the user query. The systematic nature of the data extraction and synthesis allowed for the identification of consistent patterns, discrepancies, and areas requiring further investigation across multiple independent studies.

### 3.2. Data Sources

The data for this synthesized study were meticulously drawn from a variety of reputable sources, encompassing major global surveys, comprehensive industry reports, and peer-reviewed academic journals. These sources were selected based on their direct relevance to Generation Z, workplace stress, and coping mechanisms, with a particular emphasis on those providing quantitative data.

The "sample" for this synthesized study comprises the aggregated populations from these various original investigations, rather than newly recruited participants. Key sample sizes and characteristics from the contributing studies include:

- **Deloitte Global 2021 Survey:** This extensive survey included 23,000 Millennials and Generation Z individuals, spanning 45 countries.<sup>1</sup> This broad geographical and generational scope provides a macro-level understanding of stress prevalence.
- **Calm's Annual Survey:** This report drew data from over 4,000 workers worldwide<sup>6</sup>, offering a global perspective on mental health trends and stressors.
- **MHS Emotional Quotient Inventory 2.0® (EQ-i 2.0®) Study:** This investigation utilized a sample of 800 respondents, with 200 participants allocated to each generational group (Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, Baby Boomers), matched for gender split within each group.<sup>14</sup> Data was collected between January 2020 and March 2022. This study provided insights into emotional intelligence traits relevant to coping.
- **Study on Generational Differences in Coping (International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research - IJFMR):** This study involved a sample of 200 participants, equally divided with 100 from Generation X and 100 from Generation Z.<sup>5</sup> Participants were recruited using purposive sampling. Inclusion criteria for Gen Z specifically required current enrollment in higher education, proficiency in English, regular access to internet and digital devices, a basic understanding of mental health concepts, and voluntary agreement to participate.<sup>5</sup> This provided direct comparative data on coping strategies.
- **Study on Coping with Toxic Workplace Dynamics:** This research included 96 participants, with a generational breakdown of 39.6% Gen Z, 32.3% Millennials, 19.8% Gen X, and 8.3% Baby Boomers. The sample had a gender distribution of 53.1% male and 46.9% female.<sup>20</sup> This study offered specific quantitative data on adaptive and maladaptive coping in response to toxic environments.
- **Study on Work-Related Stress Factors (Poland):** This investigation included 120 Generation Z participants<sup>21</sup>, providing specific percentages on the perception of various workplace stressors.

By meticulously detailing the sample sizes and characteristics from these original studies, this section constructs the "participant" context for the "primary study." The diversity of these samples, spanning different populations, geographical regions, and methodological approaches, enhances the breadth and generalizability of the synthesized findings. While direct comparability across all studies is inherently limited due to variations in methodologies and measurement instruments, the aggregation provides a robust collective understanding of the phenomenon.

### 3.3. "Measures" and "Data Collection"

The "measures" employed in this synthesized study are derived directly from the instruments and assessment methods utilized in the original research from which the data was extracted. These measures fall broadly into two categories: those assessing stress and mental health challenges, and those evaluating coping mechanisms. The "data collection" for this synthesized study involved systematic and meticulous extraction process rather than direct participant recruitment.

#### Stress Measures

The original studies employed various self-report measures and survey questions to assess stress levels, anxiety, depression, and burnout symptoms among Generation Z. Examples of how these constructs were captured include:

- **Self-Reported Stress and Anxiety:** Direct questions were used to gauge the prevalence of stress, such as asking participants if they felt "stressed or anxious most or all of the time".<sup>1</sup>
- **Burnout and Mental Health Symptoms:** Assessments included reports on the experience of specific symptoms related to stress and burnout<sup>2</sup>, as well as broader reports on general mental health challenges, such as "experiencing mental health challenges at least occasionally".<sup>8</sup>
- **Overall Work Health Scores:** Some studies utilized composite scores, like "work health scores," to provide a holistic measure of employee well-being in the workplace.<sup>10</sup>
- **Specific Workplace Stressors:** Detailed survey questions were used to identify and quantify the impact or frequency of particular stressors. These included factors such as work overload, improper treatment by superiors, strong workplace competition, the pressure of high expectations, inappropriate work organization, fear of job loss, and perceptions of employee evaluation systems.<sup>21</sup>

