Impact Of Toxic Leadership In Indian Schools - Psychological Distress Of Senior Secondary Students

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Abstract

Leadership is influence, (Maxwell, 2005). Leadership behaviours have yielded to corporate scandals and catastrophic failures at corporate giants such as Enron, and Lehman Brothers, among others, including in emerging markets like India, where we have witnessed similar failures in Satyam Computers Services Ltd and scams in various government projects such as Common Wealth games, Adarsh Housing society scam. Despite the comprehensiveness of literature on destructive leadership styles and their impact on organizational culture, mission, and people, research on toxic leadership, a more complex and comprehensive destructive leadership style in education settings, has been limited. There has been extensive research on the qualities and abilities of good leaders, but the topic of toxic leadership has recently been recognized for studies. Leadership in education is the active application of one's abilities and talents to influence others in the achievement of common or preconceived educational goals. Studies devoted to understanding the various types of positive leadership in schools have overlooked the toxic aspects of school leadership. It is critical to identify the behaviours of school leaders, specifically teachers, who intentionally and unknowingly inflict long-term harm on their students and school organization. Leadership toxicity in educational institutions has a negative impact on the school environment and the psychological well-being of students. Every institution, including schools, has toxic leadership. Toxic leadership in educational institutions and its repercussions on higher secondary students' psychological distress is the theme of this research report. The study, which employed a combination of approaches, identified four patterns that distinguish toxic leaders: narcissism, ethical failure, incompetence, and neuroticism.

Key words: Toxic leadership, psychological distress, school, narcissism, neuroticism

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Introduction

A leader is a dealer in hope, said Napoleon Bonaparte. Transformative leaders throughout history have raised the expectations of their followers, inspired their vision, and mobilized the group's will to accomplish shared objectives. However, history is also rife with instances of leaders who have caused unimaginable harm to their countries, businesses, or educational institutions. The 2008 global financial crisis provided fertile ground for compelling case studies on failed Leadership in the business and political spheres (George, 2008), and systemic test-taking malpractice by school districts (Wineri, 2013) provides additional material, albeit in different types of organizations. Numerous organizations worldwide have noted the significance of investigating how a toxic leader's behaviour affects emotional distress (Goldman, 2008). In addition, because of the rising frequency of psychological issues and the high expense of preventing these symptoms, psychological distress challenges are currently at the Forefront of educational studies. Through personal influence, toxic leaders can strain and reduce the emotional well-being of their subordinates; they affect the psychological well-being of their subordinates through intimidation, misconduct, and humiliation

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(Webster et al., 2016). Toxic leaders foster a toxic environment by emphasizing negative values that adversely affect employees' psychological well-being, such as hostility, distress, and depression. Furthermore, Lipman-Blumen (2005) defines toxic leadership as a personal approach that leads to failing performance, demotivation, failed aspirations, and poor mental wellbeing. It is crucial to incorporate studies on psychological distress as a consequence of toxic leadership, particularly at educational institutions, to better understand the effects of toxic leadership. This study draws attention to the pervasiveness of toxic leadership in Indian educational institutions and how it affects the mental health of senior secondary students.

What is Toxic Leadership

Social scientists are investigating leadership from a different perspective - the dark side - (Goldman, 2009; Kellerman, 2004; Kets de Vries, 1984; Hogan & Hogan, 2001; Lipman-Blumen, 2005; Williams, 2005) as a result of recent and extensive indications of abusive behaviour by leaders in most of the organizations, from enterprises to political states to educational institutions, Research on the qualities, abilities, and leadership styles of effective leaders has exploded over the past 50 years (Northouse, 2010), however, researchers have recently attempted to define and comprehend the actions of toxic leaders.

