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The Relationship Between Fatherlessness and Work Anxiety Among Generation Z Workers in Surabaya

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ABSTRACT
Generation Z has increasingly entered the workforce and faces various challenges associated with career development, workplace demands, and psychological adjustment. While previous studies have predominantly examined work anxiety from occupational and organizational perspectives, developmental and family-related factors may also be relevant to employees' psychological experiences. This study aimed to examine the relationship between fatherlessness and work anxiety among Generation Z employees in Surabaya, Indonesia. This study employed a quantitative correlational design. Participants consisted of 419 Generation Z employees aged 18–28 years residing in Surabaya and were selected using purposive sampling. Data were collected from December 4, 2025, to March 12, 2026, using an online questionnaire administered through Google Forms. Fatherlessness was measured using a 32-item researcher-developed scale based on the dimensions of interaction, accessibility, and responsibility, while work anxiety was measured using a 32-item researcher-developed scale covering cognitive, emotional, physiological, and behavioral dimensions. Both instruments demonstrated high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .986 and .971, respectively. Data were analyzed using Pearson Product–Moment correlation with IBM SPSS Statistics version 25. The results demonstrated a statistically significant and very strong positive relationship between fatherlessness and work anxiety ($r = .884$, $p < .001$). These findings indicate that participants reporting greater perceived inadequacy of paternal involvement also tended to report higher levels of work anxiety. However, because the study employed a cross-sectional correlational design, the findings should be interpreted as an association rather than evidence of a causal relationship. The findings contribute to the literature by connecting developmental family experiences with an occupational psychological outcome among Generation Z employees in the Indonesian context.

Keywords : Fatherlessness, Work anxiety, Generation Z, Work, Employee

INTRODUCTION

Generation Z has become an increasingly important segment of the workforce in Indonesia. As a generation that has grown up alongside rapid technological development, Generation Z employees are expected to adapt to changing technologies, competitive labor markets, and dynamic organizational environments (Schroth, 2019). Although employment provides opportunities for career development and self-actualization, entering the workforce may also expose young employees to psychological challenges, including work-related anxiety.

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Work anxiety refers to anxiety experienced in relation to work situations, including concerns regarding work performance, evaluation, interpersonal relationships, and uncertainty within the work environment (Cheng & McCarthy, 2018). Previous studies have shown that workplace anxiety can be associated with organizational conditions such as job demands, job insecurity, and environmental uncertainty. Rumbauw et al. (2024)for example, found that job demands were associated with workplace anxiety among sales employees.hile Yang and Long (2024) demonstrated an association between job insecurity, workplace anxiety, and work-life conflict among full-time employees. These findings indicate that work anxiety has commonly been examined from an occupational and organizational perspective.

However, organizational conditions alone may not fully explain individual differences in employees' experiences of work anxiety. Employees who encounter similar workplace demands may respond differently depending on their psychological resources and developmental experiences. Therefore, individual and family-related factors may also be relevant when examining psychological adjustment in adulthood. One developmental factor that has received increasing attention is fatherlessness.

Fatherlessness should be distinguished from the broader concepts of father absence and paternal involvement. Father absence generally refers to the physical or residential absence of a father, whereas paternal involvement refers to the extent to which a father participates in the child's life. Fatherlessness, in contrast, may encompass a broader experience in which paternal involvement is perceived as inadequate or insufficient, including situations in which a father is physically present but psychologically or emotionally unavailable.

In the Indonesian context, Ashari (2018) highlighted that fatherlessness may occur even when fathers are physically present because paternal parenting responsibilities and involvement may not be adequately fulfilled. Thus, fatherlessness cannot be understood solely through the physical absence of a father. Instead, the quality and adequacy of paternal involvement may also be important when understanding individuals' developmental experiences.

The present study conceptualizes fatherlessness as inadequate paternal involvement experienced during development. This conceptualization is based on the paternal involvement framework described by Norman et al. (2024), which includes interaction, accessibility, and responsibility. Interaction refers to direct involvement between fathers and children, accessibility concerns the father's availability to the child, and responsibility concerns the father's role in ensuring the child's welfare and care. Accordingly, higher fatherlessness scores in this study represent greater perceived inadequacy of paternal involvement across these dimensions.