## Coping Mechanism Measures

Coping strategies were assessed through various means, including self-reported preferences, observed behavioral tendencies, and explicit desires for organizational support. Examples include:

- **Propensity to Seek Professional Help:** Studies reported on the likelihood of Gen Z individuals seeking professional help for mental health issues.<sup>2</sup>
- **Desired Employer Support:** Measures captured preferences for employer-provided mental health days and mental health training.<sup>2</sup>
- **Categorization of Coping Strategies:** Coping behaviors were categorized into adaptive strategies (e.g., social support, mindfulness, expressive coping, problem-focused approaches, positive reappraisal) and maladaptive strategies (e.g., avoidance, withdrawal, emotional numbing).<sup>4</sup>
- **Standardized Psychological Inventories:** Some research utilized standardized tools like the Emotional Quotient Inventory 2.0® (EQ-i 2.0®). This inventory includes subscales such as Stress Tolerance, Problem Solving, and Independence, which provide valuable insights into emotional intelligence aspects directly related to an individual's capacity for coping.<sup>14</sup>

## Data Collection Method

The "data collection" for this synthesized study involved a systematic and meticulous process of extracting all relevant quantitative findings directly from the provided research snippets. This included percentages, means, medians, modes, standard deviations, and the results from inferential statistical tests such as Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), Mann-Whitney U tests, and Spearman's rho correlations. This rigorous extraction ensured that all numerical information explicitly requested by the user was captured and prepared for presentation and interpretation within the report. This method allowed for the compilation of a robust dataset representing various facets of Gen Z's stress and coping experiences, despite the absence of new primary data collection.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

The "data analysis" for this synthesized study involved a systematic process of organizing, interpreting, and presenting the quantitative findings extracted from the various source materials. This approach was designed to fulfill the user's requirement for "all calculation, Mean Median Mode all the things" by meticulously re-presenting and contextualizing existing statistical data, rather than performing new statistical computations.

## Quantitative Synthesis and Descriptive Statistics

The extracted numerical data, encompassing percentages, means, medians, and modes (where explicitly available in the original snippets), were compiled and organized into thematic categories. This involved:

- **Summarizing Prevalence:** Aggregating data points that indicated the widespread nature of stress, anxiety, and depression among Gen Z. For example, combining percentages from different surveys reporting on Gen Z's stress levels.
- **Identifying Impact of Stressors:** Consolidating data related to the influence of specific workplace factors on Gen Z's stress and their likelihood of turnover. This included percentages of Gen Z citing certain reasons for quitting or experiencing stress from particular work conditions.
- **Analyzing Coping Patterns:** Presenting the reported utilization patterns of various coping mechanisms, distinguishing between adaptive and maladaptive strategies. This involved noting the frequency of seeking social support, professional help, or engaging in avoidant behaviors.
- **Reporting Central Tendency and Dispersion:** Where available, means, medians, and standard deviations were extracted and presented to provide a more detailed statistical description of coping scores or other relevant quantitative measures. For instance, the mean and median coping scores for Gen Z were directly reported from one of the source studies.<sup>5</sup>

## Inferential Statistics (from Source Studies)

Results from inferential statistical tests, as reported in the original source studies, were extracted and presented to highlight statistically significant differences and relationships between variables. These included:

- **Analysis of Variance (ANOVA):** Results from ANOVA tests were utilized to identify significant generational differences in the use of specific coping strategies, particularly avoidant coping.<sup>20</sup> The F-statistic, p-value, and effect size ( $\eta^2$ ) were extracted to convey the statistical significance and practical importance of these differences.
- **Mann-Whitney U Tests:** Findings from non-parametric tests like the Mann-Whitney U test were included to compare coping efficacy between Gen Z and other generations, providing insights into relative strengths and vulnerabilities.<sup>5</sup>

- **Spearman's Rho Correlations:** Correlation coefficients ( $\rho$ ) and their associated p-values were extracted to demonstrate relationships between variables, such as age and the use of certain coping strategies.<sup>20</sup>

The presentation of these inferential statistics from the original research allowed for a deeper understanding of the underlying dynamics, such as whether observed differences between generations were statistically meaningful.

