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THE EFFECT OF EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION DEFICIENCY ON EMPLOYEE WITHDRAWAL: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF CONSCIENTIOUS INTELLIGENCE IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ALEXITHYMIA AND QUIET QUITTING

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the mediating role of conscientious intelligence in the relationship between alexithymia and quiet quitting. Data were collected from a sample of 330 individuals employed in both the private and public sectors, using the Quiet Quitting Scale, the Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20), and the Conscientious Intelligence Scale. Data analysis was performed using SPSS 26 and the PROCESS macro (Model 4). The findings indicated that the mean scores for alexithymia, quiet quitting, and conscientious intelligence were notably high among employees. A significant positive relationship was found between alexithymia and quiet quitting, while a negative relationship was found between conscientious intelligence and quiet quitting. Importantly, conscientious intelligence was found to partially mediate the relationship between alexithymia and quiet quitting. Specifically, the effect of alexithymia on quiet quitting was attenuated in individuals with higher levels of conscientious intelligence. In addition, the study examines the differences between participants' demographic characteristics and the variables. The findings are summarized. These findings suggest that interventions designed to enhance emotional awareness and conscientious intelligence in organizational contexts may play a crucial role in reducing psychological attrition and quiet quitting behaviors among employees.

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DUYGUSAL İFADE EKSİKLİĞİNİN İŞTEN KOPUŞA ETKİSİ: ÇALIŞANLARDA ALEKSİTİMİ VE SESSİZ İSTİFA İLİŞKİSİNDE VİCDANİ ZEKÂNIN ARACILIK ROLÜ

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ÖZ

Bu çalışmada, aleksitimi ve sessiz istifa arasındaki ilişkide vicdani zekânın aracı rolü incelenmektedir. Özel ve kamu sektöründe çalışan 330 kişiden oluşan örneklem grubundan elde edilen veriler, Sessiz İstifa Ölçeği, Aleksitimi Ölçeği ve Vicdani Zekâ Ölçeği kullanılarak toplanmıştır. Araştırma kapsamında gerçekleştirilen analizler SPSS 26 ve Process Macro (Model 4) ile yürütülmüştür. Bulgular, çalışanların aleksitimi, sessiz istifa ve vicdani zekâ ortalama puanlarının dikkate değer seviyelerde olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Ayrıca, aleksitimi ile sessiz istifa arasında pozitif yönlü anlamlı bir ilişki bulunduğu, vicdani zekâ ile sessiz istifa arasında ise negatif yönlü bir ilişki olduğu belirlenmiştir. Bununla birlikte, aleksitimi ve sessiz istifa arasındaki ilişkide vicdani zekânın kısmi aracılık rolü üstlendiği tespit edilmiştir. Yüksek vicdani zekâ düzeyine sahip bireylerde aleksitiminin sessiz istifa üzerindeki etkisinin zayıfladığı saptanmıştır. Ayrıca çalışmada katılımcıların demografik özellikleri ile değişkenler arasındaki farklılıklar da incelenmiştir. Elde edilen bulgular özetlenmiştir. Bu sonuçlar, örgütsel bağlamda çalışanların duygusal farkındalık düzeylerini artırmaya yönelik müdahalelerin, işten psikolojik kopuşu önlemede önemli bir rol oynayabileceğini göstermektedir.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In today's business environment, emotional awareness and ethical responsibility are critical factors influencing employees' commitment to their work and overall performance. Within this context, alexithymia—defined as the inability to recognize, express, and regulate emotions—can have significant psychosocial consequences in the workplace. Individuals with alexithymia often struggle to cope with stress due to limited emotional awareness and reduced empathy, which can lead to decreased employee engagement and contribute to passive withdrawal behaviors, such as 'quiet quitting.' Quiet quitting is a phenomenon characterized by minimal work performance and a decline in emotional investment, impairing productivity and organizational commitment over time.

In contrast, conscientious intelligence refers to an individual's moral awareness, ethical decision-making abilities, and capacity to cultivate empathy. Employees with high levels of conscientious intelligence are better equipped to manage their emotional experiences and are more adept at understanding the emotions of others. Therefore, it is hypothesized that conscientious intelligence may serve as a militating factor, buffering the adverse effects of alexithymia and reducing the likelihood of quiet quitting.

A review of the existing literature indicates that emotional factors and ethical decision-making processes play a significant role in shaping employee behavior. However, empirical research examining the relationship between alexithymia, conscientious intelligence, and quiet quitting remains limited. Notably, quiet quitting has emerged as an increasingly prevalent issue in today's business environment. According to a report by Gallup's (2023) State of the Global Workplace report, 59% of the global workforce and 50% of the U.S. workforce can be classified as experiencing quiet quitting, with particularly high rates among employees under the age of 35 (Daugherty, Kelly, & Kvilhaug, 2024). This study aims to examine the effect of alexithymia on quiet quitting and explore the mediating role of conscientious intelligence in this relationship.

