

## Correlation between Job Demands, Work Meaningfulness, Job Stress, and Turnover Intention: Empirical Study in Public Sector Organizations

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### Abstract

This study aimed to test the relationship between job demand, work meaningfulness, and turnover intention with job stress as a mediating variable. A population of 1310 officers from a government unit were asked to complete questionnaires (which consisted of 32 questions adapted from previous research) employing a cross-sectional study approach. The final sample consisted of 383 responses, and regression analysis with Macro PROCESS was used to test the hypotheses. The findings indicate that job stress was positively correlated with job demands, but negatively correlated with work meaningfulness. Further, this study found that job stress positively correlated with turnover intention and was a mediating variable in the relationship between job demand, work meaningfulness, and turnover intention. This study implies that to lower turnover intention, organizations may decrease job demand and stress levels and improve work meaningfulness.

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguji hubungan antara tuntutan pekerjaan, kebermaknaan kerja, dan *turnover intention* dengan stres kerja sebagai variabel mediasi. Pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan cara menyebarkan kuesioner (terdiri dari 32 *item* pertanyaan yang diadaptasi dari penelitian-penelitian sebelumnya) kepada populasi sebanyak 1310 pegawai dengan menggunakan pendekatan penelitian *cross-sectional*. Jumlah kuesioner yang kembali dan valid adalah 383, sedangkan analisis regresi yang digunakan adalah Macro PROCESS model yang dilakukan untuk menguji hipotesis. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa stres kerja berkorelasi positif dengan tuntutan pekerjaan, tetapi berkorelasi negatif dengan kebermaknaan kerja. Stres kerja memiliki hubungan positif dengan *turnover intention* dan merupakan variabel mediasi dalam hubungan antara tuntutan pekerjaan, kebermaknaan kerja, dan *turnover intention*. Hasil penelitian ini berimplikasi bahwa untuk mengurangi *turnover intention*, organisasi dapat berupaya menurunkan level stres kerja dan tuntutan pekerjaan serta meningkatkan tingkat kebermaknaan kerja.



## INTRODUCTION

Turnover intention is a cognitive process that involves thinking, planning, or feeling the desire to move work from one organization to another (Campbell et al., 2014). Turnover intention is the main predictor of actual turnover (Lambert et al., 2012), and indicates organizational performance in both the private and public sectors (Meier & Hicklin, 2008). A high level of voluntary turnover can be interpreted as a manifestation of sub-optimal organizational performance (Campbell et al., 2014). Organizations must pay a heavy price when competent employees move, considering the costs incurred in recruiting, training, and developing these employees (Korunka et al., 2008). Furthermore, employee turnover can be interpreted as a loss of competence inherent in the employee, increased workload, and the possibility of reduced motivation from existing employees (Belete, 2018). Therefore, organizations must keep their employees' turnover intention low (de Moura et al., 2009).

There still needs to be more research on turnover intention in public organizations in Indonesia, which may be closely related to the views that are developing in society about the nature of work in the public sector. People currently believe that the workload of civil servants is not particularly demanding and are generally laid back. Apart from that, with the guarantee of adequate income and old age benefits, civil servants are perceived as a relatively safe and stable profession compared to other types of work. This makes the civil servant profession one of the favorites for most Indonesians, forming the opinion that civil servants do not want to change jobs. Two stereotypes that civil servants have a relaxed job and the small possibility of civil servants changing jobs mean that research on turnover intention in public organizations in Indonesia still needs to be conducted.

However, the world has recently been full of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA). Technological developments have resulted in disruption in almost the entire social

order. Furthermore, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic requires every organization, private and public, to be agile and adaptive. The demands and pressures organizations face will, in turn, impact employees. Employees are required to be able to adapt to the challenges faced by the organization. As a result, the job demands placed on employees tend to increase.