## Thematic Analysis (Qualitative Integration)

While the primary focus was quantitative, qualitative insights and contextual information provided within the snippets were integrated to interpret and enrich the numerical data. This thematic analysis helped to:

- **Provide Background and Context:** Explain why certain quantitative findings might exist, drawing on Gen Z's characteristics, values, and formative experiences. For example, linking their digital nativity to loneliness in remote work or their social consciousness to their desire for value-aligned workplaces.
- **Identify Underlying Trends:** Uncover patterns and nuances that might not be immediately apparent from raw numbers alone, such as the "mental health divide" where Gen Z desires openness but feels uncomfortable discussing mental health with managers.<sup>8</sup>
- **Elaborate on Implications:** Discuss the broader implications of the quantitative data for organizational practices, employee well-being, and future research directions.

This multi-faceted approach to "data analysis"—combining quantitative synthesis with the careful integration of qualitative context—ensured a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of stress and coping mechanisms among Generation Z in the workplace, fulfilling the detailed requirements of the user query.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Prevalence of Stress and Mental Health Challenges Among Gen Z

The aggregated quantitative data consistently indicates an alarmingly high prevalence of stress, anxiety, and other mental health challenges among Generation Z in the workplace. This section presents the key findings that underscore the severity and widespread nature of these issues.

A 2021 Deloitte Global survey, involving 23,000 Millennials and Generation Z individuals, reported that 46% of Gen Z felt stressed or anxious most or all of the time.<sup>1</sup> This figure highlights a significant portion of the youngest workforce experiencing chronic psychological distress. Further emphasizing this, a Cigna International Health survey found that a striking

91% of 18-24 year-old Gen Zers reported being stressed, with 23% finding their stress unmanageable.<sup>9</sup> the same survey revealed an overwhelming

98% of Gen Z were dealing with symptoms of burnout<sup>9</sup>, indicating a pervasive and severe level of exhaustion and disengagement.

The Calm annual survey, which included over 4,000 workers worldwide, corroborated these findings, stating that 90% of Gen Z employees reported feeling anxious or stressed in the past month.<sup>6</sup> This consistent high percentage across multiple large-scale surveys underscores that stress is not an isolated experience but a systemic issue for this generation. Beyond anxiety, nearly three-quarters of Gen Z employees reported feeling depressed in the Calm survey<sup>6</sup>, signifying a substantial burden of mood disorders within this demographic.

In terms of overall well-being, Mental Health America (MHA) reported in its seventh Annual Mind the Workplace report that 71% of Generation Z employees have "unhealthy work health scores".<sup>10</sup> This contrasts sharply with older generations, where 59% of Millennials, 52% of Gen X, and 42% of Baby Boomers reported similar scores<sup>10</sup>, further illustrating Gen Z's disproportionate struggle.

The ability to cope with workplace demands also presents a challenge. More than one in three working Gen Zers, specifically between 31% and 33%, find it difficult to cope with pressure and stress at work.<sup>2</sup> This difficulty in managing stress, coupled with the high prevalence of symptoms, suggests a significant gap in effective coping strategies or supportive workplace environments.

Despite their openness about mental health, a notable "mental health divide" exists within organizations. While 92% of recent college graduates (largely Gen Z) express a desire to discuss mental wellness at work<sup>8</sup>, only

56% of Gen Z workers feel comfortable discussing mental health challenges with their managers.<sup>8</sup> This discrepancy highlights a critical lack of psychological safety in the workplace, where Gen Z's progressive expectations for open dialogue clash with established norms or perceived managerial receptiveness. The high percentage of Gen Z experiencing burnout and reporting unhealthy work health scores, combined with their discomfort in discussing these issues with management, suggests that current organizational cultures may inadvertently be exacerbating their stress by failing to provide a safe space for vulnerability and support. This situation can lead to internal conflict and increased isolation, as employees know they need help but fear the repercussions of asking for it.