Specifically, it will reveal how employees' levels of alexithymia affect quiet quitting behavior, the role of conscientious intelligence as a mediating mechanism in this relationship, and the potential effects of demographic variables on these associations. It is anticipated that the findings of this study will contribute to the development of healthier and more productive work environments in the business world.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, explanations on the concepts of alexithymia, conscientious intelligence, quiet quitting and the relationships between variables are discussed.

2.1. Alexithymia

Alexithymia, a term of Greek origin first introduced into the literature by American psychiatrists Peter E. Sifneos and John C. Nemiah in the 1970s, is defined as "the lack of words to express emotions" (Kieraité et al., 2024). It was initially identified in patients presenting with psychosomatic symptoms—conditions in which psychological stress manifests as physical

symptoms. A significant proportion of these patients, who reported somatic symptoms such as pain or fatigue, also expressed personal distress while exhibiting a marked inability to clearly articulate their emotional states to physicians (Nemiah et al., 1976; Hogeveen & Grafman, 2021). Alexithymia is conceptualized in three interrelated dimensions: difficulty identifying emotions, difficulty describing emotions, and externally oriented thinking (Adamowicz et al., 2022).

A review of the literature reveals that difficulty identifying emotions is associated with various behavioral addictions (Preece vd., 2017). Alexithymia has been linked to social media addiction (Lyvers et al., 2020), gambling addiction (Marchetti et al., 2019), substance use (Haviland et al., 1994), alcohol addiction (Cruise & Becerra, 2018), exercise addiction (Lyvers et al., 2020), and irregular eating patterns (Goetz et al., 2020). Furthermore, alexithymia has been identified as a potential risk factor for many other behavioral addictions (Sweetnam & Flack, 2023). Saarijarvi et al. (2006) highlighted a significant relationship between alexithymia and depression, noting that an individual's ability to identify and process emotions improves as their mood stabilizes. On the other hand, high levels of alexithymia are often associated with increased psychological distress (Li et al., 2024). Previous studies have also shown a positive relationship between alexithymia and negative emotional states (Lumley et al., 1996), as well as general distress (Preece et al., 2018; Torunsky et al., 2023). In a study conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, Conversano et al. (2020) observed that individuals experienced increased fear of illness, economic uncertainty, and future anxiety. They argued that prolonged stress during this period further posed challenges for individuals to recognize and articulate their emotions.

2.2. Conscientious intelligence

Conscience is defined as a human and moral emotion that guides an individual's behavior in specific situations (Lamb et al., 2019) and plays a crucial role in directing individuals toward appropriate conduct (Lak et al., 2018). Conscience education, on the other hand, is a developmental process that begins within the family and extends throughout an individual’s schooling. During this process, the development conscientiousness is influenced not only by formal education and learning but also by an individual's value and belief systems, cultural background, religious teachings, and life experiences, creating a dynamic structure (Hannani et al., 2018). While conscience helps individuals distinguish right from wrong, it is also a fundamental component that guides ethical decision-making (Wogu et al., 2015).

Conscientious intelligence is a concept shaped by an individual's family upbringing, religious beliefs, and lifelong education (Butts, 2019). According to Tarhan (2022), it involves making decisions free from ego-centered biases, taking risks for the sake of principles when necessary, and prioritizing accuracy by adhering to the principle of "right is strong" rather than "strong is right." High levels of conscientious intelligence are indicative of an individual's moral sensitivity, empathy, sense of responsibility, and ethical decision-making.

2.3. Quiet quitting

Quiet quitting has been characterized by some researchers as a new phenomenon that specifically explains the work attitudes of Generation Y and Z (Constantz, 2022; Harter, 2022), while others view it as a long-standing behavior under different terminologies (Formica & Sfodera, 2022; Yıkılmaz, 2022). Lord (2022) described this concept as "old wine in a new bottle." The phenomenon of quiet quitting can be traced back to a movement that originated in China, known as "lying flat" or "tang ping." This movement emerged as a response to the long and demanding work hours faced by young employees and gained significant traction throughout 2021. In April 2021, the concept gained global attention when Zaid Khan, a 24-year-old software engineer and musician, posted a video titled "Quiet Quitting" on TikTok, which went viral, garnering over 17 million views. As a result, many individuals expressed support for this approach, and it quickly became a widely discussed topic in the contemporary business world (Foster, 2022).

In his study, Serenko (2024, p. 29) defined quiet quitting as "a behavior in which employees deliberately limit all work activities to those outlined in a formal or informal job description, meet yet do not exceed predetermined expectations, set boundaries, avoid volunteering, and (if possible) ignore additional tasks, all while maintaining their current employment status and prioritizing their well-being over organizational goals." Essentially, while an individual may not formally resign, they intentionally refrain from investing more time, effort, or enthusiasm than what is strictly required. Though they meet the minimum job requirements, their behavior reflects a loss of commitment and motivation toward the workplace (Daugherty et al., 2024). Several factors contribute to the phenomenon of quiet quitting, including institutional indifference (Zenger & Folkman, 2022; Rocha et al., 2024), lack of growth and development opportunities, failure to connect with the organization's values and mission (Harter, 2022), excessive workload, anxiety, fatigue, and notably, the prolonged deterioration of work-life balance (Boy & Sürmeli, 2023), job instability, wage concerns, and competing personal priorities (Anand et al., 2024).