Increased workload or job demands are often associated with increased stress levels (Karasek, 1979). Job stress due to excessive workload may result in increased turnover intention (Chung et al., 2017), i.e., the employee's desire to leave the organization (Campbell et al., 2014). Most research linking job demands, job stress, and turnover intention was conducted in the context of Western or developed countries. In Indonesia, research on job demands, job stress, and turnover intention is dominated by the health sector and the private sector (e.g., Dimkatni et al., 2020; Fahamsyah, 2017; Irvianti & Verina, 2015; Putra & Prihatsanti, 2016; Ratnasari & Purba, 2018; Rindorindo et al., 2019; Sari, 2016).

Table 1.

Trends in the Number of Employees Moving

Year	Number of Employees Moving		Excess (Shortage) of Employees
	Projection	Realization	
2015	N/A	9	N/A
2016	N/A	6	N/A
2017	N/A	17	N/A
2018	N/A	13	N/A
2019	N/A	4	N/A
2020	19	48	(27)
2021	26	73	(46)
2022	21	74	(53)

This research aims to determine the correlation between job demands, job stress, and turnover intention in the context of public sector organizations in Indonesia. This research focuses on one of Indonesia's first echelon units in a ministry. The research locus was chosen because of the increasing trend of employees leaving the

first echelon unit in recent years (Table 1). The average number of employees leaving each year between 2015 and 2019 was eight. Surprisingly, in 2020, 2021, and 2022, the number of employees quitting rose to 48, 73, and 74, respectively. This resulted in the organization needing more employees.

Based on the job demand-control framework (Karasek, 1979), this research predicts a positive correlation between workload and job stress. Furthermore, using concepts in social exchange theory, this research estimates a positive correlation between job stress and turnover intention (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). This research will also examine the relationship between work meaningfulness, stress, and turnover intention. Based on job characteristic theory, this research expects the role of work meaningfulness in reducing stress levels and turnover intention. The findings of this study may contribute to reducing job stress and turnover intention, particularly for Indonesian public sector organizations, by identifying variables that are negatively correlated with those two outcomes.

Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) explain that social exchange theory (SET) emphasizes the importance of reciprocity or reciprocal relationships in interactions between employees and the organization. According to this reciprocal principle, there is a relationship of interdependence between two parties so that the attitude of one party is determined by the attitude of the other party towards them. Within the relationship between the organization and employees, employees will assess whether the organization can provide what employees expect. If the organization can please employees, the possibility of employees wanting to stay in the organization is greater (Akgunduz & Bardakoglu, 2017). As an implication, if employees feel that the work they do causes stress, then there is a tendency for these employees to leave the organization. Previous research has proven a positive correlation between job stress and turnover intention (e.g., Chen et al., 2011; Chung et al., 2017; Yang et

al., 2016). Based on the description above, this research proposes hypothesis one (H1): “Job stress is positively correlated with turnover intention”.

Job demands refer to workload, including quantity of work and time to complete work (Häusser et al., 2010; Karasek, 1979). The quantity aspect of work focuses on the amount of work that must be completed, while the time aspect of work completion is related to the small amount of time available to complete the work (Karasek, 1979). Job demands can also involve role conflict, as well as physical and emotional demands (Karasek et al., 1998).

Research on job stress is dominated by the job demand-control framework (JDC) proposed by (Karasek, 1979) and the job demand-control support (JDSCS) framework, which is a development of JDC (Johnson & Hall, 1988). According to the JDC and JDSCS framework, job demand has a positive correlation with strain, which implies that the higher the job demands, the higher the level of job stress (Karasek, 1979).

Previous research has proven the accuracy of the JDSCS framework in predicting the relationship between job demands and stress. A review of 60 scientific articles published in 1979–1997 shows a positive correlation between job demands and job stress (Van der Doef & Maes, 1999). This review also shows the consistency of control and support in reducing stress levels caused by high work demands. A review of 83 manuscripts published in 1997–2008 by Häusser et al. (2010) showed identical results. There is consistently a positive and significant relationship between job demand and job stress, as well as the significant role of control and support in reducing job stress levels. This research proposes hypothesis two (H2), considering the framework and theories above: “There is a positive correlation between job demands and job stress”.