**Table 1: Prevalence of Stress and Mental Health Challenges among Gen Z**

Indicator	Percentage/Score	Source
Stressed or anxious most or all of the time	46%	Deloitte Global 2021 Survey <sup>1</sup>
Report being stressed (18-24 year-olds)	91%	Cigna International Health Survey <sup>9</sup>
Feeling anxious or stressed in past month	90%	Calm Survey <sup>6</sup>
Stress reported as unmanageable	23%	Cigna International Health Survey <sup>9</sup>
Dealing with symptoms of burnout	98%	Cigna International Health Survey <sup>9</sup>
Report feeling depressed	~75%	Calm Survey <sup>6</sup>
Unhealthy work health scores	71%	Mental Health America (MHA) <sup>10</sup>
Find it difficult to cope with pressure/stress	31-33%	TalentLMS/BambooHR <sup>2</sup>
Desire to discuss mental wellness at work	92%	Monster's 2024 State of the Graduate Report <sup>8</sup>
Comfortable discussing mental health with managers	56%	Deloitte's 2024 Gen Z and Millennial Survey <sup>8</sup>

This table provides a clear and consolidated overview of the high prevalence of mental health struggles within Gen Z, underscoring the urgency of the issue and highlighting the significant gap between their desire for openness and the actual comfort level within the workplace. The quantitative data presented here makes the scale of the problem immediately apparent, serving as a compelling call to action for organizational leaders to prioritize mental well-being initiatives.

## 4.2. Specific Workplace Stressors for Gen Z

Generation Z faces a multifaceted array of workplace stressors that significantly impact their well-being and professional engagement. These factors range from fundamental economic concerns to issues deeply rooted in their generational values and experiences.

One of the most impactful stressors for Gen Z is a low work-life balance and the resulting burnout. The blurring of lines between work and personal life, particularly exacerbated by remote and hybrid work models, leads to a feeling of constant availability and insufficient time for recovery.<sup>9</sup> This contributes directly to chronic stress and burnout. Empirical data highlights the severity of this issue:

42% of Gen Z cite burnout and lack of work-life balance as a key reason they would quit their job.<sup>2</sup> This makes it the second most common reason for turnover, surpassed only by unsatisfactory salary. Furthermore,

28% of Gen Z respondents explicitly report difficulty in maintaining a work-life balance.<sup>2</sup> This indicates that despite their desire for flexibility, the pervasive pressure to remain connected and responsive undermines their ability to achieve the balance they seek, leading to significant psychological strain.

Financial stress remains a dominant concern. Many Gen Z individuals entered the workforce burdened by student loan debt, and the escalating cost of living coupled with wages that often do not keep pace creates a constant state of worry and insecurity.<sup>9</sup> This economic pressure directly impacts their mental health and job satisfaction. Unsurprisingly, an unsatisfactory salary is the top reason for 54% of Gen Z to quit their jobs.<sup>2</sup> While Gen Z is often perceived as valuing purpose over pay, the reality of economic pressures makes fair compensation a foundational requirement for their stability and peace of mind. Only 59% of employed Gen Zers believe they are fairly compensated for their work<sup>2</sup>, indicating a significant expectation-reality gap that fuels

dissatisfaction and stress.

Unreasonable expectations and high pressure to perform are also significant stressors. Gen Z often feels intense pressure, partly due to the pervasive influence of social media, where curated images of success foster high self-standards and a fear of failure.<sup>9</sup> This internal drive for perfection, combined with societal pressures for early career decisions and high-stakes testing<sup>19</sup>, creates a competitive environment that can be a considerable source of anxiety. More than one in three working Gen Zers (31-33%) find it difficult to cope with pressure and stress at work.<sup>2</sup>

Lack of autonomy and poor management practices contribute significantly to workplace dissatisfaction and stress. Micromanagement, rigid hierarchies, and limited opportunities for unique input can suppress the creativity and motivation of young adults, leading to feelings of being undervalued and unable to contribute meaningfully.<sup>9</sup> Poor management, a lack of recognition, the overloading of tasks, and limited chances for career growth collectively create a negative workplace atmosphere.<sup>9</sup> A particularly telling statistic reveals that

US Gen Z workers are 47% more likely than all other US workers to report that their manager has an extremely negative impact on their well-being.<sup>6</sup> This highlights a critical need for empathetic and supportive leadership that aligns with Gen Z's desire for clear direction and trust.<sup>8</sup>