Previous research has demonstrated that paternal involvement is associated with various aspects of psychological development (Rolle et al. 2019; Diniz et al., 2021). Longitudinal research has indicated that father absence may be associated with mental health trajectories extending from adolescence into young adulthood (Culpin et al., 2022). Research concerning father involvement following parental separation has also demonstrated that the continuity and quality of father–child relationships may vary according to family circumstances (Haux & Platt, 2021). These findings suggest that paternal experiences may remain relevant to psychological adjustment beyond childhood.

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Despite the growing literature concerning father involvement and psychological well-being, research examining its relationship with occupational psychological outcomes remains limited. Existing studies on workplace anxiety have predominantly focused on workplace and organizational determinants, whereas research concerning fatherlessness has generally focused on developmental, emotional, interpersonal, and family-related outcomes.

This separation between the two areas represents an important research gap. Specifically, there remains limited empirical evidence concerning whether perceived inadequacy of paternal involvement is associated with work anxiety among young employees. This issue is particularly relevant to Generation Z because they are entering employment during a period characterized by rapid technological changes, evolving work arrangements, and increasing career expectations (Schroth, 2019).

Therefore, the present study examines the relationship between fatherlessness and work anxiety among Generation Z employees in Surabaya. Rather than assuming that fatherlessness causes work anxiety, this study investigates whether the two variables are statistically associated. The study contributes to the existing literature by bringing together perspectives from developmental and occupational psychology and examining fatherlessness in relation to an occupational psychological outcome among Generation Z employees in the Indonesian context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Work anxiety is an important issue in occupational psychology because anxiety experienced in relation to work may affect employees' psychological functioning and adjustment. Cheng and McCarthy (2018) conceptualized workplace anxiety as anxiety associated with work-related situations and distinguished it from anxiety that occurs outside the workplace. Work anxiety may involve concerns regarding work performance, evaluation, interpersonal relationships, and uncertainty.

Previous empirical research has predominantly examined workplace anxiety in relation to organizational and job-related factors. Rumbauw et al. (2024), for example, found that job demands were associated with workplace anxiety among sales employees. Similarly, Yang and Long (2024) reported an association between job insecurity, workplace anxiety, and work-life conflict among full-time employees.

These findings demonstrate that workplace anxiety has commonly been investigated through organizational and occupational variables. Nevertheless, individual differences in psychological responses to similar work conditions indicate the importance of considering factors beyond the immediate workplace environment.

Generation Z has entered the workforce during a period of rapid technological development and changing employment conditions. Schroth (2019) noted that Generation Z employees have distinctive expectations regarding workplace communication, technology, career development, and organizational support.

The transition into employment may represent an important developmental period in which young adults encounter new responsibilities, performance expectations, interpersonal relationships, and uncertainty concerning their careers. Consequently, work-related

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psychological experiences among Generation Z may be influenced by both current workplace conditions and psychological resources developed through earlier life experiences.

However, psychological adjustment among Generation Z employees may not be determined exclusively by workplace conditions. Developmental experiences accumulated before entry into the workforce may shape emotional regulation, perceptions of security, self-confidence, and coping responses. Therefore, developmental and family-related experiences may provide an additional perspective for understanding individual differences in work anxiety.

Fatherlessness is conceptually different from father absence and paternal involvement. Father absence primarily describes whether a father is physically or residentially present, whereas paternal involvement describes the extent and quality of a father's participation in the child's life. Fatherlessness may occur when paternal involvement is substantially inadequate, including situations in which a father is physically present but emotionally or psychologically unavailable. Ashari (2018) emphasized that fatherlessness in Indonesia cannot be understood solely through physical absence because children may experience fatherlessness despite having a physically present father when paternal responsibilities and involvement are insufficient.

The present study operationalizes fatherlessness based on the paternal involvement framework developed in the work of Lamb and colleagues. Lamb (2010) identifies three dimensions of paternal involvement: interaction, accessibility, and responsibility. Interaction concerns direct father–child activities, accessibility concerns the father's availability to the child, and responsibility concerns the father's role in ensuring the child's care and welfare. Accordingly, fatherlessness in this study does not simply indicate whether a father was physically present. Instead, it reflects the perceived inadequacy of paternal involvement across these dimensions.

Previous research indicates that paternal involvement is associated with psychological adjustment across development. Culpin et al. (2022) found an association between father absence and mental health trajectories across adolescence and young adulthood. In addition, research examining father involvement following parental separation has indicated that paternal involvement and father–child contact may vary considerably across family circumstances (Haux & Platt, 2021).