Toxic Leadership Defined

The word toxic is derived from the Greek word toxicus, which means "poison." Whicker (1996) was the first to link toxicity and leadership, identifying three distinct leadership styles in the workplace: "trustworthy (green light), transitional (yellow light), and toxic (red light).". Although "toxic leadership" first appeared in 1996, there is still no accepted definition of the term. Academic literature relies on multiple nomenclatures for the same phenomenon. Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser, (2007) used the term "destructive leadership," while Kellerman (2004) used the word "poor leadership." But "toxic leadership" is increasingly the term of choice for bad leadership in organizations (whether a business, a political state or an educational institute). Toxic leadership is a type of deleterious leadership in which the leader and followers engage in behaviours that produce adverse long-term outcomes and an unpleasant environment. (Smith, & Fredricks-Lowman, 2020). While the extent and scale of damage caused differentiates it from incivility and adult bullying, Toxic leadership, includes both bullying and incivility, which are exacerbated by environmental conditions and complacent subordinate behaviours ("The Impact" 2016; Cleary et al, 2013). Toxic leadership is defined as a "combined effect of egotistical attitudes, intrinsic motivators, and predispositions that cause pervasive damage to the well-being of an organization and its people, either abruptly or gradually (Fredrick-Lowman and Smith, 2012). Toxic leadership is characterized as "a process in which leaders, through negative behaviours and/or fractious personal characteristics, have a profound and long-lasting noxious impact on individuals, households, and institutions" (Lipman- Blumen, 2009).

A toxic leader has also been characterized as a ‘maladaptive, complainer, and often malicious, even vindictive’. Whicker (1996) defined a toxic leader as an individual who advances by "tearing others down", in addition to "waging and attempting to control others rather than encouraging followers". Toxic leadership, according to Walton (2007), is "behaviour that is exploitive, abusive, destructive, and psychologically and perhaps legally corrupt and poisonous." Toxic leaders, according to Schmidt (2008), are "narcissistic, self-promoters who engage in an unpredictable pattern of hostile and totalitarian supervision.", Goldman (2009), defined toxic leadership as "destructive, disturbing, and dysfunctional acts."

Williams (2005) expanded on this term by pointing out that there are several levels of toxic leadership, ranging from the uninformed who do minimal damage to the malevolent who do substantial harm. She remarked, ‘Dysfunctional leaders can range from those who are only inexperienced, ineffective, and unconscious of the fact that they lack the leadership abilities to those who are all three. Toxic leaders, on the other hand, will find success and glory in the devastation of others. They will thrive on the harm they can cause to other people, whether it be psychological or even bodily.’

According to Williams' definition, toxic leadership can be both intentionally and accidentally done. Of course, a leader's actions

display both forms.

According to Omar and Ahmad (2020), toxic leadership embodies abusive behaviour and dysfunctional personality attributes that cause extreme and long-term harm to individuals, organizations, communities, and nations.

Celebi, Güner, and Yldz (2015) acknowledged toxic leadership traits as narcissism, lack of appreciation, ego, and a negative mood. The general traits of toxic leaders include an attempt to advance via the use of others, placing oneself at the center and attempting to hide an insufficient personality; lack of confidence, being conceited, and having a narcissistic personality (Reed, 2004; Kasalak and Aksu, 2016). According to Frost (2003), toxic managers and leaders display sneaky, contemptuous attitudes and behaviours that are cruel to their subordinates and workers. Maladaptive, restless, and spiteful traits are also frequently present in toxic leaders and managers (Whicker, 1996; Elebi et al., 2015).

Leaders and followers are mutually dependent on one another. As a result, any definition of toxic leadership must take into account both the characteristics of followers and the characteristics of the leader. Toxic leaders can only thrive in a toxic environment, according to Kusy and Holloway (2009). Of course, their reasoning begs the question of whether a toxic leader or a toxic environment comes first. Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser (2007) specifically addressed this issue when they developed the concept of the toxic triangle—destructive leaders, vulnerable followers, and supportive environments. Toxic leadership is a form of leadership where followers and the establishment as a whole suffer long-term consequences due to the leader's influence on others for their own self-serving and personal objectives. Toxic leaders believe they are at the core of the system. They like nothing more than dominating others while deftly masking their competence. One of the most obvious traits of toxic leaders is ego gratification. According to Turkmenolu (2016), toxic bosses are quite successful at making their staff members hate them and drive them to despair.

The Lipman-Blumen model states that toxic leaders exhibit a variety of negative traits; they poison the workplace and bring serious harm to their firm (Heppell, 2011). As a result, we conclude that toxic leadership is a combination of two components. Toxic leaders' actions cause harm to members of the institution in numerous ways, both directly and indirectly, and the efficacy of the institution is negatively impacted.

Types of Toxic Leaders

Not all toxic leaders are the same. Three categories of toxic leadership conduct were identified by Kusy and Holloway (2009): team sabotage, passive hostility, and shaming, describing how each of these styles cooperates with the others to maintain toxic leadership. The three varieties, however, lack the required precision to give a clear picture of toxic leadership in practice. More thorough lists of the behavioural characteristics of toxic leaders have been offered by Williams (2005), who identified 18 distinct types of toxic leaders and a different set of 18 personal qualities in his study of toxic leadership in the U.S. Army.

