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Article

Toxic Leadership and Turnover Intentions: Emotional Intelligence as a Moderator of This Relationship

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Abstract: This study aimed to investigate the relationship between toxic leadership and turnover intentions and whether this relationship was moderated by emotional intelligence. The sample consisted of 202 participants working in organizations based in Portugal. The results show that toxic leadership is positively and significantly associated with turnover intentions. Regarding emotional intelligence, only the dimensions of the use of emotions and the emotions of others are positively and significantly associated with turnover intentions. As for the moderating effect, only the use of emotions and emotion regulation dimensions moderate the relationship between toxic leadership and turnover intentions. Participants with high levels of emotion use and emotion regulation, when compared to participants with low levels of emotion use and emotion regulation, found that toxic leadership was relevant in boosting their turnover intentions. It can be concluded that participants use their emotional capacities to move away from toxic environments in search of new and better working conditions.

Keywords: toxic leadership; turnover intentions; emotional intelligence; moderation; emotions



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1. Introduction

The concept of leadership can be found in all populations and has been present since the dawn of civilization. King, emperor, sultan, president, and even boss are terms used to characterize someone who leads others towards creative and intuitive goals (Bolden, 2004). As organizations evolve, the leader has an increasing obligation to adapt to the subordinate and vice versa so that both can achieve goals that provide them with professional and personal harmony.

Leaders can be flexible and welcoming towards their subordinates and adopt transformational or participative leadership (Grill et al., 2017). However, subordinates' emotions are negatively impacted when their leaders prevent them from developing their skills or when they demean them. This is known as toxic leadership. This type of leadership is usually associated with the individual's characteristics, which are very difficult to change (Aravena, 2019). Erickson et al. (2015) defined toxic leadership as a set of various toxic actions that lead subordinates to achieve goals that promote the leader's image.

Schmidt (2008) developed a set of dimensions that characterize toxic leadership and stated that abusive supervision, authoritarian leadership, narcissism, self-promotion, and unpredictability (Mónico et al., 2019) are the sources of toxic leadership and that the behaviors of these leaders are derived from one of these five dimensions.

Several problems are associated with toxic leadership, including negative attitudes, lower job satisfaction, depression (Erickson et al., 2015), and subordinates' resignation,

which is strongly influenced by the relationships the employees have with their colleagues or managers in the organization (Burt et al., 2009). To reinforce this, Zhang (2016) explains that turnover intentions tend to rise when organizations do not care for their employees, especially on a personal level. Employees' perception of toxic behavior in their leader can lead to an increase in turnover intentions (Hattab et al., 2022).

Despite this poor relationship, sometimes, employees may be unable to resign from their jobs due to accommodation, monetary, or emotional reasons. This type of emotional stability or instability is detected and controlled by each individual due to one's emotional intelligence, which is the ability of individuals to perceive emotions and reason and apply them to various extrinsic factors (Mayer et al., 2004). From another perspective, emotional intelligence is identified as the perception of personal emotions and the behaviors and actions of others (Ioannidou & Konstantikaki, 2008). It is also important to note that knowing how to recognize one's own emotions helps to discriminate good actions from bad ones (Ioannidou & Konstantikaki, 2008).

Like toxic leadership, emotional intelligence has a model with four dimensions: the perception of one's own emotions, the perception of others' emotions, the use of emotions, and the regulation of emotions (Rodrigues et al., 2011). Previous studies have shown that employees with high levels of emotional intelligence have lower turnover intentions (Hattab et al., 2022; Jantjies & Botha, 2024; Nonehkaran et al., 2023). However, after thoroughly searching the literature, we found a gap in the relationship between the three constructs studied (toxic leadership, turnover intentions, and emotional intelligence). We studied these relationships to test the hypothesis that emotional intelligence alters the relationship between toxic leadership and turnover intentions. Therefore, this study aimed to determine the relationship between toxic leadership and turnover intentions and whether emotional intelligence moderated this relationship.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Toxic Leadership

Leadership has been strongly linked to the leader's ability to promote and encourage followers to perform specific tasks. A strong leader's primary goal is to accomplish tasks on personal and organizational levels. DePree (1998) stated that leaders have a duty to act with a certain level of maturity, which is expressed through responsibility, self-esteem, a sense of belonging, and equality (DePree, 1998). However, not all leaders promote the well-being and organizational support that subordinates need.

The study by Krasikova et al. (2013) concludes that toxic leadership is noticeable in some organizations. They stated that toxic leadership can take various forms, such as abusive supervision and "petty tyranny" (Krasikova et al., 2013, p. 1308). In the same vein, Erickson et al. (2015) observed that toxic leadership in the US military is characterized by a "perfect" triangle between toxic leaders, susceptible subordinates, and a welcoming environment. In fact, this phenomenon occurs in 25% of organizations worldwide (Erickson et al., 2015).

Toxic leaders are often frustrated and arrogant, and their main goal is to prevail in terms of their image and sovereignty over others. From this perspective, the study by Krasikova et al. (2013) characterizes the toxic leader as evil. Their behaviors are essential for their superiority and visibility within the organization, even if they negatively affect their subordinates. In the same vein, the research by Erickson et al. (2015) shows that leaders can become toxic when their personal goals (promotions or career advancement) cannot be legitimately recognized.

Also, the study by Einarsen et al. (2007) shows that it is important to remember that leaders can make bad decisions on a day-to-day basis without being considered toxic.

Leaders are only considered toxic when they systematically and repetitively provoke this type of action. Similarly, [Erickson et al. \(2015\)](#) stated that in order to be considered toxic, the leader's actions must be volitional, systematic, and repeated over time.

Long-term research on leadership behaviors has demonstrated that these actions can take different forms [Dobbs \(2014\)](#). This author determined that toxic leadership is multidimensional and identified five interconnected areas based on the conceptual model and Toxic Leadership Scale (TLS) developed by [Schmidt \(2008\)](#). [Schmidt \(2008\)](#) outlined the five dimensions of toxic leadership as follows: (1) abusive supervision, which consists of toxic verbal and non-verbal behaviors ([Schmidt, 2008](#)), such as outbursts of anger, aggressive feedback, and ridicule of subordinates ([Salvador, 2018](#)), poor organizational justice, and psychological abuse ([Tepper, 2000](#)); (2) an authoritarian leadership, which is defined as a behavior of control (forcing subordinates to be obedient) ([Cheng et al., 2004](#)), psychological abuse ([Tepper, 2000](#)), and a restriction on the autonomy and initiatives of subordinates ([Ferreira et al., 2021](#)); (3) narcissism, where an individual thinks of and values oneself as a form of supremacy ([Schmidt, 2008](#)), which has a bad influence on the work and lives of subordinates ([Lubit, 2004](#)) and results in a big gap in empathy and recognition of the efforts made by others ([Ferreira et al., 2021](#)); (4) self-promotion, which aims to promote the image of leaders excessively, to promote their interests in order to create a good image at higher levels of the hierarchy ([Schmidt, 2008](#)), and to compete against rivals within the organization ([Salvador, 2018](#)); and (5) unpredictability, which refers to the leader's unexpected behaviors, mainly toxic or abusive behaviors and unpredictable mood swings ([Schmidt, 2008](#); [Salvador, 2018](#); [Mónico et al., 2019](#)).

[Schmidt's \(2008\)](#) research demonstrated that toxic leadership has a large impact on the organization and, above all, on subordinates. Thus, he attempted to understand some of the behaviors adopted by the leader, which were classified according to the five dimensions mentioned above.