These findings provide a developmental basis for considering paternal involvement as a factor associated with later psychological functioning (Schoppe-Sullivan & Fagan, 2020; Henry et al., 2020). However, most previous studies have focused on childhood, adolescence, family relationships, self-esteem, or general mental health. Less attention has been given to occupational psychological outcomes among young adults who have entered the workforce.

The existing literature indicates two relatively separate research streams. Occupational research has predominantly examined work anxiety in relation to organizational and job-related conditions, whereas developmental research has examined fatherlessness primarily in relation to psychological and interpersonal development.

The present study addresses this gap by examining whether fatherlessness is associated with work anxiety among Generation Z employees. The novelty of this study lies in three aspects: first, examining fatherlessness in relation to an occupational psychological outcome; second, focusing specifically on Generation Z employees; and third, examining this relationship in

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the Indonesian context, specifically Surabaya. The study therefore integrates developmental and occupational perspectives without assuming a causal relationship between the variables.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design to examine the relationship between fatherlessness and work anxiety among Generation Z employees in Surabaya, Indonesia. A correlational design was selected because the study examined the statistical association between variables without manipulating participants' conditions. The population of this study consisted of Generation Z employees residing in Surabaya, Indonesia. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on predetermined inclusion criteria.

Participants were required to:

1. be aged 18–28 years;
2. currently work in either the public or private sector;
3. reside in Surabaya; and
4. be willing to participate voluntarily.

The minimum sample size was determined using G*Power with an alpha level of .05, statistical power of .95, and an anticipated effect size of .30. The analysis indicated a minimum required sample size of 138 participants. Data collection ultimately yielded 419 eligible respondents, substantially exceeding the minimum sample requirement.

Data were collected from December 4, 2025, to March 12, 2026, using an online questionnaire administered through Google Forms. The questionnaire was distributed directly through online channels to individuals who met the inclusion criteria. Recruitment was not conducted through a particular organization or institution. Before completing the questionnaire, participants were provided with information regarding the purpose and general procedure of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. Participants indicated their willingness to participate before proceeding with the questionnaire.

Fatherlessness was assessed using a 32-item scale developed by the researcher based on the conceptual framework of paternal involvement described by Norman et al. (2024). The scale consisted of three dimensions: interaction, accessibility, and responsibility.

Interaction refers to direct involvement and activities between fathers and children. Accessibility refers to the father's availability to the child, whereas responsibility refers to the father's role in ensuring the child's care, welfare, and needs. The items were developed by the researcher based on the operational definitions of the three dimensions and were discussed and reviewed through consultation with academic supervisors before administration.

Item analysis was subsequently conducted using Corrected Item–Total Correlation. All 32 items met the predetermined minimum criterion of .30 and were therefore retained for analysis. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher total scores represented greater perceived inadequacy of paternal involvement and consequently higher levels of fatherlessness.

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Work anxiety was assessed using a 32-item scale developed by the researcher based on the conceptualization of workplace anxiety described by Cheng and McCarthy (2018).
The scale covered four dimensions:

1. cognitive;
2. emotional;
3. physiological; and
4. behavioral.

The items were developed according to the operational definitions of the dimensions and were discussed and reviewed through consultation with academic supervisors before data collection. Item analysis was performed using Corrected Item–Total Correlation. All 32 items met the minimum criterion of .30 and were retained for analysis. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher total scores indicated higher levels of work anxiety.
Item quality was examined using Corrected Item–Total Correlation, with a minimum criterion of .30. All items on both instruments met this criterion and no items were removed. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The Fatherlessness Scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = .986$), while the Work Anxiety Scale also demonstrated excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = .971$).
Because both instruments were developed specifically for the present study, the study did not claim formal construct validity based on exploratory or confirmatory factor analysis. The psychometric evidence reported in this study was limited to item analysis and internal consistency reliability.

RESULTS

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25. Descriptive statistics were calculated to describe the distribution of fatherlessness and work anxiety scores.
Scores were categorized into five levels: very low, low, moderate, high, and very high. Categorization was based on the empirical mean and standard deviation using the following criteria:

Table 1. Categorization Criteria

Category	Formula
Very High	$X \geq Mean + 1,5 \times SD$
High	$Mean + 0,5 \times SD < X \leq Mean + 1,5 \times SD$
Moderate	$Mean - 0,5 \times SD < X \leq Mean + 0,5 \times SD$
Low	$Mean - 1,5 \times SD < X \leq Mean - 0,5 \times SD$
Very Low	$X < Mean - 1,5 \times SD$

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Before hypothesis testing, the data were examined for normality and linearity. Normality was assessed using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test. Linearity was examined using the linearity component of the ANOVA-based linearity test. Pearson Product–Moment correlation was subsequently used to examine the relationship between fatherlessness and work anxiety. Statistical significance was evaluated at $p < .05$.