Work meaningfulness can be defined as employees’ perceptions of the extent to which they view their work as valuable and meaningful (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Steger et al. (2012)

break down the components of work meaningfulness into three: (1) psychological meaningfulness, i.e., employees' subjective assessment that they are doing important work; (2) meaning-making, i.e., employees' perceptions that their work contributes to providing meaning in life; and (3) greater good, i.e., employees' awareness that what they do not only contribute to the interests of the organization in the narrow sense but also contributes to larger goals.

Job characteristic theory states that employees will feel a positive impact when they think their work is meaningful (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). This positive impact will become intrinsic motivation so that employees will perform better and get better job satisfaction, as well as other positive impacts (Allan et al., 2019). A meta-analysis study by Allan et al. (2019) found that meaningful work positively correlates with commitment, engagement, performance, and job satisfaction and negatively correlates with turnover intention. In another study, Lease et al. (2019) found that meaningful work is correlated with lower depressive symptoms. Furthermore, research from Allan et al. (2016) also emphasized the importance of meaningful work because it has been proven to be negatively correlated with stress and anxiety. Based on the description above, this research proposes hypothesis three (H3): "There is a negative correlation between the meaningfulness of work and job stress."

This research was conducted in a public sector organization at the first echelon level in Indonesia. The organization is currently implementing new ways of working, which has resulted in a transition from a culture of working from the office to a culture of working from a flexible place, whether from home or a satellite office. Work processes carried out face-to-face before the COVID-19 pandemic era have shifted to activities carried out entirely virtual or hybrid. Habitual behavior theory states that carrying out work that has become a habit is easy while changing old work patterns into new habits is

difficult (Ersche et al., 2017). Because the COVID-19 pandemic demands changes in habits, we can conclude that the tasks this organization must carry out have become more demanding.

The argument above is supported by an internal survey conducted in 2021, which shows that most employees in the organization feel that their work during the pandemic is more than before. Apart from that, the organization that is the object of research is opening up opportunities for its employees to move work units to other echelons. Thus, research that links the relationship between job demands, job stress, and turnover intention is relevant to be carried out in the organizational unit that is the research locus.

This research can contribute to the literature on job stress and turnover intention by using public sector organizations in the context of developing countries as a research locus. The results of this research can provide input for formulating human resource policies in the public sector in terms of managing job stress and turnover intention.

## **METHODS**

This type of research is quantitative, with data collection carried out through surveys. The population of this research is all employees in the first echelon units of a ministry in Indonesia. The number of employees when the research was conducted was 1310 people. Questionnaires were distributed to all employees via Google Forms. Employees are allowed to respond within ten days. This survey is anonymous to reduce the potential for social desirability bias. The total number of returned questionnaires was 486. After data cleaning, there were three invalid responses. Thus, the response rate in this study was 37% (483/1310).

Measuring turnover intention was carried out using one question item previously used by Bertelli (2007). The editorial of the question was, "Have you thought about working outside the organization?". The response format is dichotomous with the answer options "no" and

“yes”. In the “yes” answer option, the answers are broken down into five categories: moving to another first echelon unit within the same ministry, moving to another government agency, moving to work in the private sector, running an independent business, and quitting work/retiring.

To measure the job demands variable, this research uses a modification of the instrument from Karasek (1979), which consists of three question items. An example of a question item used is, “I have to be quick in completing my work”. Furthermore, the job stress measurement tool used in this research adopted the instrument developed by Shukla and Srivastava (2016) with nine question items. An example of a question item is, “Work makes me feel anxious”. Work meaningfulness was measured using the instrument adoption from Steger et al. (2012), which consists of ten question items. An example of a question item is, “I have found a job that suits my life goals”. The answer format for the variables job demands, job stress, and work meaningfulness uses a Likert scale with five points, where the first answer choice is “strongly disagree”, and the fifth answer choice is “strongly agree”.