The behaviors of the leaders often have negative impacts on their subordinates who can develop physical, mental, or organizational problems. A brief survey found that the consequences of this type of leadership include a great lack of trust, a feeling of favoritism and nepotism ([Erickson et al., 2015](#)), bullying ([Khan et al., 2017](#)), and a lack of energy, motivation, and fatigue ([Goleman, 2011](#); [Erickson et al., 2015](#)). At a more extreme stage, some employees may suffer from physical violence ([Schyns & Schilling, 2013](#)) and even end up leaving the organization, as explained by [Arshad and Puteh \(2015\)](#), who determined that frustrated and unhappy employees are more likely to leave than satisfied employees.

2.2. Turnover Intentions

With the growth and development of the human resources department, there is a need to analyze employees' potential intentions to leave the organization. [Mendes \(2014\)](#) analyzed and described three types of this phenomenon: involuntary turnover, which is the departure of an employee based on the decision of the organization; voluntary turnover, referring to the departure of an employee based on their own decision; and, finally, turnover intentions, described as the employee's turnover intentions through their behavior, words, or attitudes ([Mendes, 2014](#)).

Turnover intention is defined as the desire or willingness to leave the organization for a new position ([Liu & Onwuegbuzie, 2012](#)) or the actual movement of an employee to a different organization ([Rahman & Nas, 2013](#)). [Carmeli and Weisberg \(2006\)](#) stated that the turnover intention process is divided into three phases: (1) thinking about leaving, (2) thinking about looking for a new job, and (3) the actual turnover intention. This led to the following research question: why do employees intend to leave the organization? Studies have shown that several motivations can contribute to this phenomenon, including

issues with management and unions (Alam & Asim, 2019), the relationship with colleagues (Alam & Asim, 2019; Liu & Onwuegbuzie, 2012), salary and benefits (Alam & Asim, 2019; Lee et al., 2012), and organizational factors such as the work environment (Alam & Asim, 2019; Lee et al., 2012) and commitment to the organization (Alam & Asim, 2019; Liu & Onwuegbuzie, 2012; Rahman & Nas, 2013) and NasA survey by the Society for Human Resource Management and Aon Consulting concluded that poor management is the third most common reason for employees to consider leaving the organization Rahman and Nas (2013). This has led to a growing concern for organizations to maintain good management practices to maintain the mental well-being and professional goals of employees and avoid the costs associated with redundancies.

Tepper (2000) concluded that abusive supervision by leaders has significant effects on employees' intentions to leave due to the imbalance between their personal and professional lives and a significant increase in stress and psychological problems. Rahman and Nas (2013) stated that employees who are dissatisfied with their manager perform poorly and search for alternative jobs, in addition to having negative feelings about their manager.

However, Zhang (2016) concluded that the departure of an employee can result in explicit costs (recruitment, training, and productivity) and hidden costs (unfavorable comments about the organization by the employee, loss of opportunities, and low morale). Similarly, Guzeller and Celiker (2020) stated that turnover, which follows the intention to leave, can result in high costs for the organization (due to time and labor associated with the training of the previous and future employees), a loss of talent, redundancy payments, and new hires.

To reduce turnover intentions, it is necessary to prepare a set of actions that reduce this impact so that, later, the intention is not fulfilled (Fukui et al., 2019). The strategies include leadership training (training in techniques and strategies), improving the conditions of the organization (increasing salaries and benefits and creating opportunities for career progression), and, increasingly, investing in good mental health programs for employees (indicators of work stress and burnout as well as reducing the likelihood of depression and job dissatisfaction) (Fukui et al., 2019).

Despite this, the employee's intention to leave is influenced by intrapersonal factors, such as motivations that are extrinsic to the company's goals, moving to another country, or personal characteristics.

Toxic Leadership and Turnover Intentions

The leader's toxic characteristics and personality serve to maintain their reputation and a good image to their superiors (Krasikova et al., 2013). Zhang (2016) concluded that when workers experience difficulty in their relationships with their bosses, they need to exert great mental effort in their professional lives to maintain a working relationship. Job satisfaction and commitment can be compromised when toxic hierarchical factors are identified within teams (Zhang, 2016). This dissatisfaction is often accompanied by frustration and distress, leading employees to disengage from their workplace.

Khan et al. (2017) concluded that turnover intentions result from various events within a toxic workplace environment. Low commitment, reduced productivity, and increased absenteeism lead to a high level of stress, which increases job dissatisfaction and, consequently, the turnover intentions of the company's employees (Khan et al., 2017). Erickson et al. (2015) found that toxic leadership is strongly linked to turnover rate, for example, in the United States Army. Zhang (2016) demonstrated that high turnover rates are due to weak and poor management leadership, which translates into a high organizational cost associated with attracting and retaining employees. Ofei et al. (2023) concluded that when nurses perceive toxic behavior in their leaders, their turnover intentions increase.

Similarly, other authors have concluded that employees' turnover intentions increase in the presence of a toxic leader (Hattab et al., 2022; Jantjies & Botha, 2024; Nonehkaran et al., 2023; Nunes & Palma-Moreira, 2024). Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

Hypothesis 1. *Toxic leadership is positively and significantly associated with turnover intentions.*

2.3. Emotional Intelligence

Rationality differentiates humans from other living beings. Critical thinking and decision-making are factors that occur in all human populations and contribute to emotions experienced by each individual.

Whether or not an individual is rational depends on the emotions they may feel towards something. Adolphs et al. (2019) stated that an emotion is a state of the brain that causes a certain behavior. This emotion can come from various factors, such as running away from something dangerous or crying with joy (Adolphs et al., 2019). It is important to note that emotion to a single stimulus can vary among individuals (Adolphs et al., 2019).

However, the concept of emotional intelligence and its application in various contexts is increasingly being studied.

Emotional intelligence is characterized as the individual's way of perceiving and controlling their emotions (Siddiqui & Hassan, 2013). In the same vein, Goleman et al. (2018) stated that emotional intelligence involves the ability to manage one's own and others' feelings and emotions, discriminate the information gathered, and plan future actions.

To distinguish between different aspects of emotional intelligence, Mayer et al. (1997) organized emotional intelligence into four dimensions: (1) perceiving emotions; (2) reflecting on emotions; (3) assimilating emotions into thought; and (4) perceiving and expressing emotions.

Later, Davies et al. (1998) reorganized the dimensions of emotional intelligence based on the studies of Mayer et al. (1997), which was later adopted by Law et al. (2004). This led Law et al. (2004) to define the four dimensions as follows: (1) The first one is the evaluation and expression of one's own emotions, which refers to the way in which the individual perceives and understands spontaneous and authentic emotions in a non-verbal way (Peltier, 2011; Rodrigues et al., 2011). It is based on perceiving feelings, such as anger, fear, happiness, disgust, and sadness, among others (Mayer et al., 2004), and automatically filtering their actions based on this perception (Rodrigues et al., 2011). (2) The second dimension is the evaluation and recognition of the emotions of others, which refers to the perception, identification, and evaluation of the individual in recognizing and analyzing the emotions of others, allowing for better sensitivity towards others (Peltier, 2011; Rodrigues et al., 2011). This dimension is important as it allows us to distinguish whether emotions have been honest or not (Peltier, 2011). (3) The third dimension is the use of emotions to facilitate an individual's performance, with the aim of using the best emotions to facilitate one's performance in activities (Rodrigues et al., 2011). It promotes direction, thinking, and seeing things from a different perspective, and it prioritizes only accomplishing tasks that are really important (Mayer et al., 2004; Peltier, 2011). (4) Finally, the fourth dimension refers to managing one's emotions and, specifically, regulating them (Rodrigues et al., 2011). It also helps an individual to determine whether or not one's "self" should turn off emotions in the face of an event or situation that has occurred (Grilo, 2009).