2.4. Relationships between variables and hypotheses

Global and social disasters, such as earthquakes and pandemics, can adversely affect emotional processing systems by inducing intense trauma, anxiety, and stress in individuals (McFarlane & Van Hooff, 2009). These catastrophic events can impair individuals' emotional processing capacity, often leading to elevated levels of alexithymia. Traumatic experiences, in particular, may cause individuals to suppress their emotions, struggle to articulate their feelings, and experience reduced emotional awareness (Solomon & Mikulincer, 2006). In the aftermath of an earthquake, for instance, the instinct for survival may lead individuals to consciously or unconsciously suppress their emotional responses. This is especially relevant for those who have lost loved ones or become displaced, as they may prioritize survival over emotional processing, intentionally setting aside their emotional awareness (McFarlane & Van Hooff, 2009). In a social context, expressing emotions openly among individuals affected by disasters can sometimes be considered as a sign of weakness. This perception, particularly among men or individuals in leadership roles, may lead to the deliberate suppression of emotions in an effort

to maintain a strong or resilient image (Taylor et al., 1997). Consequently, this can contribute to a rise in alexithymia levels.

This research draws on existing theoretical frameworks to reveal the relationships between alexithymia, conscientious intelligence, and quiet quitting. In particular, the Theory of Emotional Processing suggests a critical foundation for conceptualizing these relationships. Introduced by Weiss and Crapanzano (1996), this theory suggests that individuals' past emotional experiences significantly influence their current organizational behavior. Events in the workplace often trigger emotional reactions, which, in turn, shape employees' responses and behaviors. These emotional reactions can be triggered by both recent and past events, affecting an individual's everyday work life. In this regard, emotional experiences are not only influenced by personal characteristics and organizational dynamics but also are also shaped by external factors, which collectively impact workplace behavior. The Theory of Emotional Processing emphasizes that the structure of emotional responses is as crucial as the context in which these emotions arise. Emotions such as anger, frustration, pride, or joy can lead to distinct behavioral outcomes, with each emotional response potentially guiding different actions within the workplace (Weiss & Crapanzano, 1996). Alexithymia can adversely affect social interactions and job satisfaction in the workplace since it restricts an individual's emotional skills. Despite the growing relevance of quiet quitting in contemporary work environments, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding the effect of alexithymia on employees' tendencies toward quiet quitting. This study aims to fill this gap through examining the relationship between alexithymia and quiet quitting in greater depth, with a focus on both public and private sector employees.

H_1: *Alexithymia has a positive effect on employees' tendencies to engage in quiet quitting. Individuals with higher levels of alexithymia are more likely to exhibit quiet quitting behaviors.*

Conscientious intelligence, on the other hand, is a competency that enables individuals to align their actions with ethical values, make responsible decisions, and demonstrate moral integrity within the workplace. Employees with high conscientious intelligence are typically more committed to their roles, driven not merely by external expectations but also by an intrinsic sense of responsibility and ethical duty. These individuals tend to seek meaning and purpose in their work, fostering resilience and engagement, even in the face of challenges or job dissatisfaction. Rather than resorting to disengagement or passive withdrawal, employees with high conscientious intelligence are more likely to adopt solution-oriented approaches to address issues (Wilmot & Ones, 2019). Therefore, it is anticipated that there will be an inverse relationship between conscientious intelligence and tendency to engage in quiet quitting.

H_2*: Conscientious intelligence has a negative effect on employees' tendencies to engage in quiet quitting. Employees with high levels of conscientious intelligence exhibit lower tendencies to engage in quiet quitting.*

Individuals with alexithymia, who struggle to recognize and manage their emotions, may find it challenging to identify and internalize stress, dissatisfaction, or lack of motivation

in the workplace. This emotional disconnect can reduce their emotional commitment and increase the likelihood of disengaging from work, leading to quiet quitting behaviors. However, conscientious intelligence can buffer the negative effect of alexithymia on quiet quitting through enhancing individuals' sense of ethical responsibility and intrinsic motivation. Employees with high conscientious intelligence are more likely to act with a sense of duty and accountability toward their roles, maintaining organizational commitment even in the face of emotional challenges. These individuals are also more adept at finding constructive solutions to workplace issues, despite lower emotional awareness. In this context, conscientious intelligence may serve as a mediating variable that disrupts the positive relationship between alexithymia and quiet quitting.

H_3: *Conscientious intelligence has a mediating (debilitating) effect on the positive relationship between alexithymia and employees' tendencies to engage in quiet quitting.*

Employees may exhibit quiet quitting for various reasons, and the manifestation of this behavior can differ across individuals, depending on their unique personalities (Wicker & Van Hein, 2023) and the specific nature of their profession. For instance, how a nurse engages in quiet quitting behavior may differ from those of a receptionist, reflecting both their occupational context and personal disposition (Nimmi et al., 2024). This study examines whether alexithymia levels, quiet quitting tendencies, and conscientious intelligence vary based on the demographic characteristics of individuals.