Schmidt (2008) developed the Schmidt Toxic Leadership Scale, and classified toxic leaders into five categories: (a) self-promotion; (b) abusive supervision; (c) unpredictability; (d) narcissism; and (e) authoritarian leader, mentioning specific behaviours that fit into each category. Schmidt's list, however, ignores the negative consequences of a leader's unethical behaviour or even the leader's inaction.

According to Egan (2004), toxic leaders might be accidental, destructive-narcissistic, or psychopathic. Accidental toxic leaders are genuinely ignorant of how their acts could harm others. Destructive-narcissistic toxic leaders are individuals that present an attitude of self-importance, giving the impression that they are superior and in charge. Egan asserted that leaders who engaged in toxic behaviour used others to their advantage to advance and realize their idealized goals. By lacking tolerance or acting inappropriately toward others, this kind of toxic leader hurts others. The toxic, psychotic leaders bullied people for amusement and had no sense of regret or guilt.

Toxic Leadership in Educational Institutions

Leadership in education is the active application of one's abilities and talents to influence students in the achievement of

common or preconceived educational goals. Given its wide-ranging effects on the achievement of educational goals, policies, and programs, educational leadership plays a crucial role in schools. Consequently, the purpose of leadership in education is to coordinate the goals and activities of followers in the school (Orunbon, 2020).

Negative leadership has been marginalized in the context of educational administration and leadership (Oplatka, 2016).

Poet Kabir and Guru Dronacharya from Mahabharata, both have praised teachers as deserving of greater reverence than God. Despite this cultural significance, the Indian education system is currently dealing with the problem of ineffective academic leadership (Sheikh, 2017). However, ineffectual or flawed educational leadership is not a local phenomenon. Cases of poor leadership in academia, resulting in PhD dropouts, academic burnout, students committing suicide, basic education dropouts, etc., have been reported in almost all countries, implying that this is a globally prevalent issue with far-reaching implications (Myrick, 2020).

Although there is little research on toxic leadership in educational settings, it has been recognized that it exists in schools, colleges, and universities (Fahie, 2019; Green 2014; Mahalangu, 2014). The existence of unethical leadership may have negative effects on the learning environment, such as absenteeism (Sam, 2020) and lead to stress (Balci, 2000). Additionally, toxic leadership has been shown to have detrimental effects on teaching and learning in general as well as on the impacted individual (Carswell, Sasso & Ross, 2017). The "power and synergy" of toxic leadership, aided by supportive followers and enabling environment settings, can "overwhelm and replace a healthy academic culture with one of authoritarianism, fear, and retribution, regardless of checks and balances" (Pelletier, Kottke, and Sirotnik, 2019).

School administrators fit that description when speaking of leaders in educational institutions. The real leaders of the education and training activities are the teachers and instructors in the classroom, even though the leadership of the administrators is commonly emphasized (Beyciolu, 2010; Uurlu & Yiit, 2014). According to Jawas (2014), leadership methods that are centered on teachers' and students' teaching and learning activities are referred to as "teaching leadership." Competencies that demonstrate instructional leadership include developing good students, creating more favourable learning environments for coworkers, and changing the working atmosphere of the school into one that is fulfilling and productive (Elik, 1999). There is minimal agreement among studies regarding what constitutes an effective teacher (Hanushek, 2006).

There are several viewpoints on the leadership behaviours of teachers in classrooms and in every other context where leadership is a concern. The deliberate exclusion of specific groups from the school, the blatant favouritism of some students over others, the use of preexisting personal relationships inside the school to influence the advancement of some students, and the repression of viewpoints from students deemed to be a possible threat to the current state of affairs are all manifestations of toxic leadership in school settings. Academic excellence is hampered by toxic leadership behaviours like violations, misrepresentations, playing on followers' fears, failing to mentor, ignoring competence, isolating followers, and other harmful actions (Adetunji, & Vu, 2021). Schools are intricate, unpredictable social structures that are highly susceptible to a variety of strong external and internal influences. The highest standards can be attained by successful leaders as well but unlike toxic leaders who may do this to bolster their egos or because they are concerned about the repercussions of failure, successful leaders base their actions on higher moral principles (Hopkins, et al, 2014). Toxicity in school has the potential to impede proper teaching and learning while also suppressing knowledge creation (Giroux 2015). Toxicity has the ability to frustrate students to the juncture of psychological distress. (Baloyi, 2020) He contended that a space that is not favourable to knowledge production will be equally unsuitable for training young minds to move and grow their country's economy.