In this research, the first step taken in carrying out the analysis was to conduct confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) testing. CFA is an assessment technique that can be used to assess the suitability of psychometric models or construct validity (Morin et al., 2016). In other words, CFA allows researchers to test hypotheses about the suitability of the relationship between manifest variables and latent variables (Albright & Park, 2009). Several indicators that can be used to assess suitability include goodness of fit index (GFI), Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA), and comparative fit index (CFI) (Boateng et al., 2018; Hu & Bentler, 1999). Reference values for assessing model suitability are GFI > .90 and TLI > .90 (Bentler & Bonett, 1980); SRMR < .08

and RMSEA < .08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999); and CFI > .90 (Hopwood & Donnellan, 2010).

Cronbach’s alpha is used to assess the instrument’s reliability. The Cronbach’s alpha threshold value used in this research is a minimum of .70 (Hair et al., 2019). Kurtosis and skewness are used to assess data normality. Like CFA and reliability tests, the three variables whose kurtosis and skewness are assessed are job demands, work meaningfulness, and job stress. This study uses an absolute value of less than 2 as the standard for data normality, as used by previous studies (e.g., Chung et al., 2017).

This research uses path analysis using the Macro PROCESS model to test the hypothesis. Macro PROCESS is an analytical method that can be used to test models with mediating and/or moderating variables. The advantage of Macro PROCESS compared to ordinary linear regression is its ability to detect mediation without the need to carry out a Sobel test (Hayes, 2012). Macro PROCESS can provide more accurate estimates when research uses dichotomous dependent variables. It automatically detects these variables and then runs logistic regression, which cannot be done by structural equation modeling (SEM) with AMOS software. However, unlike SEM, Macro PROCESS can only be used to analyze observable variables and cannot be used to analyze unobservable variables. Because this research involves unobservable variables (latent variables), the scores on the manifest variables are converted into factor scores so that they become a proxy for the latent variables. The factor score is a weighted average of the manifest variables and can be used for further analysis (Albright & Park, 2009).

## **RESULTS**

The first analysis step carried out was a model suitability test to determine validity, reliability, and normality. Initially, the CFA results on three latent variables, i.e., job demands, work meaningfulness, and job stress, indicated that the model used did not meet the model suitability criteria. The suitability indicator shows the value of GFI

= .848; TLI = .882; SRMR = .68; RMSEA = .085; and CFI = .894 (Table 2). Of the five suitability indicators, only SRMR values are in accordance with the reference criteria. This indicates the low suitability between empirical data and the research model.

Table 2.  
Suitability of Research Model

Indicator	Reference Value	Early Model	Model After Adjustment
GFI	> .90	.848	.911
TLI	> .90	.882	.932
SRMR	< .08	.068	.060
RMSEA	< .08	.085	.073
CFI	> .90	.894	.942

Modifications were carried out by eliminating manifest variables with low loading factors or high modification indices to improve model suitability, as was done by previous research (e.g., Meesters et al., 1996; Wang et al., 2013). There is one question item each issued for the job demands and job stress variables, as well as three items for the work meaningfulness variable. After adjustments were made, the number of question items for the latent variables job demands, work meaningfulness, and job stress became two, eight, and seven, respectively.

The CFA test results after adjusting the model produced all manifest variables with loading factors > .50. Furthermore, the suitability indicators show GFI = .911; TLI = .932; SRMR = .060; RMSEA = .073; and CFI = .942 (Table 2). The values of these indicators indicate a good match between the model and the data, so it can be concluded that the instrument has good construct validity. The Cronbach's alpha value for the job demands variable is .709; the work meaningfulness variable is .924; and the job stress variable is .908. All variables have a Cronbach's alpha value above the minimum value of .70 (Hair et al., 2019).