H_4: *The levels of alexithymia, quiet quitting tendencies, and conscientious intelligence vary based on the demographic characteristics of employees.*

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research design

This study was designed as a descriptive and cross-sectional research. Data were collected between October and November of 2024. The snowball sampling method was used for sample selection. In this method, initial participants who met the research criteria were identified, and subsequent participants were recruited through referrals from these initial participants. The snowball sampling method is particularly effective for reaching a large number of unknown or hard-to-reach participants in the sample (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2018). The ethical compliance of the research was reviewed and approved by the Social Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Board of Osmaniye Korkut Ata University, with approval granted on 18/10/2024, under decision number 2024/10/8.

3.2. Data and sample

The population of the research comprised individuals from various professions residing and working in Kahramanmaraş province. The research sample consisted of public and private sector employees who voluntarily participated in the study. A power analysis was conducted using the G*Power (3.1.9.7) program to assess the adequacy of the sample size. For the power analysis, the effect size was set at 0.20, in accordance with Cohen's (1992) guidelines (Çapık, 2014). Using the "A priori" method, it was estimated that a sample size of 262 participants

would be adequate for the research, assuming a 95% confidence interval. In the research, 330 participants were successfully recruited on a voluntary basis. The socio-demographic characteristics of the participants are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics

		N	%			N	%
Gender	Female	155	47	**Sector**	Public	115	34.8
	Male	175	53		Private	215	65.2
Marital Status	Single	134	40.6	**Job Position**	Manager	49	14.8
	Married	196	59.4		Employee	281	85.2
Age	Aged ≤ 25	50	15.2	**Total Professional experience**	Less than 1 year	20	6.1
	Aged 26-35	183	55.5		1-5 years	146	44.2
	Aged 36-45	70	21.2		6-10 years	76	23
	Aged ≥ 46	27	8.2		11-15 years	63	19.1
Education Level	High school	34	10.3		16 years and over	25	7.6
	Associate graduate	81	24.5				
	Bachelor's graduate	189	57.3				
	Postgraduate	26	7.9				

Regarding the socio-demographic profile of the participants, 53% were male, 59.4% were married, 55.5% were aged between 26 and 35, 57.3% held a bachelor's degree. In addition, 65.2% worked in the private sector, 85.2% were non-executive employees, and 44.2% had between 1 and 5 years of professional experience (Table 1).

3.3. Data collection tools

In this study, alexithymia was defined as the independent variable, while quiet quitting served as the dependent variable, and conscientious intelligence was treated as the mediating variable. A survey form was developed to collect data, and the following scales were included:

Personal Information Form: This form includes demographic items designed to determine the participants' gender, marital status, age, education level, sector, job position, and years of professional experience.

Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20): The Toronto Alexithymia Scale, developed by Bagby, Parker, and Taylor (1994) and adapted to Turkish by Güleç et al. (2009), was used to assess participants' alexithymia levels. The scale consists of 20 items across three subscales (difficulty identifying emotions, difficulty describing emotions, and externally oriented thinking). Responses are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Never, 5 = Always). The lowest possible score on the scale is 20, while the highest score is 100. The cut-off scores for the TAS-20 are as follows: ≤ 51 indicates no alexithymia, 52-60 indicates borderline alexithymia, and ≥ 61 indicates alexithymia. In this study, the mean alexithymia score was 53.09. The Cronbach's alpha of the original scale was reported as 0.78, and in this study, it was determined to be 0.712. The scale does not include any reverse-coded items.

The Conscientious Intelligence Scale: The Conscientious Intelligence Scale, developed by Akti et al. (2017), was used to assess participants' conscientious intelligence levels. It consists of 32 items across seven subscales (ethical values, moral sensitivity, responsibility towards the creator, compassion, conscious awareness, social awareness, and wisdom).

Responses are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). The lowest possible score on the scale is 32, while the highest score is 160. The Cronbach's alpha value of the original scale was reported as 0.85, and in this study, it was determined to be 0.926. The scale includes reverse-coded items.

The Quiet Quitting Scale: The Quiet Quitting Scale, developed by Avcı (2023), was used to assess the quiet quitting attitudes of participants. It consists of 8 items across two subscales (work and life). Responses are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 =Strongly Disagree, 5 - Strongly Agree). The lowest possible score on the scale is 8, while the highest score is 40. The Cronbach's alpha of the original scale was reported as 0.81, and in this study, it was determined to be 0.846. The scale does not include any reverse-coded items.

3.4. Analysis

For data analysis, SPSS 26 and Process Macro (Model 4) were used. The data were found to exhibit a normal distribution, with skewness and kurtosis coefficients within the acceptable range of -2 to +2 (Table 2) (George & Mallery, 2010). Descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha coefficient for internal consistency of the scales, and correlation tests between the scale variables and demographic variables (independent samples t-test and one-way analysis of variance) were conducted using SPSS 26.0. Additionally, a post-hoc Tukey test was performed to determine intergroup differences. The relationships between the variables were examined using the Pearson correlation coefficient. Process Macro (Model 4) was employed to assess the mediating role of conscientious intelligence in the effect of alexithymia on quiet quitting. The 95% confidence interval excluded zero. The statistical significance level was set at $p<0.05$.