This study aims to shed light on the toxic leadership of school teachers in India and its impact on the emotional and psychological

makeup of senior secondary students.

Research on Toxic Leadership

Definitions are elusive when it comes to toxic leadership. Furthermore, current research has mainly focused on the corporate or military sectors. Research on toxic leadership in educational institutions like colleges, universities, and schools is rare and very scarce in India. Toxic leaders in the educational setting display dominance, coercion, and manipulation in contrast to effective leaders who make use of influence, persuasion, and encouragement. Toxic leaders never change rapidly; instead, there is a sequence of interactions with the elements that surround them. The submissions of Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser's (2007) study on the idea of the toxic triangle show that the existence of toxic cultures is a result of three factors: leaders, followers, and the organizational environment, where each one aids to keep the workplace dysfunctional.

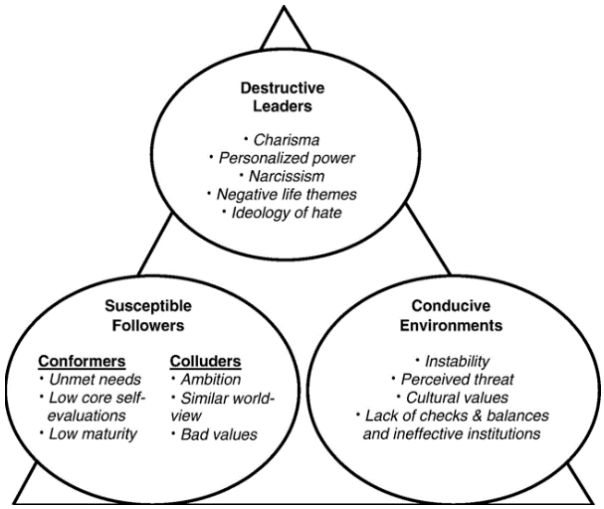

Fig 1: Toxic triangle which is composed by Padilla, Hogan, and Kaiser (2007).

Psychological distress as an outcome of toxic leadership

Psychological distress is defined in social science literature as an emotional disorder involving symptoms of depression and anxiety (Mirowsky & Ross, 2002). People with psychological distress may experience changes in normal levels of anxiety, sadness, demotivation, crankiness, irritability, and a weakened personality, as stated by Terry et al. (2020). Such subjective moods can decrease people's emotional resilience, and impact their ability to appreciate life and deal with hurt, deceit, and sadness. (Rose & Mechanic, 2002).

Psychological distress is largely defined as a state of emotional suffering characterized by symptoms of depression, (lost interest, sadness, hopelessness) and anxiety (tenseness; restlessness) (Mirrowsky and Ross, 2002). Psychological distress is an emotional state categorized by unfavourable perceptions of oneself, other people, and the environment. Unpleasant subjective experiences such as feeling tight, concerned, worthless, withdrawn, and irritable are its hallmarks (Barlow and Durand, 2005). Psychological anguish manifests as sadness, worry, a separation from oneself, and many other signs of mental imbalance. These irrational emotions can weaken people's emotional fortitude and affect their capacity to enjoy life and deal with suffering, sorrow, and despair (Rose and Mechanic, 1999). Long-term and repeated interactions with toxic leaders may contribute to stress and decreased well-being in their subordinates, according to Hobman et al. (2009). In a similar vein, Kusy and Holloway (2009) found that employees who had a long working relationship with toxic leaders experienced lower self-worth and decreased self-efficacy. When toxic leaders yell, criticize and make fun of their subordinates, it immediately lowers their self-esteem, self-worth, and self-efficacy (Harvey et al., 2014). The sense of mistreatment by subordinates, according to Richman et al. (1992), has adverse psychological effects like animosity, anxiety, and melancholy. Toxic leadership is one of the most imminent crisis times and is often distressing for the followers (Meng & Choi, 2021).