The test results show that the kurtosis values for the job demands, work meaningfulness, and job stress variables are -.61, .51, and -.67, respectively. Meanwhile, the skewness values for the

three variables are -.05, .71, and .06, respectively. With the absolute values of kurtosis and skewness for all research variables below 2, it can be concluded that the variables used in this research have met the assumption of data normality. Considering the results of CFA, reliability tests, and normality of data, it can be concluded that all questionnaire items are valid and reliable so that further data analysis can be carried out.

Table 3 presents descriptive statistics of the research variables. Turnover intention is a dichotomous variable, so the average value of .46 indicates that approximately 46% of respondents want to change jobs. The mean scores for job stress, job demands, and work meaningfulness were 3.11, 3.72, and 4.00, respectively. The value of 3.11 for job stress indicates that, in general, the level of job stress experienced by the respondent is not too high, while the values of 3.72 and 4.00 for job demands and work meaningfulness indicate that the respondent has quite a lot of work demands and high meaningfulness of work.

Table 3.  
Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Average	Standard Deviation
Turnover Intention	.46	.50
Job Stress	3.11	.95
Job Demands	3.72	.76
Work Meaningfulness	4.00	.74
Baby Boomer/Gen-X	.33	.47
Male	.66	.48
Length of Education	7.05	1.95
Married	.88	.32
Had Children	.82	.39
*) Number of respondents = 483		

Baby boomers or Generation X, gender, marital status, and having children or not are dichotomous variables. As many as 33% of respondents were baby boomers or Generation X, 66% of respondents were men, 88% of respondents were married, and 82% of respondents had children. The length of education variable shows the time spent studying after junior high school. On aver-

age, respondents studied for seven years after graduating from junior high school or equivalent to bachelor's level.