The presence of a toxic work environment and a lack of psychological safety is another profound stressor. Factors such as office politics, discrimination, verbal abuse, a lack of appreciation, and unsupportive leadership create unhealthy work atmospheres that detrimentally affect employee well-being.<sup>9</sup> A substantial

63% of Gen Z employees reported not feeling confident expressing their opinions, and 60% disagreed that they could truly be themselves at work.<sup>10</sup> This indicates a profound lack of psychological safety, which directly impairs workplace relationships and significantly increases an employee's intent to leave an organization.<sup>10</sup> This mismatch between Gen Z's value for authenticity and the reality of their workplace experience creates internal conflict and stress.

Paradoxically, despite their digital fluency, loneliness and disconnection, particularly in hybrid or remote work arrangements, emerge as major stressors. A significant 73% of Gen Z individuals report feeling alone sometimes or always.<sup>2</sup> While remote work offers desired flexibility, 44% of working Gen Zers agree that it can make them feel lonely and disconnected.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, US Gen Z workers are 55% more likely than the general population of workers to state that loneliness negatively affects their mental health.<sup>6</sup> This suggests that for a generation that values in-person socialization and supportive workplace relationships, the isolation of remote work can be a significant psychological burden, especially for those new to the workforce who may be missing crucial mentoring and bonding opportunities.<sup>6</sup> The absence of strong workplace relationships is a reason for 19% of Gen Zers to quit their jobs.<sup>2</sup>

Career uncertainty and limited growth opportunities also weigh heavily on Gen Z. Career uncertainty is a more significant concern for this generation than for older workers.<sup>6</sup> Limited career progression opportunities are cited by 34% of surveyed Gen Z as a reason to quit their job.<sup>2</sup> Moreover,

37% report quitting because they are not doing what they are passionate about.<sup>2</sup> This highlights their strong desire for meaningful work and professional development, which, when unmet, leads to dissatisfaction and turnover.

Specific quantitative data from a study on work-related stress factors for Gen Z (N=120) provides further granular detail:

- **Work overload (I-1): 18.33% of Gen Z reported feeling "a lot of stress"** from work overload, with 54.17% feeling "a little stress".<sup>21</sup> Notably, women from Gen Z (23.33%) reported stronger reactions to work overload than men (13.33%).<sup>21</sup>
- **Improper treatment of employees by superiors (I-3): 22.50% of Gen Z reported "a lot of stress"** from improper treatment by superiors.<sup>21</sup> Men from Gen Z were more sensitive to this stressor than men from Gen Y.<sup>21</sup>
- **Strong competition in the workplace (I-4): 11.67% of Gen Z reported "a lot of stress"** from strong competition.<sup>21</sup>
- **The need to meet high expectations towards employees and continuous improvement (I-5): 14.17% of Gen Z reported "a lot of stress"** from this factor.<sup>21</sup> Men from Gen Z were more sensitive to this than men from Gen Y.<sup>21</sup>
- **Inappropriate organization of work (I-6): 15.83% of Gen Z reported "a lot of stress"** from inappropriate organization of work.<sup>21</sup>
- Other factors like bad relations among employees (17.50% "a lot of stress"), fear of job loss (12.50% "a lot of stress"), and employee evaluation system (10.08% "a lot of stress") also contribute to their overall stress burden.<sup>21</sup>

The data presented here clearly demonstrates that Gen Z's workplace stress is not monolithic but stems from a complex combination of traditional stressors (e.g., financial, workload) and factors deeply tied to their generational values and experiences (e.g., loneliness, lack of purpose, value misalignment, and poor management). The direct links between these stressors and high turnover intentions (e.g., 42% quit due to burnout) underscore that these are not merely discomforts but significant drivers of employee turnover, making them critical for organizational stability and talent retention.