A total of 419 Generation Z employees met the inclusion criteria and participated in the study.

Table 2. Presents the Distribution of Fatherlessness Levels

Category	n	Persentase
Very High	9	2.1%
High	135	32.2%
Moderate	111	26.5%
Low	163	38.9%
Very Low	1	.2%
Total	419	100%

The largest proportion of participants was classified as having low fatherlessness (38.9%, n = 163), followed by high fatherlessness (32.2%, n = 135) and moderate fatherlessness (26.5%, n = 111). A smaller proportion was classified as having very high fatherlessness (2.1%, n = 9), while only one participant (0.2%) was categorized as having very low fatherlessness.

Table 3. Presents the Distribution of Work Anxiety levels among respondents

Category	n	Persentase
Very High	35	8.4%
High	89	21.2%
Moderate	166	39.6%
Low	105	25.1%
Very Low	24	5.7%
Total	419	100%

The largest proportion of participants was classified as having moderate work anxiety (39.6%, n = 166), followed by low work anxiety (25.1%, n = 105) and high work anxiety (21.2%, n = 89). Meanwhile, 8.4% (n = 35) of participants were categorized as having very high work anxiety and 5.7% (n = 24) as having very low work anxiety.

Table 4. Assumption Testing

Test	Statistics	Result
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Normality	P = .087	Normality distribution
Linearity	p < .001	Linear

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relationship

Before testing the research hypothesis, assumption testing was performed to determine the suitability of Pearson Product–Moment correlation analysis. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov normality test indicated that the data were normally distributed ($p = .087$), as the significance value exceeded the minimum criterion of .05. Furthermore, the linearity test showed a significant linear relationship between fatherlessness and work anxiety ($F = 2.165$, $p < .001$). These findings indicate that the assumptions for conducting Pearson correlation analysis were satisfied.

Table 5. Person Correlation Analysis

Variable	r	p
Fatherless – Work anxiety	.884	< .001
Note. N = 419		

The analysis demonstrated a statistically significant positive relationship between fatherlessness and work anxiety ($r = .884$, $p < .001$). The positive direction of the coefficient indicates that higher levels of perceived fatherlessness were associated with higher levels of work anxiety among the participants. The magnitude of the correlation was very high. The squared correlation coefficient ($r^2 = .781$) indicates that the two variables shared approximately 78.1% of their variance statistically. However, this shared variance should not be interpreted as evidence that fatherlessness explains or causes 78.1% of work anxiety because the present study employed a cross-sectional correlational design. Based on the statistical significance and direction of the correlation, the proposed hypothesis (H1) was supported.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the relationship between fatherlessness and work anxiety among Generation Z employees in Surabaya. The results demonstrated a statistically significant and very strong positive relationship between the two variables ($r = .884$, $p < .001$). Participants reporting greater perceived inadequacy of paternal involvement also tended to report higher levels of work anxiety.

This finding extends the discussion of work anxiety beyond immediate occupational conditions by suggesting that developmental and family-related experiences may also be relevant to individual differences in work-related psychological experiences. Previous research has predominantly examined workplace anxiety in relation to occupational and organizational factors. Job demands, for example, have been associated with workplace anxiety among sales employees (Rumbauw et al., 2024), while job insecurity and work-life conflict have also been examined in relation to workplace anxiety among full-time employees (Yang & Long, 2024). The present findings provide an additional developmental perspective without implying that fatherlessness is a causal determinant of work anxiety.

The observed relationship can be considered in relation to the multidimensional framework of paternal involvement. (Norman et al., 2024) describes paternal involvement through three

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dimension: engagement, accessibility, and responsibility. Engagement refers to direct father-child interaction, accessibility concerns the father`s availability to the child, and responsibility concerns the father`s role in ensuring the child`s care and welfare.

From a developmental perspective, such experiences may be relevant to later psychological adjustment. Culpin et al. (2022), for example, reported an association between father absence and mental health trajectories across adolescence and young adulthood. Research concerning father involvement following parental separation has likewise indicated that paternal involvement and father–child contact may vary substantially across family circumstances (Haux & Platt, 2021).