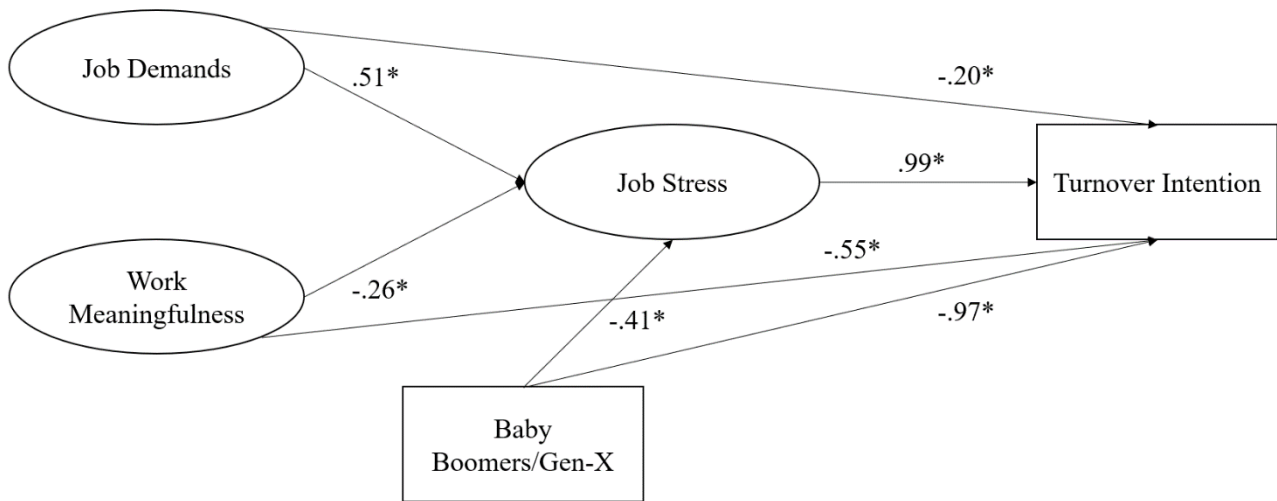


Figure 1.  
Hypothesis Test Results

The parameter estimate for the job stress variable on the turnover intention variable is .99 and is significant at  $p < .01$  (Figure 1). A positive and significant relationship exists between the job stress and turnover intention variables. Thus,  $H_0$  is rejected, and  $H_1$  is accepted. In dependent variables whose data type is dichotomous, such as the turnover intention variable, the parameter estimate of the predictor variable is a z-score probability function and not a linear function. Thus, every one-point increase in the job stress variable will increase the turnover intention z-score by .99 points, assuming all other variables have constant values.

An increase of .99 z-score points is not a linear function and will have different impacts depending on how big an employee's initial turnover intention is. As an illustration, employee A initially had a turnover intention of 10% (z-score of .13). When employee A experiences an increase in job stress by one point, the employee's turnover intention z-score will increase by .99 points to 1.12 (.13 + .99), and the probability of turnover intention will be 73% or increase by 63% (73% - 10%). Different effects will occur for employees with an initial probability of turnover intention that is not the same as employ-

ee A. For example, employee B initially has a probability of turnover intention of 25% (z-score of .32). When employee B experiences an increase in stress by one point, the z score of turnover intention will be 1.31 (.32 + .99), and the probability of turnover intention will be 80% or increase by 55% (80% - 25%). From the illustration above, an increase in one level of job stress experienced by employee A has a more significant impact (63% increase in turnover intention) compared to the impact on employee B (55% increase in turnover intention). So, the marginal effect of job stress on turnover intention will be more significant for employees with a lower initial probability of turnover intention.

The parameter estimate for the variable job demands on job stress is .51 and is significant at  $p < .01$  (Figure 1). A positive and significant relationship exists between job demands and job stress variables. Every one-point increase in the job demands variable will increase the job stress variable by .51 points, assuming all other variables have constant values. With these findings,  $H_0$  is rejected, and  $H_2$  is accepted.

$H_3$  states that work meaningfulness is negatively correlated with job stress. The parameter estimate for the work meaningfulness variable

for the job stress variable is  $-.26$  and is significant at  $p < .01$ . A negative and significant relationship exists between the work meaningfulness and the job stress variables. Every one-point increase in the work meaningfulness variable will reduce the job stress variable by  $.26$  points, assuming all other variables have constant values. Thus,  $H_0$  is rejected, and  $H_3$  is accepted.

As shown in Figure 1, the parameter estimate for the job demands variable on turnover intention is  $-.20$  but not significant. Thus, job demands do not correlate directly with turnover intention. On the other hand, the parameter estimate for the work meaningfulness variable on turnover intention is  $-.55$  and is significant at  $p < .01$ . This shows a direct correlation between work meaningfulness and turnover intention. The turnover intention z-score will decrease by  $.55$  for every one-unit increase in work meaningfulness.

The “effect”, “BootLCP”, and “BootULCI” indicators in the PROCESS Macro output are indicators for testing the significance of the mediating variable. The mediation criteria are met if all indicators have a value of more than 0. If there is at least one indicator with a value of 0, then the mediation effect is not proven.  $H_4$  states that job stress mediates the relationship between work demands and turnover intention. The values of “effect”, “BootLCP”, and “BootULCI” in the relationship between the variables job demands, turnover intention, and job stress as mediating variables are  $.50$ ,  $.34$ , and  $.72$ , respectively. All values of these indicators do not contain the value 0, so  $H_0$  is rejected, and  $H_4$  is accepted. Job stress is a mediator variable in the correlation between job demands and turnover intention.

The values of “effect”, “BootLCP”, and “BootULCI” in the relationship between the variables of work meaningfulness, turnover intention, and job stress as mediating variables, respectively, are  $-.26$ ,  $-.39$ , and  $-.16$ . The numbers for all these indicators do not contain the value 0, so job stress is a mediating variable in the cor-

relation between work meaningfulness and turnover intention.