4. RESULTS

The results of Pearson correlation analysis between alexithymia, silent resignation and conscientious intelligence and mean scale scores are presented in Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics

Variables	Min-Max	$\bar{x}\pm ss$	Skewness	Kurtosis
Alexithymia	**20-100**	**53.09±9.03**	**-0.651**	**1.245**
Difficulty identifying emotions	7-35	15.72±5.20	0.123	-0.921
Difficulty describing emotions	5-20	13.37±2.74	0.024	0-.569
Externally oriented thinking	8-40	23.98±4.85	-0.775	1.245
Quiet quitting	**8-40**	**23.25±7.25**	**-0.609**	**-0.304**
Work	3-15	6.64±2.67	0.354	-0.316
Life	5-25	16.60±5.93	-.0531	-0.613
Conscientious intelligence	**32-160**	**136.03±17.87**	**-0.886**	**0.524**
Ethical values	5-25	20.37±4.67	-1.103	0.548
Moral sensitivity	5-25	22.03±3.71	-1.455	1.793
Responsibility towards the creator	4-20	16.32±3.19	-0.822	-0.028
Compassion	5-25	22.21±3.43	-1.473	1.613
Conscious awareness	5-25	21.20±3.50	-0.994	0.853
Social awareness	4-20	16.97±3.28	-0.928	-0.088
Wisdom	4-20	16.90±2.70	-0.855	1.487

The overall mean score for alexithymia was 53.09±9.03. In the subscales of the scale, the mean score for "difficulty identifying emotions" was 15.72±5.20, "difficulty describing emotions" was 13.37±2.74, and "externally oriented thinking" was 23.98±4.85. The mean score for quiet quitting was 23.25±7.25, with subscale scores of 6.64±2.67 for "work" and 16.60±5.93 for "life." The overall mean score for conscientious intelligence was 136.03±17.87, with subscale scores as follows: 20.37±4.67 for "ethical values," 22.03±3.71 for "moral sensitivity," 16.32±3.19 for "responsibility towards the creator," 22.21±3.43 for "compassion," 21.20±3.50 for "conscious awareness," 16.97±3.28 for "social awareness," and 16.90±2.70 for "wisdom" (Table 2).

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis between alexithymia, quiet quitting, and conscientious intelligence are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Pearson correlation analysis results

Variables		Alexithymia	Quiet quitting	Conscientious intelligence	Cronbach Alpha	CR	AVE
Alexithymia	r	1	.449**	-.374**	0.71	0.95	0.48
	p		.000	.000			
Quiet quitting	r	.449**	1	-.402**	0.85	0.88	0.48
	p	.000		.000			
Conscientious intelligence	r	-.374**	-.402**	1	0.93	0.97	0.49
	p	.000	.000				

**p<0.01

A significant and positive relationship was found between alexithymia and quiet quitting (r = .449). Additionally, significant negative relationships were identified between alexithymia and conscientious intelligence (r = -.374), as well as between conscientious intelligence and quiet quitting (r = -.402) (Table 3).

As shown in Table 3, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Composite Reliability (CR) values are critical indicators for assessing construct validity. According to widely accepted criteria in the literature, an AVE value greater than 0.50 and a CR value above 0.70 are considered acceptable (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). AVE represents the average variance captured by the variables, while CR measures the internal consistency of the scale items. However, some studies suggest that validity can still be achieved if the CR value exceeds 0.70, even when the AVE is below 0.50. This is due to the fact that CR accounts for both factor loadings and error variances in a more comprehensive manner compared to AVE. Within this framework, it is argued that construct validity can still be accepted if the CR value is sufficiently high, regardless of whether the AVE value is below 0.50 (Malhotra & Dash, 2011).

The results of the analysis conducted to determine the mediating role of conscientious intelligence in the effect of alexithymia on quiet quitting are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Mediation analysis results

	SC(β)	USC	SE	C.R	P	R^2	Lower Limit	Upper Limit
Direct Effect								

Alexithymia	→	Conscientious intelligence	-.373	-.462	.063	-7.298	.000	.139	-.586	-.337
Alexithymia	→	Quiet quitting	.346	.720	.106	6.786	.000	.264	.511	.929
Conscientious intelligence	→	Quiet quitting	-.272	-.457	.085	-5.323	.000		-.626	-.288
Indirect Effect										
Alexithymia	→	Quiet quitting	.101	.211	.037				.140	.288
Total Impact										
Alexithymia	→	Quiet quitting	.447	.932	.102	9.090	.000	.201	.730	1.134

p<.001; SC: Standardized Coefficients; USC: Unstandardized Coefficients; SE: Standard Error; C.R: *Unstandardised Coefficients/ Standard Error*

In the direct effects, it was found that alexithymia had a significant negative effect on conscientious intelligence (β: -.373), explaining a variance value (R^2) of .139. Alexithymia also had a positive effect on quiet quitting (β: .346), while conscientious intelligence showed a negative effect on quiet quitting (β: -.272), with a variance explained (R^2) of .264.