**Table 2: Key Workplace Stressors for Gen Z and Their Reported Impact**

Stressor Category	Specific Impact/Prevalence (Quantitative Data)	Source
<b>Reasons for Quitting (Top 3)</b>	Unsatisfactory salary: 54%	TalentLMS/BambooHR <sup>2</sup>
	Burnout & lack of work-life balance: 42%	TalentLMS/BambooHR <sup>2</sup>
	Not doing what they are passionate about: 37%	TalentLMS/BambooHR <sup>2</sup>
<b>Work-Life Balance</b>	Difficulty maintaining work-life balance: 28%	TalentLMS/BambooHR <sup>2</sup>
<b>Loneliness &amp; Disconnection</b>	Report feeling alone sometimes or always: 73%	TalentLMS/BambooHR <sup>2</sup>
	Remote work makes them feel lonely/disconnected: 44%	TalentLMS/BambooHR <sup>2</sup>
	More likely to say loneliness affects mental health: 55% (vs. general population)	Calm Survey <sup>6</sup>
	Quit due to lack of bonds/relationships with colleagues: 19%	TalentLMS/BambooHR <sup>2</sup>
<b>Managerial Impact</b>	Manager has extremely negative impact on well-being: 47% (vs. all US workers)	Calm Survey <sup>6</sup>
<b>Work Overload</b>	Feel "a lot of stress" from work overload: 18.33% (N=120 Gen Z)	ResearchGate <sup>21</sup>
	Women Gen Z stronger reactions to work overload: 23.33% (vs. 13.33% men)	ResearchGate <sup>21</sup>
<b>Improper Treatment by Superiors</b>	Feel "a lot of stress" from improper treatment: 22.50% (N=120 Gen Z)	ResearchGate <sup>21</sup>
<b>High Expectations/Continuous Improvement</b>	Feel "a lot of stress" from high expectations: 14.17% (N=120 Gen Z)	ResearchGate <sup>21</sup>
<b>Inappropriate Organization of Work</b>	Feel "a lot of stress" from inappropriate organization: 15.83% (N=120 Gen Z)	ResearchGate <sup>21</sup>
<b>Limited Career Progression</b>	Quit due to limited career progression: 34%	TalentLMS/BambooHR <sup>2</sup>
<b>Lack of Psychological Safety</b>	Not confident expressing opinions: 63%	Mental Health America (MHA) <sup>10</sup>
	Disagree could be themselves at work: 60%	Mental Health America (MHA) <sup>10</sup>

This table provides clear, actionable information for employers by identifying the specific pain points for Gen Z. The quantitative data allows for prioritization of interventions, demonstrating which stressors are most prevalent and directly linked to negative outcomes like employee turnover. The data on loneliness and managerial impact highlights unique challenges for this generation, emphasizing the need for tailored strategies that foster connection and supportive leadership.

### 4.3. Coping Mechanism Utilization and Effectiveness

Generation Z exhibits distinct patterns in their utilization of coping mechanisms, reflecting both adaptive strengths and areas of vulnerability. This section presents quantitative and qualitative findings regarding their preferred strategies and their overall coping efficacy.

In terms of adaptive coping strategies, Generation Z demonstrates a clear preference for certain approaches. Studies indicate that Gen Z individuals favor social support, mindfulness, and expressive coping approaches.<sup>4</sup> This contrasts with Generation X, who tend to rely more on problem-solving and pragmatic strategies.<sup>5</sup> Gen Z places a high value on social support, frequently relying on close networks of friends, family, and online communities for both emotional and practical assistance. They tend to seek out and cling to social support more than previous generations, leveraging it as a key resource for navigating personal and societal challenges.<sup>1</sup> This reliance on social networks has been shown to positively influence their well-being and resilience.<sup>1</sup>

A significant and progressive characteristic of Gen Z's coping is their openness to professional help. They display significantly greater openness to seeking professional psychological help compared to Generation X ( $t(198) = -5.50, p < .001$ ).<sup>5</sup> This generation is notably more likely to seek professional mental health assistance than past generations, a trend largely attributed to a reduced societal stigma surrounding mental health in their cohort.<sup>2</sup> This openness translates into concrete expectations for employer-provided mental health support, with half of Gen Z respondents desiring mental health training and over 8 out of 10 wanting mental health days at work.<sup>2</sup> Other adaptive strategies identified include relaxation techniques and engagement in physical wellness activities, which are recognized as effective positive coping mechanisms.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, active involvement in positive thinking, acceptance of reality, and positive reframing of thoughts are protective coping strategies that correlate with improved psychological well-being.<sup>17</sup> Internal factors such as resilience—the ability to adapt and recover from stress—and extraversion, characterized by sociability and positive emotional expression, also positively influence well-being and coping outcomes for Gen Z.<sup>1</sup> Resilience, in particular, is crucial for mitigating the negative impacts of social media-induced anxiety and FOMO.<sup>1</sup>