The studies by Mayer et al. (1997), Davies et al. (1998), Law et al. (2004), Wong and Law (2002), and Rodrigues et al. (2011) allowed for the development and validation of the emotional intelligence scale adapted to the Portuguese population Rodrigues et al. (2011).

However, Neubauer and Freudenthaler (2005) concluded that emotional intelligence helps cognitive success. Rodrigues et al. (2011) emphasized that emotional intelligence has a multidimensional objective, i.e., it aims to be able to perceive the emotions of the

individual and of others, to regulate them well, to make good decisions, and to use them correctly to achieve harmony between emotions and actions.

2.3.1. Emotional Intelligence and Turnover Intentions

Emotional intelligence improves the perception and rationalization of emotions. The research by [Khosravi et al. \(2020\)](#) concludes that, from an intrapersonal perspective, emotional intelligence enhances problem-solving and individual and collective behaviors. From an interpersonal perspective, [Mohammad et al. \(2014\)](#) showed that employees who consider their leader to have a high emotional intelligence are less likely to leave the organization.

The response of emotional intelligence in the professional context can be useful in that it can help regulate emotions when dealing with different bosses, work pressure, or lack of recognition at work ([Kong, 2011](#)). From another perspective, teams with a high capacity for emotional intelligence are more attentive and, in turn, can manage their emotions in response to possible conflicts ([Khosravi et al., 2020](#)). For example, a study conducted in a public hospital, by [Abdallah and Mostafa \(2021\)](#), showed that when nurses participate and become involved in decisions together with their leaders, they express more positive emotions, which makes them happier, more altruistic, and more civic-minded. Similarly, [Latif et al. \(2017\)](#) stated that emotional intelligence has a negative association with turnover intentions, with previous research confirming the existence of a negative relationship between emotional work and the intention to leave the organization ([Latif et al., 2017](#)). [Giao et al. \(2020\)](#) also confirmed the negative and significant association between emotional intelligence and turnover intentions. [Uzair and Bhaumik \(2023\)](#) conducted a study involving employees in the banking sector and found a negative and significant association between emotional intelligence and turnover intentions. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

Hypothesis 2. *Emotional intelligence is positively and significantly associated with turnover intentions.*

2.3.2. Emotional Intelligence as a Moderating Tool

Emotional intelligence, as mentioned above, is the ability of individuals to control and perceive their emotions and act, according to [Mayer et al. \(1997\)](#). Studies show that emotional intelligence works as a defense mechanism, as exemplified by [Peng et al. \(2019\)](#), who stated that emotional intelligence is a very important factor in people's lives and can increase their resilience. As such, emotional intelligence helps humans protect themselves from external factors.

Recent research has shown that emotional intelligence can act as a moderating tool, especially in the workplace. [Batool \(2013\)](#) concluded that it is possible to control negative situations through emotional intelligence and self-awareness, which refers to an individual's ability to recognize and manage their emotions for the well-being of others and oneself. He also stated that self-regulation is about controlling words, decisions, stereotypes, and concern for the values of others. Self-regulation is knowing how to control oneself, even in stressful situations ([Batool, 2013](#)).

In the same vein, [Dasborough's \(2019\)](#) research on the moderating effects of emotional intelligence showed that individuals with high levels of emotional intelligence are more likely to use this mechanism to manage and regulate their emotions. In contrast, the author stated that individuals with a lower level of emotional intelligence cannot manage and regulate emotions easily ([Dasborough, 2019](#)).

Jordan et al. (2002) suggested that high emotional intelligence allows workers to deal with stress and possible job insecurities and improves their management of negative reactions to less pleasant situations).

Finally, Lubit (2004) showed that knowing how to deal with toxic leadership in organizations significantly impacts one's career. Individuals who can recognize the actions and attitudes of others are well-equipped to protect and help themselves. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

Hypothesis 3. *Emotional intelligence moderates the relationship between toxic leadership and turnover intentions.*

The hypotheses formulated in this study are summarized in Figure 1:

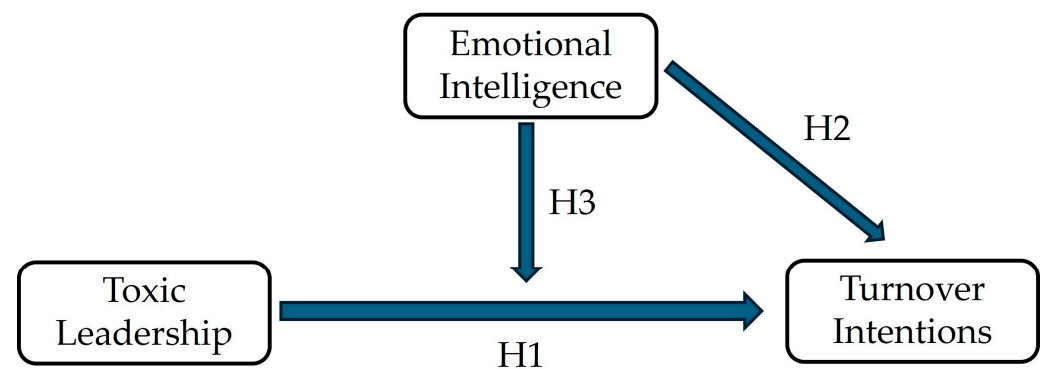


Figure 1. Research model.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Data Collection Procedure

A total of 202 individuals took part in this study voluntarily. The conditions for participating in this study were that they had to be 18 years old or over and work in organizations based in Portugal. A non-probabilistic, convenient, and intentional snowball sampling process was used (Trochim, 2000). This study is quantitative and non-experimental since the predictor variable (toxic leadership) was not manipulated, and it has a correlational structure since the aim is to study whether there is a relationship between the following variables: toxic leadership, turnover intentions, and emotional intelligence. This study is also cross-sectional (as the data were collected at a single point in time) and hypothetical-deductive (Reto & Nunes, 1999).

The questionnaire was created online on the Google Forms platform, and its link was sent via email and LinkedIn. Before answering the questionnaire, the participants gave their informed consent if they decided to participate in this study. The informed consent form guaranteed the confidentiality of the answers given. After reading the information provided about informed consent, they were asked to state whether they agreed to participate in the questionnaire. If the participants answered no, they were taken to the end of the questionnaire; if they answered yes, they were taken to the next section.

The questionnaire included sociodemographic questions to characterize the sample, including age in years, gender, seniority in the organization, educational qualifications, marital status, sector of activity, and type of contract. In addition to these questions, the participants answered three scales: toxic leadership, turnover intentions, and emotional intelligence. The data were collected between February and March 2024.

3.2. Participants

The sample in this study consisted of 202 participants, with 58 participants aged between 18 and 29 (28.7%), 103 aged between 30 and 49 (51%), and 41 aged between 50 and 67 (39.6%). Most of the participants were female; specifically, 122 were female (60.4%) and 80 were male (39.6%). Regarding their educational qualifications, 13 had a basic level of education (6.4%), 72 had completed secondary school (35.6%), 83 had a bachelor's degree (41.1%), and 34 had a master's degree (16.8%). There were no participants with a PhD. The participants' seniority in the company/organization can be classified as follows: less than 1 year: 28 participants (13.9%); between 1 and 3 years: 58 participants (28.7%); between 4 and 6 years: 39 participants (19.3%); between 7 and 9 years: 15 participants (7.4%); between 10 and 15 years: 24 participants (11.9%); and more than 15 years: 38 participants (18.8%). As for the sector of activity, 36 of the participants were in the public sector (17.8%), 153 in the private sector (75.7%), and 13 in the public-private sector (6.4%). Finally, when asked about their contract, 27 answered that they were on an uncertain-term contract (13.4%), 21 on a fixed-term contract (10.4%), 145 on an open-ended contract (71.8%), and 9 on another type of contract (4.5%).