These findings provide a developmental context for considering why paternal experiences may remain relevant during young adulthood (Puglisi et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the present study does not establish that inadequate paternal involvement directly produces work anxiety. The association observed may involve other psychological or environmental mechanisms that were not examined in the current study.

The present findings also complement occupational research concerning workplace anxiety. Cheng and McCarthy (2018) conceptualized workplace anxiety as anxiety associated with work-related situations and highlighted the importance of workplace experiences in understanding anxiety at work. Rumbauw et al. (2024) and Yang and Long (2024) further demonstrated relationships between workplace anxiety and occupational conditions. The current study adds to this literature by considering a developmental factor that exists outside the immediate workplace environment.

Nevertheless, the magnitude of the correlation obtained in the present study requires cautious interpretation. The correlation coefficient of .884 is considerably high and indicates a very strong statistical association between the two measured constructs. However, the magnitude may also have been influenced by methodological factors. Both variables were assessed using self-report questionnaires administered within the same data-collection procedure, which creates the possibility of common method variance or similar response tendencies.

Furthermore, both instruments were developed by the researcher. Although all items met the Corrected Item–Total Correlation criterion and both instruments demonstrated high internal consistency, formal factor-analytic evidence and independent evidence of discriminant validity were not obtained in the present study. Consequently, similarities in item wording or conceptualization cannot be completely ruled out as contributors to the observed correlation.

The value of $r^2 = .781$ should therefore be interpreted as statistical shared variance rather than as evidence that fatherlessness causes or explains 78.1% of work anxiety. The cross-sectional design does not establish temporal precedence, causal direction, or underlying mechanisms. It is possible that other variables not examined in this study contribute to the relationship between the two constructs.

The findings nevertheless have potential practical implications. At the organizational level, employers and human resource practitioners may consider providing psychological support, mentoring, stress-management programs, and supportive workplace environments for young employees. Such interventions should not assume that employees' work anxiety is caused by family experiences. Rather, developmental background may be considered as one of several factors that may be relevant to individual psychological adjustment.

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At the family level, the findings reinforce the importance of meaningful paternal involvement during development (Putri & Widyorini, 2025). Engagement , accessibility, and responsibility represent important dimensions through fathers participate in their children's development (Norman et al., 2024). At the individual level, career preparation and employee development programs may also incorporate emotional regulation, coping strategies, resilience, and psychological preparedness for workplace challenges.

Future research should replicate the present findings using established and independently validated measurement instruments. Longitudinal research would also be valuable for examining whether the association between paternal involvement experiences and work anxiety changes over time. In addition, future studies could investigate potential mediating or moderating variables, such as self-esteem, emotional regulation, resilience, social support, and perceived organizational support.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examined the relationship between fatherlessness and work anxiety among Generation Z employees in Surabaya. The findings demonstrated that fatherlessness was positively and significantly associated with work anxiety, indicating that limited paternal involvement may continue to influence psychological adjustment during early adulthood and employment. These findings contribute to the literature by extending previous research beyond developmental and family contexts and highlighting fatherlessness as a developmental factor associated with occupational mental health. Practically, the results suggest that organizations, mental health professionals, and educational institutions should consider employees' developmental backgrounds when designing workplace mental health and career preparation programs. Future research is encouraged to employ longitudinal designs and investigate potential mediating variables, such as emotional regulation, resilience, self-esteem, and perceived organizational support, to further explain the relationship between fatherlessness and work anxiety.

LIMITATION

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the cross-sectional correlational design does not permit causal inferences; therefore, although a strong positive relationship was identified between fatherlessness and work anxiety, the findings cannot confirm that fatherlessness directly causes work anxiety. Second, the use of self-report questionnaires may have introduced response bias, as participants' answers were based on subjective perceptions and personal experiences. In addition, the sample was limited to Generation Z employees in Surabaya, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other age groups, occupations, or cultural contexts.

Furthermore, this study examined fatherlessness as a single construct without analyzing the specific contributions of its dimensions (interaction, accessibility, and responsibility). Consequently, it remains unclear whether certain dimensions of fatherlessness have a stronger association with work anxiety than others. Future research is encouraged to employ longitudinal designs, include more diverse samples, and investigate potential mediating or moderating variables, such as emotional regulation, resilience, self-esteem, and perceived

organizational support, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between fatherlessness and work anxiety.

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