However, the analysis also reveals a concerning tendency towards maladaptive coping strategies, particularly avoidance and withdrawal. A study on coping with toxic workplace dynamics ( $N=96$  participants, with 39.6% Gen Z) found a statistically significant difference in the use of avoidant coping strategies among generational groups ( $F(3, 92) = 6.07, p < .001, \eta^2 = .165$ ).<sup>20</sup> Post hoc tests confirmed that Generation Z exhibited a greater tendency to withdraw or avoid toxic situations compared to Generation X ( $p = .026$ ) and Millennials ( $p = .012$ ).<sup>20</sup> This tendency is further supported by a significant negative correlation observed between age and Avoidant/Passive Coping ( $\rho = -0.411, p < .001$ ), suggesting that younger individuals, including Gen Z, employ these strategies more frequently.<sup>20</sup> This can manifest as denying the existence of stress, emotional numbing, or retreating into unhealthy comfort zones.<sup>16</sup> While these maladaptive strategies may offer temporary relief from mental distress, their preferential use and a lack of adaptive coping styles are associated with higher levels of psychopathology and can contribute to long-term psychological illnesses.<sup>17</sup> It is important to note that no statistically significant differences were found among generations for adaptive, emotion-focused, or problem-focused coping strategies in the toxic workplace study, although practical patterns (e.g., Baby Boomers displaying higher emotion-focused coping) emerged.<sup>20</sup> This suggests that while Gen Z may not differ in the use of these strategies, their efficacy or preference for avoidant strategies in specific contexts is distinct.

Furthermore, a study ( $N=100$  Gen Z) reported a mean ( $M$ ) of 34.0 and a standard deviation ( $SD$ ) of 6.55 for coping with stress, with a median of 35.0.<sup>5</sup> In comparison, Generation X scored significantly higher on coping with stress (Mann–Whitney  $U$  test:  $U = 2588.00, p < .001, \text{rank biserial correlation} = -0.482$ ), indicating a lower overall coping efficacy for Gen Z.<sup>5</sup> This suggests that while Gen Z is more attuned to mental health and willing to seek professional help, they may generally struggle with effective coping, not just prefer certain strategies. The effectiveness of coping strategies is highly individualized and context-dependent, and even when implemented, their utility can be compromised by unsupportive or hostile work conditions.<sup>22</sup> This highlights a critical duality in Gen Z's coping behaviors: a progressive openness to professional mental health support and reliance on social networks, contrasted with a concerning tendency towards maladaptive avoidance in challenging workplace situations. This implies that while Gen Z is more aware of mental health, they may lack the robust problem-focused coping skills or feel disempowered to address systemic issues, leading to withdrawal rather than confrontation.

**Table 3: Gen Z Coping Mechanism Preferences and Tendencies**

Coping Aspect	Quantitative/Qualitative Finding	Source
<b>Preferred Adaptive Strategies</b>	Favor social support, mindfulness, expressive coping approaches (Qualitative)	IJFMR, Research Archive of Rising Scholars <sup>4</sup>
<b>Openness to Professional Help</b>	Significantly greater openness to seeking professional psychological help than Gen X ( $t(198) = -5.50, p < .001$ )	IJFMR <sup>5</sup>
	Significantly more likely to seek professional help than past generations (Qualitative)	TalentLMS/BambooHR <sup>2</sup>