3.3. Data Analysis Procedure

After the data were collected, they were processed using SPSS Statistics software, version 29 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA). The metric qualities of the instruments used in this study were initially tested. Confirmatory factor analyses were carried out using AMOS Graphics software, version 29 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA) to test the validity of the instruments. Confirmatory factor analysis was used to assess the quality of fit of a theoretical measurement model to the correlational structure observed between the manifest variables (items) (Marôco, 2021). The procedure followed a “model generation” logic (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993). Six fit indices were combined, as recommended by Hu and Bentler (1999): Chi-square ratio/degrees of freedom (χ^2/df); Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI); Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI); Comparative Fit Index (CFI); Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA); and Root Mean Square Residual (RMSR). The chi-square/degrees of freedom ratio (χ^2/df) must be less than 5. The CFI, GFI, and TLI values must equal or exceed 0.90. The RMSEA value must be less than 0.08 (McCallum et al., 1996). The lower the value of the RMSR, the better the fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). With the data obtained from the confirmatory factor analysis, the construct reliability was calculated for each of the dimensions of the scales and the respective convergent validity (by calculating the AVE value). The construct reliability values must be greater than 0.70, and the AVE value must be equal to or greater than 0.50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). However, according to Hair et al. (2011), if the reliability value is higher than 0.70, AVE values of 0.40 or higher are acceptable. The internal consistency of each of the dimensions of the scales was also tested by calculating Cronbach's alpha, whose value should be equal to or greater than 0.70 in organizational studies (Bryman & Cramer, 2003).

The items' sensitivity was also tested by calculating the measures of central tendency and shape. The items must have responses at all points and no asymmetry at one of the extremes, and their absolute values of asymmetry and kurtosis must be less than 2 and 7, respectively (Finney & DiStefano, 2013).

Next, we carried out descriptive statistics on the studied variables using Student's *t*-tests for independent samples. To test the association between sociodemographic variables and the studied variables, we used Student's *t*-tests when the independent variable consisted of two groups and a one-way ANOVA test when the independent variable consisted of more than two groups. The association between the studied variables was tested using Pearson's correlations. Hypotheses 1 and 2 were tested using simple and multiple linear

regressions. Hypothesis 3, which assumes a moderating effect, was tested using Macro Process 4.2, developed by Hayes (2022).

3.4. Instruments

To assess the toxic leadership dimension, the Portuguese version by Mónico et al. (2019) was used; it is based on the Toxic Leadership Scale by Schmidt (2008) and consists of 30 items with a 6-point Likert-type response, where one corresponds to “Strongly Disagree” and 6 indicates “Strongly Agree”. These 30 items (e.g., “My leader has no consideration for subordinates’ commitments outside of work”) are divided into five dimensions: self-promotion (items 19, 20, 21, 22, and 23); abusive supervision (items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7); unpredictability (24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, and 30); authoritarian leadership (items 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13); and narcissism (items 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18). Once the confirmatory factor analysis had been carried out, it was found that not all the fit indices obtained were adequate ($\chi^2/df = 2.67$; GFI = 0.81; CFI = 0.94; TLI = 0.93; RMSEA = 0.074; and SRMR = 0.112) and that the five factors were strongly correlated with each other. Another confirmatory factor analysis was then carried out, which showed that the fit indices were adequate, or their values were very close to adequate ($\chi^2/df = 2.67$; GFI = 0.81; CFI = 0.94; TLI = 0.93; RMSEA = 0.074; and SRMR = 0.112). A composite reliability value of 0.97 and an AVE value of 0.57 were obtained, indicating that this instrument has good composite reliability and convergent validity. Internal consistency was represented by a Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.98. Regarding the sensitivity of the items, responses were obtained for all items, but the median of items 2, 8, 10, 11, 12, 23, 26, 27, 29, and 30 were skewed towards the lower end. However, their absolute asymmetry and kurtosis values were below 2 and 7, respectively, which indicates that they did not grossly violate normality.

To measure turnover intentions, we used the instrument developed by Bozeman and Perrewé (2001), which was translated and adapted for the Portuguese population by Bártole-Ribeiro (2018). The scale consists of 6 items (i.e., “It is very likely that I will leave this organization soon”), classified using a 5-point Likert scale, as follows: 1—“Does not apply to me at all”; 2—“Applies to me a little”; 3—“Applies to me in part”; 4—“Applies to me a lot”; and 5—“Applies to me completely”. Since this is a one-dimensional instrument, a one-factor confirmatory factor analysis was carried out. The fit indices obtained were adequate ($\chi^2/df = 2.88$; GFI = 0.98; CFI = 0.99; TLI = 0.98; RMSEA = 0.078; and SRMR = 0.039). The composite reliability was 0.93, and the convergent validity was represented by an AVE value of 0.67. It can be concluded that both composite reliability and convergent validity had good values. Internal consistency was represented by a Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.93. Regarding the sensitivity of the items, responses were obtained for all items, and only item 5 had a median skewed towards the lower end. However, their absolute values of asymmetry and kurtosis were below 2 and 7, respectively, which indicates that they did not grossly violate normality.

We used the Portuguese version of Wong and Law’s (2002) Emotional Intelligence Scale—WLEIS—analyzed and translated by Rodrigues et al. (2011) to measure emotional intelligence. The scale consists of 16 items (e.g., “I usually have a good idea of why I have certain feelings”), which are grouped into four dimensions: the evaluation of one’s own emotions (items 1, 2, 3, and 4); the evaluation of the emotions of others (items 5, 6, 7, and 8); the use of emotions (items 9, 10, 11, and 12); and the regulation of emotions (items 13, 14, 15, and 16). The answers to the items were classified using a Likert scale, where 1 corresponds to “Strongly Disagree” and 5 indicates “Strongly Agree”. The fit indices obtained were adequate ($\chi^2/df = 2.88$; GFI = 0.98; CFI = 0.99; TLI = 0.98; RMSEA = 0.078; and SRMR = 0.039). The composite reliability ranged from 0.79 (appraisal of others’ emotions) to

0.89 (emotion regulation). As for convergent validity, the AVE values ranged from 0.49 (appraisal of others' emotions) to 0.57 (emotion regulation). Regarding internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.78 (appraisal of others' emotions) to 0.89 (emotion regulation). Regarding the sensitivity of the items, none of the items had a median close to one of the extremes, but items 1, 4, 6, and 8 did not have responses at point 1. However, their absolute asymmetry and kurtosis values were below 2 and 7, respectively, which indicates that they did not grossly violate normality.

4. Results

Two models, performed using one and six factors, were tested. The one-factor model's fit indices were inadequate ($\chi^2/\text{df} = 3.64$; GFI = 0.43; CFI = 0.59; TLI = 0.58; RMSEA = 0.115; and SMRM = 0.46), whereas the fit indices of the six-factor model proved to be adequate or very close to adequate ($\chi^2/\text{df} = 1.36$; GFI = 0.83; CFI = 0.95; TLI = 0.94; RMSEA = 0.043; and SMRM = 0.090). Thus, the theoretical conceptualization, which was determined using six variables, adequately represents the observed data. The correlations are consistent with the pattern of the theorized relationships.

4.1. Descriptive Statistics of the Studied Variables

The descriptive statistics of the studied variables were obtained to determine the position of the answers given by the participants using the instruments used in this study.

The answers obtained using the toxic leadership instrument were significantly lower than the scale's central point (3.5), which indicates that the participants in this study do not perceive their leader as toxic (Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the studied variables.