Lipman-Blumen (2005) used more neutral terminology, such as harmful, to define the results of toxic leadership. Conclusions should, according to consensus, be based on assumed nature rather than specific impacts, which will lead to the appropriate identification of behaviours (Thorough good et al., 2012). Lipman's theory of toxic leadership is grounded primarily in the idea of inappropriate behaviour, similar to previous theories of destructive and abusive leadership, which also focused on violent behaviour. It also covers behaviours that are harmful to followers' well-being. Employee relations and toxic leaders might be seen as having an opposite relationship (Wu & Hu, 2009). As a result of

their relationship, a leader's values, attitude, and behaviour affect their followers' well-being. Employees who experience poor involvement from a leader indicate a decline in performance. (Ozlem et al., 2017) The results of the study by Wu and Hu (2009) also hinted at an unfavourable association between emotionally draining supervision and subordinates. Research on the effect of toxic leadership on students has revealed that Toxic supervision increases students' distress (Shahnawaz, & Siddiqi, 2022; Levecque et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2018). Carlson et al. (2012) found a correlation between toxic leadership and a high level of subordinate withdrawal. In conclusion, the literature has identified three main effects of psychological distress brought on by toxic leadership: loss of self-worth, agitated behaviour, and disengagement (Hobman, et al., 2009).

Thus, we can summarize that, Hypothesis: Toxic leadership at school impacts students' psychological distress

Method

Schmidt's (2008) Toxic Leadership Scale© was used for toxic leadership. For the purpose of this research, 14 items relevant to the school environment were identified from the 30-item questionnaires and 13 items were chosen from 15 items on Bhandarker & Rai's (2019) Psychological distress scale.

Pretesting was carried out to establish the content validity of the composite scale. The pre-test was conducted with 70 students in Mumbai from 2 different schools, one private and one government school, after minor alterations to the language of the questionnaire were made to ensure its suitability for school culture.

For the final survey, students were asked to reflect on the toxic behaviours of their teachers and how they impacted their state of mind. The instrument was designed on google forms and distributed via WhatsApp to a random sample of 800 students studying in senior secondary classes dispersed in both government and private schools in 5 states in India. (Mumbai, Bangalore, Chennai, Delhi, and Kolkata).

100 students from Mumbai and Kolkata were also interviewed face to face to understand the patterns of toxic teachers' behaviour and the impact on the students.

Instructions for the questionnaire asked participants to identify the most difficult teacher (present or in the past) with whom they felt uncomfortable.

The reliability score for the toxic leadership scale was 0.871 (14 questions), and the psychological distress scale by Bhandarker & Rai (2019) had a reliability value of 0.923 (13 items). The composite scale with 27 items had an overall reliability score of 0.917.

Results

A total of 648 participants responded to the survey for a return rate of 81%. Results confirmed that toxic leadership is, indeed, a prevalent phenomenon, with 95% (n=615) of students reporting previous or current experience with toxic teachers. Respondents to the survey were 63.7% female (n=413), 34.9% male (n=226), and 1.4% non-binary (n=9). Respondents were senior secondary students who were studying in classes XI & XII or just passed out of class XII. 57.8% (375) students were from government schools and 41.9% (272) were from private schools.

Data analysis.

Simple linear regression was done to analyze the impact of toxic leadership at school on the psychological distress of senior secondary students in India.

To test the hypothesis, a linear regression analysis was done. Results of the hypotheses are reported below. The first hypothesis refers to examining the impact of toxic leadership on the psychological distress of students of senior secondary schools in India. The regression model summary was statistically significant and indicated $\mathbf{R^2 = 0.57}$ with the value of $F = 39.43$, $p < 0.001$. Results indicate a significant impact of toxic leadership on students' psychological distress ($\beta=0.12$, $p<0.01$), implying a 57% variance in the psychological distress of students is explained by toxic leadership of teachers, while the remaining variances are explained by other factors outside the model.