Of all the control variables used, only the generation variable explains job stress and turnover intention significantly. The parameter estimate for the generation variable in explaining job stress is  $-.41$ , which means that the baby boomer generation and Generation X have lower stress levels compared to the millennial generation and Generation Z. Furthermore, the parameter estimate for the generation variable in explaining turnover intention is  $-.97$ , so it can be interpreted that the baby boomer generation and Generation X have a lower turnover intention than the millennial generation and Generation Z.

## DISCUSSION

This research aims to determine the relationship between job demands and work meaningfulness on job stress. This research also examines the relationship between job stress and turnover intention. Job stress is predicted to mediate the relationship between job demands, work meaningfulness, and turnover intention. The results of the analysis support all the hypotheses proposed.

Empirical data shows that job demands positively correlate with job stress, while the relationship between work meaningfulness and job stress is negatively correlated. These results align with previous studies examining the relationship between job demands and job stress (e.g., Häusser et al., 2010; Van der Doef & Maes, 1999). As mentioned by the JDCS framework, job demands will be directly proportional to the level of stress experienced by employees (Johnson & Hall, 1988). When employees are required to work quickly, continuously, with a high volume of work, or a combination of the three, the level of stress experienced by employees will increase (Karasek, 1979).

On the other hand, research results show that work meaningfulness is negatively correlated with job stress, consistent with previous studies (e.g., Allan et al., 2016; Lease et al., 2019). Meaningful work can reduce stress levels because employees view the work as providing



personal satisfaction (Allan et al., 2019). In addition, meaningful work will increase employees' intrinsic motivation so that work feels enjoyable and reduces stress levels (Allan et al., 2019).

Job stress mediates the relationship between job demands, work meaningfulness, and turnover intention. It has been shown to correlate positively with turnover intention. These findings confirm the proposed hypothesis while strengthening previous findings (e.g., Chen et al., 2011; Chung et al., 2017; Yang et al., 2016). Employees under a lot of stress are more likely to change jobs (Akgunduz & Bardakoglu, 2017).

The results of this research provide several theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, this research increases the generalizability of the JDCS, JCT, and SET models. More specifically, this research proved the correlation between job demands, work meaningfulness, job stress, and turnover intention in the context of public sector organizations in Indonesia. This research shows that aspects of job stress and turnover intention for civil servants in Indonesia need attention.

This research has several practical implications for human resource management in the public sector. First, organizations must pay attention to the job demands placed on employees. Too much work and demands to complete work quickly can trigger employee stress reactions. Organizations need to carry out adequate workload analysis and strive for an even distribution of work according to employee capacity and abilities to reduce the risk of stress. Second, because each employee may have different preferences regarding meaningful work, organizations need to consider the match between the type of work and the work that interests the employee. In this way, employees' perception of the meaningfulness of their work can increase. Third, to increase the meaningfulness of work, it is necessary to continuously emphasize to employees the importance of their work to achieve organizational goals. Awareness of the importance of work will make employees have high

meaningfulness of work. Ultimately, the perception that the work is meaningful reduces employee stress. By reducing stress levels, the probability of employees changing jobs can decrease.

## CONCLUSION

Job stress correlates positively with job demands; however, it correlates negatively with work meaningfulness. There is a positive correlation between job stress and turnover intention. Job stress serves as a mediator in this relationship since job demands and work meaning have an indirect relationship with turnover intention. Several limitations in this research are the cross-sectional research design, the measurement of independent and dependent variables, which still uses self-report, the potential for endogeneity caused by not including other variables that influence job stress and turnover intention, and the use of samples from one public sector organization. Future researchers can consider using a longitudinal research design, carrying out measurements using different parties (e.g., colleagues, superiors), including more variables that correlate with job stress and turnover intention, and taking samples from public sector organizations with different characteristics.

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