Variable	t	df	p	d	Mean	SD
Toxic leadership	−13.40 ***	201	<0.001	0.94	2.38	1.19
Turnover intentions	−7.83 ***	201	<0.001	0.55	2.36	1.16
Own emotions	28.43 ***	201	<0.001	2.00	4.19	0.59
Others' emotions	26.62 ***	201	<0.001	1.87	4.16	0.62
Emotion use	19.93 ***	201	<0.001	1.40	4.08	0.77
Emotion regulation	16.19 ***	201	<0.001	1.14	3.85	0.75

Note. *** $p < 0.001$.

Turnover intentions were also significantly lower than the scale's midpoint (3), indicating that these participants have low turnover intentions (Table 1).

The participants' answers to questions regarding emotional intelligence were significantly higher than the midpoint of the scale, indicating that they have high levels of emotional intelligence (Table 1). Among the dimensions that make up this instrument, the one with the highest average was evaluating one's own emotions, and the one with the lowest average was regulating emotions (Table 1).

4.2. Association Between Sociodemographic Variables and the Studied Variables

The gender of the participants did not result in statistically significant differences in the studied variables. However, male participants perceive their leader as more toxic than female participants (Figure 2). Male participants were also found to regulate their emotions better (Figure 2). On the other hand, female participants are more likely to leave the organization (Figure 2).

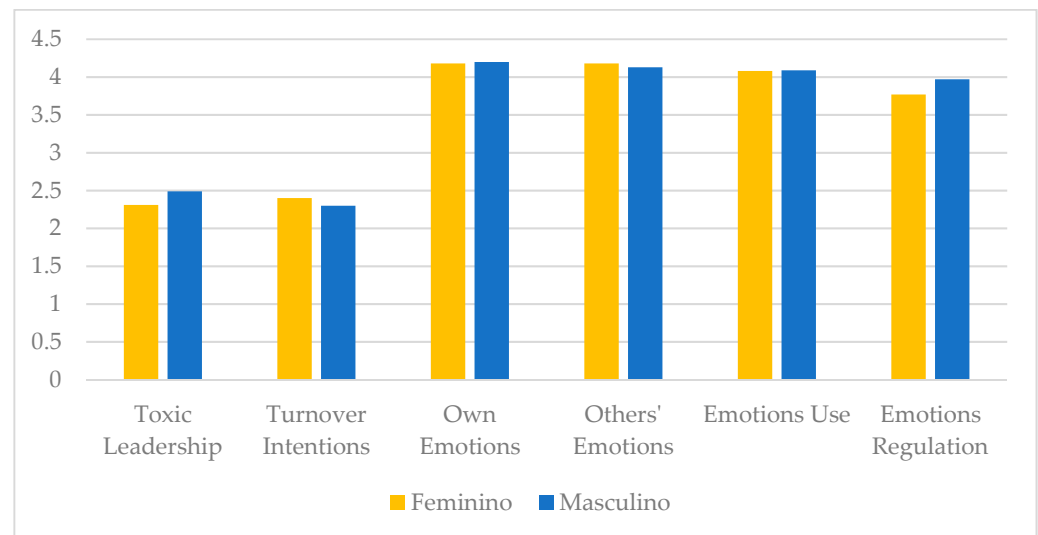


Figure 2. Association between gender and the studied variables.

The age of the participants only resulted in significant differences in turnover intentions ($F(2, 199) = 3.29, p = 0.039$), with participants aged between 18 and 29 showing significantly higher turnover intentions than those between 50 and 67 (Figure 3). Participants aged between 30 and 49 perceive their leader as more toxic and have higher levels of emotional intelligence in all dimensions, except emotion regulation (Figure 3). Participants aged between 50 and 67 showed the highest levels of emotion regulation (Figure 3).

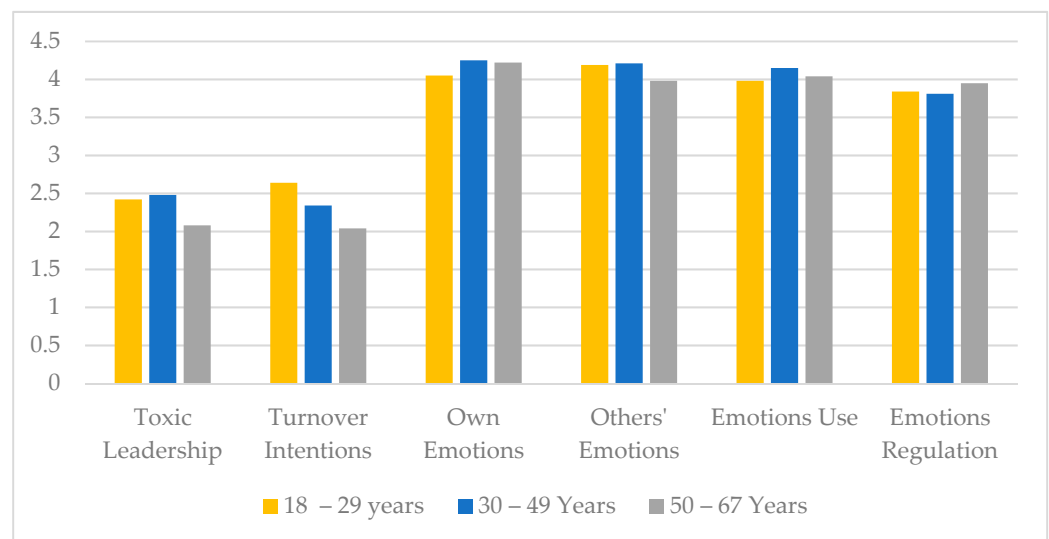


Figure 3. Association between age and the studied variables.

The participant's level of education only had a significant association with emotion use ($F(3, 198) = 7.15, p < 0.001$) and emotion regulation ($F(3, 198) = 7.48, p < 0.001$). Participants with a bachelor's degree showed significantly higher levels of emotion use than participants with a 12th grade degree (Figure 4), and participants with a 12th grade degree showed significantly lower levels of emotion regulation than participants with a bachelor's or master's degree (Figure 4). Although the differences are not statistically significant, participants with a 12th grade degree are more likely to perceive their leader as toxic than the other participants, and they have greater turnover intentions (Figure 4).

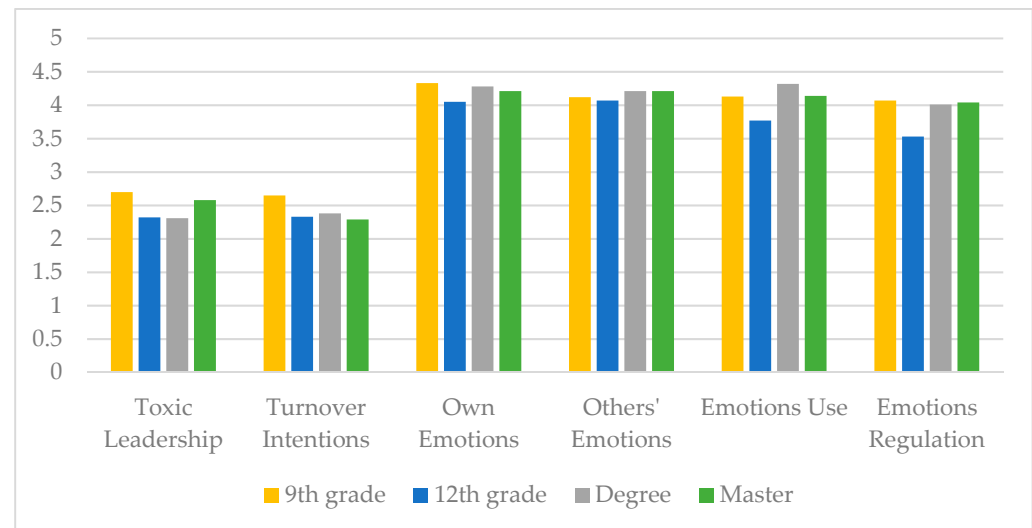


Figure 4. Association between academic qualifications and the studied variables.