Hence, Hypothesis is not rejected,

ANOVAa						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	21.711	1	21.711	39.431	<.001
	Residual	356.787	648	0.551		
	Total	378.497	649			
a. Dependent Variable: AVGPD, b. Predictors: (Constant), AVGTL						

Coefficients					
Model:					
		B	Std. Error	T	Sig.
1	(Constant)	3.054	0.08	38.206	<.001
	AVGTL	0.126	0.02	6.279	<.001
a. Dependent Variable: AVGPD					

The results are indicative of the fact that toxic teachers cause psychological distress in senior secondary students of schools in India in a significant way. Students perceived a reasonable level of toxicity in their teachers' leadership behaviour. The results corroborate with the findings of previous literature where Lipman-Blumen, (2010) stated that toxic leaders engage in wrongdoing, deceive, play on followers' vulnerabilities, fail to mentor, disregard ability, and isolate their followers. Toxic leaders create a climate of fear and intimidation where individuals are afraid to speak up. A healthy person may occasionally become frail, worried, and sad while interacting with a toxic boss (Vickers, 2006). Such individuals who are exposed to toxic leadership can have an overactive emotional response to their leader's toxicity and bring this negative feeling into their everyday lives. Thus, teams who undergo behaviour patterns of toxic leaders suffer detrimental outcomes, such as psychological distress (Asha & Snigdha, 2019). In a corporate setting, Mitchell and Elizabeth (2009) found that 92 per cent of employees who have been exposed to toxic leaders are suffering from psychological distress.

The results confirm that within an organization, leadership has an impact on interpersonal, team, and dyadic interactions as well as psychological well-being (Fahie, 2019). According to Asha and Snigdha (2019), toxic leadership impacts psychological distress.

Toxic aspects of school leadership must be recognized in order to categorize the behaviours of school leaders who intentionally or unintentionally inflict long-term harm on their students and their learning orientation. Leadership toxicity in school organizations has a negative impact on the school environment and the psychological well-being of students. This relationship may also form the basis for maltreatment, abuse, and punishment, accompanied by feelings of frustration, anxiety, uncertainty, and displeasure among teachers who have assumed higher positions in the school setting, (Orunbon, 2020).
In senior secondary schools, school leadership is critical to improving educational quality, as well as teachers' diligence, commitment, and productivity.

The researcher also conducted an interview with 100 students to analyze the qualitative data to support the inferences of the quantitative data, and through firsthand knowledge, accurate reporting, and quotations from real conversations, qualitative research supports gaining a deeper understanding. The qualitative research helped in comprehending how participants interpreted their environment and how that interpretation affected their behaviours. The discussions helped the researcher to understand from students the intensity of the toxic behaviour of the teachers and the impact on their psychological disposition. Students reportedly developed feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, worthlessness, and incompetence as a result of these bitter and toxic experiences. The majority of them believed that working with toxic supervisors had reduced their self-esteem and confidence, and as a result, they felt less motivated and enthusiastic than before. The most common reaction of students to toxic supervision was anger and resentment. Students revealed a lot of pent-up negativities and developed passive aggression, anger, or an aversion to such teachers. Some of the students developed a fear that persisted, and they continued to experience anxiety and even nightmares.

The interview questions focused mainly on the four dimensions of toxic leadership. In addition, a few probing questions were posed to the respondents as considered necessary.

Several conclusions were drawn as a result of the participant's responses. The toxic behaviour of teachers was evident within a year or less, according to 35 out of 100 responses to the

question, "How long did it take you to understand that this teacher was toxic?". More than half of the students mentioned that the harmful behaviour started to become increasingly obvious between eight to twelve weeks. These results suggest that toxic leaders have a keen sense of audience. "He fascinated us with his appealing personality and wise words, and the principal and higher-ups at the school were happy about it. Students also heard what they wanted to hear. we didn't see any pretence," (student 6) claimed during the interview of the toxic teacher.

Egotism.

In the qualitative investigation, students acknowledged their belief that toxic leaders are, first and foremost, narcissists and egoists. When asked to describe the toxic teacher in one word, they frequently used phrases like "self-absorbed," "vindictive," and "arrogant." Students also indicated that toxic teachers' egos can take on the appearance of a bully. According to (student 4), "she is always right, and anyone who dared to question her had to face public humiliation or poor grades in internal exams." Toxic teachers appear to enjoy their proximity to higher authorities.

Ethical failure.

Self-centeredness appears to lead to ethics violations. The topic of ethical failure came up repeatedly in the comments of the participants. The most common ethical failure was deception. Indeed, one of the first signs that people were dealing with toxic leadership was hiding. Toxic teachers who played games with the facts saw their credibility decline in the eyes of their students, whether the lies were explicit or as described by student 1, as showing "a complete disregard of facts to suit his purpose." Abuse of power was another area of ethical failure, particularly in personnel decisions. Respondents reported instances such as passing the selection process for national-level interschool activities and competitions in order to choose their personal favourites, as well as using internal markings for assignments to unreasonably punish those who fell out of favour. Toxic teachers always appeared to be blaming the non-favourites whenever something goes wrong. "Her favourite student was never to blame; it is always someone else" (student 1).