In the indirect effects, alexithymia had a significant positive effect on quiet quitting (β: .101). When all the data were evaluated together, it was determined that by including conscientious intelligence in the model, alexithymia had a statistically significant direct (β: .346) and indirect (β: .101) effect on quiet quitting. Therefore, it was revealed that conscientious intelligence had a partial mediating role (Table 4; Figure 1). According to the findings obtained, H_1, H_2, and H_3 were accepted.

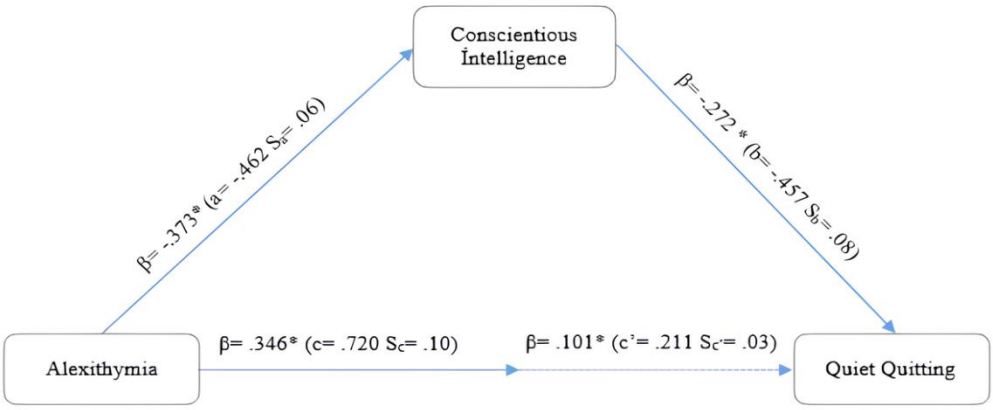

Figure 1. Research model results

The results of the analysis conducted to evaluate alexithymia, quiet quitting, and conscientious intelligence according to demographic variables are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Evaluation of alexithymia, quiet quitting and conscientious intelligence according to demographic variables

	N	Alexithymia	Quiet quitting	Conscientious intelligence
		$\bar{x}$±ss	$\bar{x}$±ss	$\bar{x}$±ss
Gender				
Female	155	53.30±9.48	22.89±7.74	136.65±15.55
Male	175	52.90±8.63	23.57±7.30	135.47±19.72
Test value		t:0.401	t:-0.829	t:0.600
p value		p:0.689	p:0.408	p:0.549
Marital Status				

Single	134	53.98±9.42	22.83±8.06	134.31±16.87
Married	196	52.47±8.72	23.54±7.11	137.20±18.47
Test değeri		t:1.489	t:-0.837	t:-1.445
p value		p:0.137	p:0.403	p:0.149
Age				
Aged ≤ 25[1]	50	53.56±8.58	22.20±7.63	138.88±11.46
Aged 26-35[2]	183	52.04±8.60	22.81±7.48	135.45±19.19
Aged 36-45 [3]	70	56.77±9.14	25.35±6.95	134.48±17.02
Aged ≥ 46[4]	27	49.74±9.87	22.74±8.21	138.66±20.36
Test value		F:6.250	F:2.440	F:0.856
p value		p:0.000*	p:0.064	p:0.464
Difference between groups		3>2.4		
Education Level				
High school [1]	34	56.58±9.26	23.91±6.96	131.05±20.42
Associate graduate [2]	81	55.30±7.53	24.22±7.16	134.62±16.56
Bachelor's graduate [3]	189	51.91±9.34	22.56±7.69	138.55±17.09
Postgraduate [4]	26	50.19±8.45	24.38±7.74	128.57±20.77
Test value		F:5.510	F:1.263	F:3.902
p value		p:0.001*	p:0.287	p:0.009*
Difference between groups		1>3.4		3>4
Sector				
Public	115	52.64±9.90	22.55±7.08	134.93±22.31
Private	215	53.33±8.55	23.62±7.71	136.61±14.99
Test value		t:-0.657	t:-1.236	t:-0.811
p value		p:0.511	p:0.218	p:0.418
Job Position				
Manager	49	50.32±8.23	24.87±8.25	139.14±15.26
Employee	281	53.57±9.09	22.97±7.35	135.48±18.26
Test value		t:-2.336	t:1.643	t:1.322
p value		p:0.020*	p:0.101	p:0.187
Total professional experience				
Less than 1 year [1]	20	54.95±9.50	24.55±7.27	136.30±20.89
1-5 years [2]	146	50.95±8.95	21.54±7.61	138.73±16.44
6-10 years [3]	76	54.60±8.28	24.21±6.84	128.39±20.55
11-15 yearsl [4]	63	55.28±8.98	24.36±7.42	138.90±15.60
16 years and over [5]	25	53.92±9.42	26.48±7.49	136.00±14.16
Test value		F:3.891	F:3.976	F:4.935
p value		p:0.004*	p:0.004*	p:0.001*
Difference between groups		4>1	5>1	4>3