The results show that seniority in the organization is not significantly associated with any of the studied variables. However, employees who have been with the organization for a shorter period of time are more likely to perceive their leader as toxic and have the highest turnover intentions (Figure 5). On the other hand, participants who have been with the organization for 7 to 9 years have the lowest turnover intentions but the highest levels of self-emotion, use of emotions, and emotion regulation (Figure 5).

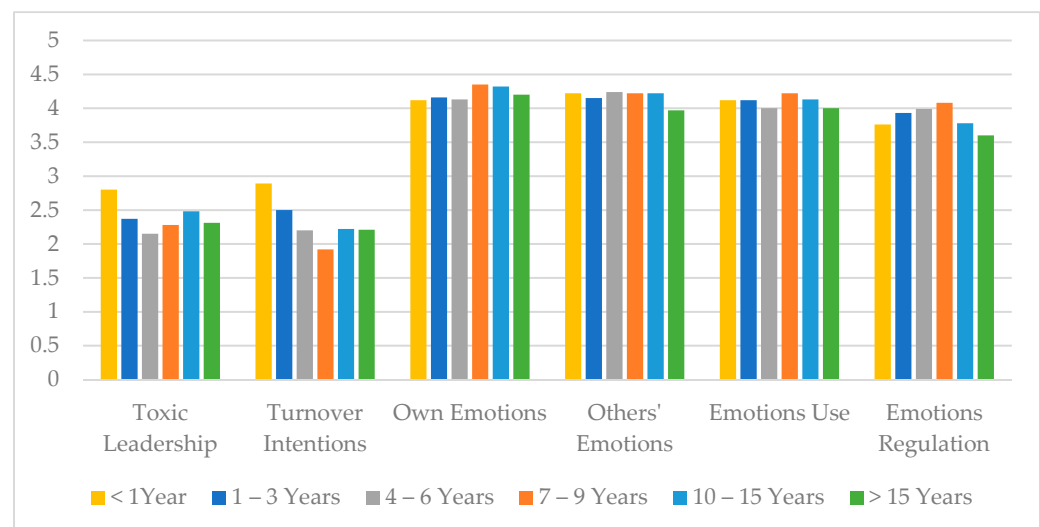


Figure 5. Association between seniority in the organization and the studied variables.

It was found that the sector of work is not significantly associated with the studied variables. However, employees working in the public sector are most likely to perceive their leader as toxic but have the lowest turnover intentions (Figure 6). Employees working in the private–public sector have higher levels of self-emotion but a poorer appraisal of others' emotions and lower levels of emotion use (Figure 6).

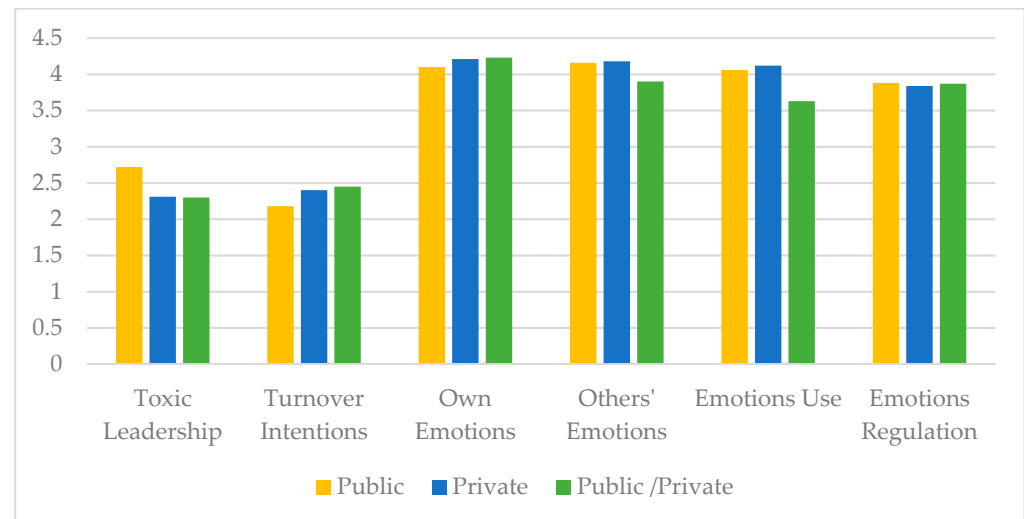


Figure 6. Association between the sector and the studied variables.

The results show that the type of employment contract is significantly associated with toxic leadership ($F(3, 198) = 2.78, p = 0.042$), one's own emotions ($F(3, 198) = 4.45, p = 0.005$), the use of emotions ($F(3, 198) = 2.77, p = 0.043$), and the regulation of emotions ($F(3, 198) = 2.66, p = 0.049$). Participants with a fixed-term contract differ significantly in their perception of their boss's leadership compared to those with an open-ended contract, with participants with a fixed-term contract perceiving their leader as more toxic (Figure 7). Participants with an open-ended contract have significantly lower self-emotion levels than participants with a fixed-term or other type of contract (Figure 7). Participants with another type of contract have significantly higher levels of emotion use and emotion regulation than participants with open-ended and fixed-term contracts, respectively (Figure 7).

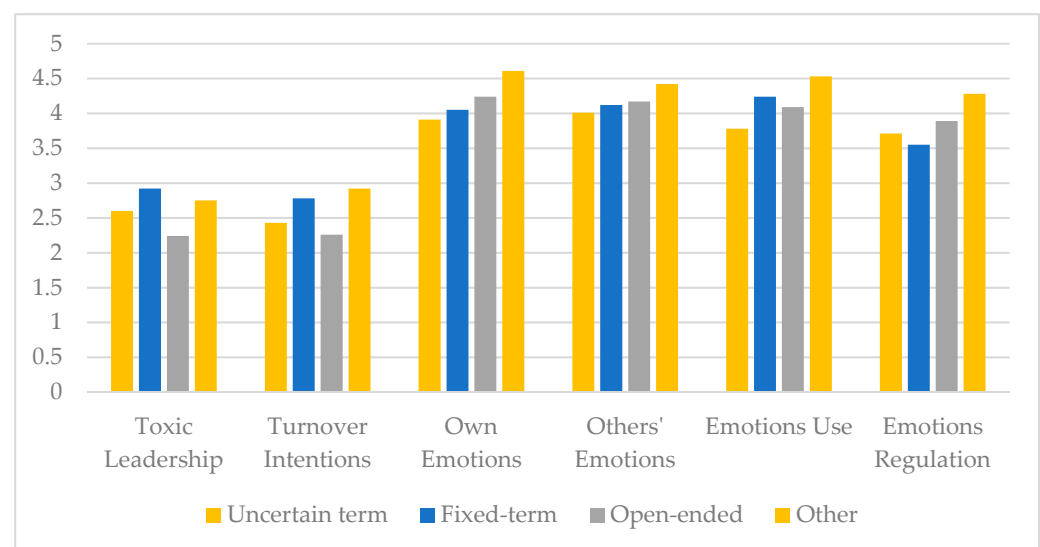


Figure 7. Association between the contract and the studied variables.

4.3. Association Between the Studied Variables

Toxic leadership is positively and significantly associated with turnover intentions only, which indicates that when employees perceive their leader as toxic, their turnover intentions increase (Table 2). The emotions of others and the use of emotions are negatively and significantly associated with turnover intentions, i.e., participants with a better appraisal of others' emotions and higher levels of emotion use have lower turnover intentions (Table 2).