<b>Desired Employer Support</b>	Half want mental health training; over 8 out of 10 want mental health days	TalentLMS/BambooHR <sup>2</sup>
<b>Overall Coping Efficacy (Gen Z)</b>	Mean (M) = 34.0, Standard Deviation (SD) = 6.55; Median = 35.0 (N=100 Gen Z)	IJFMR <sup>5</sup>
	Significantly lower coping with stress scores than Gen X (U = 2588.00, p <.001)	IJFMR <sup>5</sup>
<b>Tendency Towards Avoidant Coping</b>	Greater tendency to withdraw/avoid toxic situations vs. Gen X (p =.026) & Millennials (p =.012) (F(3, 92) = 6.07, p <.001, $\eta^2$ =.165)	ResearchGate <sup>20</sup>
	Significant negative correlation between age and Avoidant/Passive Coping ( $\rho$ = -0.411, p <.001)	ResearchGate <sup>20</sup>
<b>Other Coping Styles</b>	No statistically significant generational differences for adaptive, emotion-focused, or problem-focused coping strategies	ResearchGate <sup>20</sup>

This table summarizes the reported coping strategies for Gen Z, highlighting their openness to professional mental health support and their reliance on social networks, while also pointing to a concerning tendency towards avoidant coping in challenging workplace situations. The quantitative measures, particularly the lower overall coping efficacy compared to Gen X, suggest that while Gen Z is more aware of mental health, they may lack robust problem-focused coping skills or feel disempowered to address systemic issues, leading to withdrawal.

## 5. Discussion

This study reveals that Generation Z faces significantly high levels of workplace stress, anxiety, and burnout, often more than older generations. Key stressors include financial strain, poor work-life balance, toxic management, lack of psychological safety, and loneliness, especially in remote work settings. Despite their openness to mental health support and reliance on social connections, many Gen Z employees still resort to avoidant coping strategies when faced with toxic work cultures. They seek authenticity, empathy, and growth opportunities, yet often feel disconnected and unsupported. Simply offering mental health benefits isn't enough—organizations must address root causes of stress, create psychologically safe environments, and invest in leadership that fosters trust and development. Without such efforts, businesses risk higher turnover and disengagement among this critical workforce segment.

## 6. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study highlights that Gen Z workers face high levels of stress, anxiety, and burnout, often more than older generations. Their digital upbringing, focus on mental health, and social awareness shape how they experience and cope with workplace challenges. While they are open to seeking help, many still rely on avoidant coping, especially in toxic or unsupportive environments. Key stressors include financial pressures, poor work-life balance, bad management, and loneliness in remote work. For organizations, this signals an urgent need to create healthier, more supportive workplaces. Addressing these issues isn't just good practice—it's essential for retaining and engaging Gen Z talent. Based on the synthesized findings, the following recommendations are put forth for organizations:

- **Prioritize Mental Health Support:** Move beyond token efforts by offering comprehensive mental health benefits, mental health days (valued by 82% of Gen Z), and training. Leaders must model healthy boundaries and demonstrate that well-being is a business priority.
- **Foster Psychological Safety:** Close the gap between Gen Z's openness and discomfort discussing mental health with managers (only 56% feel comfortable). Train leaders in empathy, build trust, encourage transparent communication, and create spaces where employees feel safe to express themselves.
- **Redefine Work-Life Balance:** Since burnout and poor balance drive 42% of Gen Z to quit, establish clear boundaries on availability, especially after hours. Hybrid models should include social opportunities to reduce loneliness.
- **Ensure Financial Well-being:** As 54% leave jobs over pay, provide competitive, transparent compensation and offer financial planning support to ease money-related stress.
- **Build Connection and Community:** Combat the 73% loneliness rate by creating mentorship programs, employee groups, and social clubs to strengthen workplace bonds, especially in hybrid/remote settings.

- Invest in Growth and Careers: Address Gen Z's desire for growth—34% leave due to limited career progression—by offering skills training and clear advancement paths.
- Engage Gen Z in Purposeful Work: Involve them in shaping diversity, equity, inclusion, and sustainability initiatives. Giving them a voice enhances their sense of purpose and autonomy.
- Strengthen Coping Skills: Support Gen Z's coping efficacy through resilience training, stress management workshops, and problem-solving skills based on Positive Psychological Capital (PsyCap) principles to reduce avoidant behaviors.

By strategically addressing these interconnected areas, organizations can create work environments that not only mitigate stress but also genuinely support the mental well-being and professional flourishing of Generation Z, ensuring their sustained engagement and contribution to the future workforce.

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