A significant difference was found between alexithymia and age (p: 0.000), education (p: 0.001), job position (p: 0.020), and total professional years (p: 0.004). Alexithymia was found to be significantly higher in individuals within the 36-45 age range, high school graduates, employees (non-executives), and those with a total professional experience of 11-15 years. In the Post Hoc Tukey Test, which was conducted to identify intergroup differences, a significant difference was observed between the 36-45 age group and both the 26-35 age group and the group aged 46 and over within the age sub-variables. A significant difference was found in the educational level sub-variables between high school graduates and those with undergraduate or postgraduate degrees. In terms of total professional experience, a significant

difference was observed between those with 11-15 years of experience and those with less than 1 year of experience. However, no significant differences were found in alexithymia levels based on gender (p: 0.608), marital status (p: 0.137), or sector (p: 0.511) (Table 5).

A significant difference was found between total professional years and quiet quitting (p: 0.004). Quite quitting tendencies were significantly higher among individuals with 16 or more years of professional experience. In the Tukey test, a significant difference was observed between those with 16 or more years of experience and those with less than 1 year of experience (Table 5). No significant difference was found in quiet quitting based on gender (p: 0.408), marital status (p: 0.403), age (p: 0.064), education (p: 0.287), sector (p: 0.218), or position (p: 0.101) (Table 5).

However, a significant difference was found in conscientious intelligence based on education (p: 0.009) and total professional years (p: 0.001). Conscientious intelligence levels were significantly higher among bachelor's degree graduates and those with 11 to 15 years of professional experience. In the Tukey test, a significant difference was found in the educational level sub-variables between undergraduate and graduate graduates, as well as in the total professional years sub-variables between those with 1 to 5 years and 6 to 10 years of experience. However, no significant difference was found in conscientious intelligence based on gender (p: 0.549), marital status (p: 0.149), age (p: 0.464), sector (p: 0.418), or position (p: 0.187) (Table 5). According to the findings obtained, H_4 was partially accepted.

5. DISCUSSION

The global and regional crises experienced in recent years have had a profound impact on the emotional states of individuals and their behaviors in the workplace. In particular, the COVID-19 pandemic and devastating events, such as the February 6 earthquakes, have tested the psychological resilience of those living in disaster-stricken areas, affecting their emotional awareness and regulation skills. This study aimed to examine the mediating role of conscientious intelligence in the relationship between the alexithymia levels of individuals working in the public and private sectors in Kahramanmaraş province and their quiet quitting behavior.

In the literature, alexithymia is often examined in relation to an individual’s exposure to psychosocial and environmental stressors (Lumley et al., 2007). Assessing the level of alexithymia in employees provides valuable insight into the challenges they face in identifying, expressing, and understanding their emotions. Given this context, it can be suggested that the alexithymia levels of employees may be significantly influenced by large-scale traumatic events. Traumatic events such as earthquakes can significantly impair individuals' emotional processing abilities, often triggering symptoms of alexithymia or exacerbating pre-existing symptoms (Frewen et al., 2008). The losses, traumatic memories, and feelings of uncertainty that follow a disaster can lead to an increase in alexithymia levels, particularly among individuals who struggle with emotional regulation. In this regard, the elevated alexithymia levels observed in employees can be interpreted as a reflection of both the prolonged

psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the acute stress induced by the February 6 earthquakes.

Difficulties in identifying and regulating emotions at work can significantly impact employees' attitudes and commitment to their roles. Individuals with high levels of alexithymia are more susceptible to negative experiences in the workplace due to their challenges in processing emotions and coping with stress. This emotional dysregulation can undermine their sense of organizational engagement, decrease their motivation, and lead to behaviors such as quiet quitting. In particular, the heightened symptoms of alexithymia following traumatic events can complicate employees' ability to manage their expectations at work and uphold their psychological contract. Individuals who have difficulty identifying and expressing their emotions may refrain from voicing the dissatisfaction they experience at work. This lack of emotional expression can gradually build a sense of disengagement, potentially setting the stage for quiet quitting over time. In their study, Nimmi et al. (2024) identified several factors contributing to quiet quitting, including the need for livelihood, exclusion at work, illness, wage inequality, work-life imbalance, work-family conflict, lack of recognition, insufficient career development opportunities, the absence of challenging tasks, and overall job dissatisfaction. Researchers have pointed out that when the psychological contract is violated by management, employees may initially exhibit quiet quitting behaviors, which may lead to actual resignation over time (Constantz, 2022; Hamouche et al., 2023). However, based on the findings obtained, it can be concluded that conscientious intelligence plays a crucial mediating role in this process. It enhances individuals' ethical and emotional awareness, enabling them to respond to workplace negativity in a more conscious and reasoned manner. Individuals who struggle with identifying and describing their emotions can express their dissatisfaction in healthier manners and manage workplace relationships more effectively when they possess high conscientious intelligence. Consequently, the negative effects of alexithymia can be mitigated, thereby slowing down or preventing the process leading to quiet quitting.