Table 2. Association between the studied variables.

	1	2	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.4
Toxic leadership	--					
Turnover intentions	0.60 ***	--				
Own emotions	−0.08	−0.05	--			
Others' emotions	−0.13	−0.19 *	0.50 ***	--		
Emotion use	−0.05	−0.16 *	0.45 ***	0.37 ***	--	
Emotion regulation	−0.01	−0.02	0.46 ***	0.44 ***	0.36 ***	--

Note. * $p < 0.05$ and *** $p < 0.001$.

4.4. Hypothesis Testing

In this section, we test the hypotheses formulated in this study in order to contribute to the development of a more comprehensive model of the direct antecedents of turnover intentions. In this study, we test Hypotheses 1 and 2 using simple and multiple linear regressions, and Hypothesis 3 using Macro Process 4.2., developed by Hayes (2022). However, structural equations could be used to develop and test a more comprehensive model involving all the antecedents of turnover intentions. This solution was not chosen due to the small sample size (202 participants); the sample should consist of at least 510 participants (since the three instruments contain a total of 51 items) in order to have reliable results.

To test Hypothesis 1, a simple linear regression was performed.

The results show that toxic leadership is positively and significantly associated with turnover intentions ($\beta = 0.60$; $p < 0.001$), which indicates that when employees perceive their leaders as toxic, their turnover intentions increase (Table 3).

Table 3. Results of the association between toxic leadership and turnover intentions (H1).

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	F	p	R ²	β	p
Toxic leadership	Turnover intentions	114.86 ***	<0.001	0.36 ***	0.60	<0.001

Note. *** $p < 0.001$.

A coefficient of 0.36 was obtained, which means that the model is responsible for 36% of the variability in turnover intentions. The model is statistically significant ($F(1, 200) = 114.86$; $p < 0.001$) (Table 3), and the results support this hypothesis.

To test Hypothesis 2, a multiple linear regression was performed.

The results show that only the dimensions of the perception of others' emotions ($\beta = -0.20$; $p = 0.017$) and emotion use ($\beta = -0.16$; $p = 0.048$) are negatively and significantly associated with turnover intentions, indicating that when employees have high levels of these two dimensions, their turnover intentions decrease (Table 4).

Table 4. Results of the association between emotional intelligence and turnover intentions (H2).

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	F	p	R ²	β	p
Own emotions	Turnover intentions	2.94 *	0.022	0.04	0.09	0.328
Others' emotions					−0.20 *	0.017
Emotion use					−0.16 *	0.048
Emotion regulation					0.09	0.270

Note. * $p < 0.05$.

A coefficient of 0.04 was obtained, which means that the model accounts for 4% of the variability in turnover intentions. The model is statistically significant ($F(4, 197) = 2.94$; $p = 0.022$) (Table 4), and the results partially support this hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3 assumed a moderating effect; so, Hayes (2022) Macro Process 4.2 was used to test this hypothesis.

The results show that only the dimensions of emotion use and emotion regulation moderate the relationship between toxic leadership and turnover intentions (Table 5). The results partially support this hypothesis.

Table 5. Results of the moderating effect (H3).

Variables	B	SE	t	p	95% CI
Toxic leadership → Turnover intentions ($R^2 = 0.37$; $p < 0.001$)					
Constant	2.37 ***	0.07	36.14 ***	<0.001	[2.23, 2.50]
Toxic leadership	0.59 ***	0.06	10.62 ***	<0.001	[0.48, 0.70]
Own emotions	0.01	0.12	0.06	0.956	[−0.21, 0.22]
Toxic leadership × own emotions	0.08	0.10	0.79	0.428	[−0.18, 0.28]
Toxic leadership → Turnover intentions ($R^2 = 0.39$; $p < 0.001$)					
Constant	2.37 ***	0.06	36.66 ***	<0.001	[2.25, 2.51]
Toxic leadership	0.58 ***	0.06	10.61 ***	<0.001	[0.47, 0.69]
Others' emotions	−0.20	0.11	−1.92	0.056	[−0.41, 0.01]
Toxic leadership × others' emotions	0.17	0.09	1.85	0.065	[−0.01, 0.35]
Toxic leadership → Turnover intentions ($R^2 = 0.40$; $p < 0.001$)					
Constant	2.37 ***	0.06	37.15 ***	<0.001	[2.24, 2.50]
Toxic leadership	0.57 ***	0.05	10.62 ***	<0.001	[0.47, 0.68]
Emotion use	−0.22 **	0.08	−2.67 **	0.008	[−0.38, −0.06]
Toxic leadership × emotion use	0.15 *	0.07	2.16 *	0.032	[0.01, 0.29]
Toxic leadership → Turnover intentions ($R^2 = 0.39$; $p < 0.001$)					
Constant	2.36 ***	0.06	36.86 ***	<0.001	[2.24, 2.49]
Toxic leadership	0.58 ***	0.05	10.74 ***	<0.001	[0.47, 0.69]
Emotion regulation	0.02	0.09	0.26	0.793	[−0.14, 0.20]
Toxic leadership × Emotion regulation	0.22 **	0.08	2.75 **	0.006	[0.06, 0.38]

Note. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; and *** $p < 0.001$.

Regarding the perception that their leader is toxic, participants with high levels of emotional use had higher turnover intentions than those with low levels of emotional use (Figure 8).

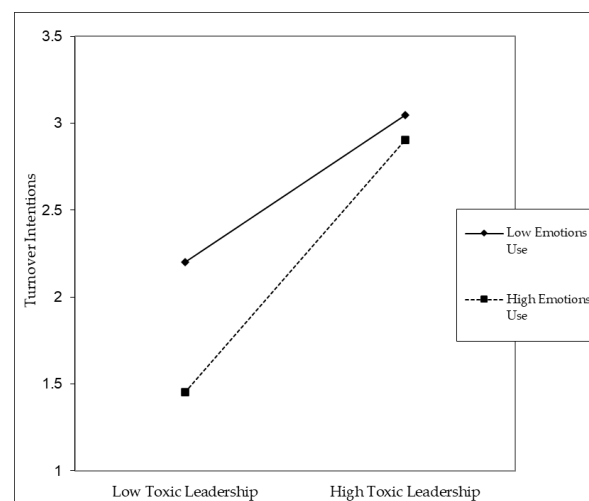


Figure 8. Interaction between toxic leadership and emotion use.

Regarding the perception that their leader is toxic, participants with high levels of emotion regulation had higher turnover intentions than those with low levels of emotion regulation (Figure 9).

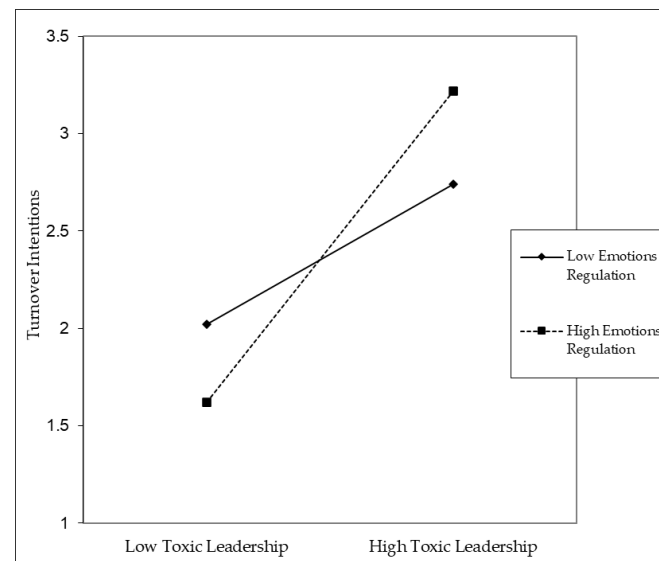


Figure 9. Interaction between toxic leadership and emotion regulation.

5. Discussion

The main objective of this research was to understand how emotional intelligence moderates the relationship between toxic leadership and turnover intentions.

The results of Hypothesis 1 show that toxic leadership is positively and significantly associated with turnover intentions. The statistical analysis shows a strong association between toxic leadership and turnover intentions, demonstrating that the more toxic the leadership in organizations, the greater the employee's intention to leave. This conclusion aligns with various studies, such as [Weberg and Fuller's \(2019\)](#) research, which showed that toxic leadership increases employees' turnover intentions. More recent studies have also found a positive and significant association between toxic leadership and turnover intentions, indicating that when people perceive toxic behaviors and attitudes in their leaders, they are more likely to leave the organization voluntarily ([Hattab et al., 2022](#); [Jantjies & Botha, 2024](#); [Nonehkaran et al., 2023](#); [Nunes & Palma-Moreira, 2024](#)). The leaders' behaviors and attitudes of control, suppression, and ridicule ([Wilson-Starks, 2003](#)) towards their subordinates increase the latter's desire to look for an organization that will help them advance in their careers and acknowledge their efforts.

The results provide partial support for Hypothesis 2 as only the dimensions of the perception of others' emotions and emotion use are negatively and significantly associated with turnover intentions. These results are in line with the literature; for example, [Latif et al. \(2017\)](#) stated that emotional intelligence decreases turnover intentions, and in a study involving workers in the banking sector, [Uzair and Bhaumik \(2023\)](#) found a negative and significant association between emotional intelligence and turnover intentions. Higher levels of emotion use have a negative and significant association with turnover intentions as employees adapt better to unpleasant behaviors and situations, thus reducing their turnover intentions ([Giao et al., 2020](#); [Khosravi et al., 2020](#); [Riaz et al., 2018](#)).

The results of this study also indicate that only the dimensions of using and regulating emotions moderate the relationship between toxic leadership and turnover intentions. The findings show that when faced with the perception that their leader has toxic behaviors, employees with greater and better use of emotions and emotion regulation have higher

turnover intentions, i.e., employees with a greater ability to use and regulate their emotions are more likely to leave the organization in order to improve their well-being and professional life by moving to organizations that provide them with these opportunities (Uzair & Bhaumik, 2023). These results are inconsistent with those reported in the literature; some authors claim that the correct use and regulation of emotions allow employees to adapt quickly to behaviors and situations, thus reducing their turnover intentions (Giao et al., 2020; Khosravi et al., 2020; Riaz et al., 2018). These trends may be due to the fact that around 80% of the participants were less than 49 years old; participants aged between 18 and 29 have the highest turnover intentions, followed by participants aged between 30 and 49. Participants aged between 18 and 29 also have lower emotion use and regulation levels. Another factor that may contribute to these trends is that more than 60% of the participants have been with the organization for up to 6 years, and these participants showed the highest turnover intentions.

It should also be noted that the participants in this study have a low perception of toxic behavior in their leader, along with low turnover intentions. On the other hand, they have high levels of emotional intelligence, with the dimension of self-emotions having the highest average and the dimension of emotion regulation having the lowest average.

Participants who work in the public sector perceive higher levels of toxic behavior in their leaders. As for the association between academic qualifications and the studied variables, participants with a 9th grade education perceive their leader as having more toxic behaviors, and they have higher levels of turnover intentions. Participants with a 12th grade education have the lowest levels of emotional intelligence.

5.1. Limitations and Future Studies

This study had some limitations that should be addressed in future studies.

These limitations include the small number of participants and the data collection procedure using a self-report questionnaire. However, several methodological and statistical recommendations were followed to reduce the impact of common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Since the data in this study were collected from various organizations and individuals, future studies should be conducted in organizations that have high rates of turnover intentions to determine whether the poor leadership of their managers affects the likelihood of employees leaving the organization.

5.2. Theoretical and Practical Implications

The main contribution of this study was to contribute to the existing literature on the relationship between toxic leadership and turnover intentions and examine whether emotional intelligence moderates this relationship. As mentioned above, the results of this study provide partial support for our hypotheses.

However, in this study, we also explore the dimensions of emotional intelligence.

Therefore, based on this study's results, the following questions can be asked: (1) Do employees who perceive their leader as toxic express their intention to leave only due to poor leadership or are there other variables that contribute to this? (2) Have toxic leaders undergone leadership skill recognition through career progression or external admission? (3) Do organizations that recognize that their employees intend to leave in the face of poor leadership take preventive measures? (4) Is an employee who develops defense strategies against toxic leadership happy and motivated?

In this sense, organizations need to contribute to their employees' well-being and happiness and address toxic leadership. The organization needs to recognize or promote leaders who have completed certified leadership courses, and before they start working

for the organization, they should undergo a trial period without knowing they are being assessed. One strategy is to create Personal Development Plans (PDPs) based on non-participant and naturalistic observation. This observation makes it possible to assess the subjects in their typical environment and understand whether they are competent for the job.

On the other hand, organizations should carry out quarterly feedback interviews to determine whether there are any shortcomings or whether employees intend to leave the organization. This way, quick and objective action can be taken to identify problems associated with leaders.

Another practice is to offer wellness consultations, mainly on emotional intelligence, to determine whether employees are emotionally intelligent in all or some dimensions.

Finally, and to combat toxic leadership effectively, if organizations identify one of these leaders as toxic, countermeasures, such as asking them to leave the company, are mandatory to prevent the loss of hard-working and talented employees, especially those with high emotional intelligence.

6. Conclusions

Emotional intelligence provides better perception and rationalization of emotions. The research by [Khosravi et al. \(2020\)](#) showed that, from an intrapersonal perspective, emotional intelligence increases problem-solving and individual and collective behaviors. From an interpersonal perspective, [Mohammad et al. \(2014\)](#) show that employees who consider their leader to have high emotional intelligence are less likely to have turnover intentions, which is not the case when dealing with a leader with toxic behaviors. One way of reducing employees' turnover intentions is to hire leaders who have high levels of emotional intelligence and who do not have toxic behavior. When a leader has high emotional intelligence, the employees' needs are satisfied, thus reducing their turnover intentions ([Majeed & Jamshed, 2021](#)). According to [Uzair and Bhaumik \(2023\)](#), organizations should invest in training and development programs that focus on improving emotional awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and social skills (i.e., the emotional intelligence of employees) in order to reduce employees' turnover intentions.

This study shows that when employees perceive toxic behavior in their leader, their turnover intentions increase, consistent with the findings of other studies. According to [Khan et al. \(2017\)](#), turnover intentions result from various events within a toxic workplace environment.

As for the dimensions of emotional intelligence, only the perception of others' emotions and the use of one's own emotions significantly reduce turnover intentions, consistent with the findings of [Khosravi et al. \(2020\)](#), who showed that the correct use of emotions reduces the intention to leave the organization.

Only the mediating effect of emotions and emotion regulation on the relationship between toxic leadership and turnover intentions was proven. However, the relationship was inconsistent with the results reported in the literature since participants with high levels of emotion use and emotion regulation have higher turnover intentions than those with low levels of emotion use and emotion regulation when they perceive their leader as toxic.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: Ethical review and approval were waived for this study since all participants (before answering the questionnaire) needed to read the informed consent portion and agree to it. This was the only way they could complete the questionnaire. Participants were informed about the purpose of this study and that their responses would remain confidential.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in this study.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available because the participants' responses are confidential.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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