In addition, the analysis of the differences between the demographic characteristics of the participants and the variables was examined in the study. The findings obtained are summarized below:

— The analysis revealed no significant differences in alexithymia levels based on gender, marital status, or the sector under study. However, notable differences were observed in relation to age, educational background, job position, and overall professional experience. Specifically, higher levels of alexithymia were found in individuals aged 36-45, suggesting that this age range may be particularly emotionally challenging for employees. The middle-aged period is often characterized by an intensification of stressors related to both professional and personal life. The observed higher levels of alexithymia among high school graduates may reflect the influence of educational attainment on an individual's ability to recognize and articulate emotions. Higher levels of education may contribute to enhanced emotional awareness, facilitating better emotional recognition and expression. The increased alexithymia observed among non-executive employees could be linked to limited control over their work environment and reduced decision-making authority. Additionally, higher alexithymia in

individuals with 11-15 years of professional experience may indicate that this period represents a critical transitional phase in their careers.

— No significant differences were found in the tendency for quiet quitting based on gender, marital status, age, education, sector, or job position. However, a significant difference was observed in relation to total professional experience. The Tukey test results indicated that the highest tendency for quiet quitting was observed in individuals with 16 or more years of experience, with a notable difference when compared to those with less than one year of experience. This suggests that new employees typically begin their careers with higher motivation and expectations; however, over time, this enthusiasm may diminish, eventually leading to a shift toward quiet quitting. The pronounced tendency for individuals with extensive professional experience to engage in quiet quitting highlights the critical importance of effective career management, employee satisfaction, and strategies aimed at enhancing motivation within the workplace. Organizations that provide opportunities for career development and balance employee workload can play a significant role in reducing quiet quitting. This finding is consistent with the research conducted by Nimmi et al. (2024), which found similar patterns across different generational cohorts, including Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z in the workplace. Researchers have reported that quiet quitting is experienced by employees across all age groups and genders. Similarly, Rocha et al. (2024) highlighted in their study that the phenomenon of quiet quitting is pervasive, irrespective of gender, job title, or industry sector.

— No significant differences were observed in the levels of conscientious intelligence among employees based on gender, marital status, age, sector, or job position. However, differences were found in relation to educational background and total professional experience. Specifically, employees with an undergraduate degree exhibited higher levels of conscientious intelligence. The significant difference between graduate and undergraduate graduates suggests that higher levels of education may not necessarily lead to a direct enhancement of conscientious intelligence. This finding implies that the development of conscientious intelligence is influenced not only by formal academic education but also by individual experiences and the values acquired in the professional environment. On the other hand, the significant difference between total years of professional experience and conscientious intelligence reveals that employees with 11-15 years of experience exhibit higher levels of conscientious intelligence. This suggests that as employees attain a certain level of professional maturity, their ethical sensitivity and conscientious awareness tend to increase. The absence of a significant relationship between factors such as gender, marital status, age, sector, and position with conscientious intelligence supports the notion that conscientious intelligence is more closely linked to an individual's learning process, ethical values, and professional dexperience than to demographic characteristics. This finding aligns with previous studies on conscientious intelligence in the literature. Life experiences and maturation are essential to enhance conscientious intelligence in individuals (Hannani et al., 2018; Wogu et al., 2015). However, contrary to the findings of this study, the literature suggests that conscientious intelligence is associated with gender (Özcan, 2021; Pant & Srivastava, 2019; Schmitt et al.,

2017), with some studies also indicating differences based on marital status (Arslanoğlu & Tabur, 2019).

CONCLUSION

Research findings indicate a significant positive relationship between alexithymia and quiet quitting among participants with borderline alexithymia. However, it was found that conscientious intelligence mitigates this relationship, acting as a mediating factor. Conscientious intelligence plays a crucial role in helping individuals cope with negative workplace experiences, such as dissatisfaction and emotional burnout, by enhancing their ability to understand both their own emotional states and the emotional needs of others. In this context, it is hypothesized that individuals with alexithymia, if they develop higher levels of conscientious intelligence, may be better able to distance themselves from the tendency toward quiet quitting and foster stronger professional connections, thereby cultivating healthier work relationships. In this regard, it is recommended that organizations implement training and awareness programs focused on enhancing conscientious intelligence to foster employee loyalty and prevent quiet quitting. Furthermore, the adoption of strategies designed to increase emotional awareness in individuals with alexithymia could contribute to the creation of a healthier and more sustainable work environment. Future research should explore broader samples, involving individuals from various sectors, and investigate the causal relationships between these variables through longitudinal studies to gain a deeper understanding of their dynamics.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

All stages of this study, including the development of the research idea, literature review, data collection and analysis, interpretation of findings, and manuscript writing, were conducted solely by the author.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

No conflict of interest has been declared.

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