Incompetence.

When asked to describe the person they thought was a toxic leader, participants frequently used the word "incompetent." However, no one mentioned competence in the sense of their teaching subject knowledge. They were referring to human relations skills and empathy. The teachers described by participants in this investigation were considered woefully clueless in human relations skills. The terms "autocratic", "unfair", "unsympathetic" and "inconsiderate" were quite often used.

As a pattern, these toxic teachers insisted on dominating conversations, and communication was always in the form of orders. Students perceived these teachers to be insensitive, indifferent regarding their feelings, and unbothered about how their changing moods affected the students. One toxic teacher was described as "very moody." Student 8 described his teacher as "all over the place... we never knew what he might ask for, he would give one assignment and then ask for a completely different task the next class."

Neuroticism.

The analyses of the personal interviews also indicate neuroticism. Comments like "uncertain," "suspicious," and "erratic mood" formed a general trend. Furthermore, critical incidents reported by participants revealed that toxic leaders are obsessed with self-promotion. "She always had to be the focus.. any conversation you had with her always ended up being about her," yet another student said. "With him, it was 'all about him,'... no one else's ideas mattered, what he said was final,". One student described a teacher as "cruel," another as "depressive," and yet another as "fearful." While the researcher does not interpret these comments in the context of clinical usage, they do indicate the intensity of toxic teachers' behaviour as perceived by their students.

Psychological Distress:

Students reported that their distress increased around the toxic teacher and the particular subject period. Students reported their 'anxiety' increased when the period approached, leading to increased perspiration and they felt their hearts would explode.

While participants were able to identify some of the behaviours that they observed as

harbingers of the toxic leadership that followed, a word of caution is necessary. The qualitative data collection procedures utilized an open-ended question; and, obviously, the observations are subjective in their nature. However, qualitative analysis of the responses revealed that toxic leaders exhibit multiple toxic behaviours.

Discussion

Narcissism.

The survey results revealed a high prevalence of egocentric behaviours by toxic leaders/ teachers in Indian schools, with a preference for self-serving goals. The average for behaviours that occur "always" was 70%, with "Does not allow to try new ways/approaches "(62%). "Thinks he/she is more talented than others" (72%), "Believes he/she is an excellent person" (75%), and "Believes that the future and course of the school only goes well with him/her" (76%).

Neuroticism.

Toxic leaders also have a proclivity for negative emotions. The average for negative behaviours that occur "often" was 71%, with "speaks in a pessimistic/complaining manner" (87%) being the most toxic. Toxic leaders humiliate and degrade their followers. Other neurotic behaviours reported by respondents as occurring "frequently" 60% of the time or more involved "always reminds past mistakes/faults unsympathetically" (68%) and "displays humiliating manners most of the time" (73%), "has illogical behaviours and/or decisions" (65%). These behaviours are typical of someone who tries to manipulate the emotions of others while also being erratic on their own.

Personality characteristics.

The study indicated that yet another consistent pattern of behavior among toxic leaders is acting in unpredictable moods. The average frequency of these items occurring "often" was 82%, with "There is instability/in his/her behaviours" (77%) as the key determinant. According to 65% of the respondents, "Students behave in accordance with the teacher's mood," and 85% of them accept that "No one really wants to get near to him/her in his/her deleterious states (indignant, agitated, or glum).".

Psychological distress,

The findings revealed a high level of emotional stress and anxiety among students as a result of their interactions with toxic teachers. The average "always" behaviour was 88%, with a "Deep sense of failure" (82%) as the leading indicator. Feelings of being "humiliated" (76%), "helpless and hopeless" (69%), "losing confidence in myself" (89%), and "depressed and distressed" (78%) were also significant indicators of psychological distress.

Conclusion

This investigation supports a variety of conclusions. First, just as it does in other types of organizations, toxic leadership frequently manifests itself in educational institutions (Bullis & Reed, as cited in Williams, 2005; Kusy & Holloway, 2009; Solfield & Salmond, 2003). Key individuals are alienated and demoralized, and the institution's progress toward its objective is hampered as a result of the subtle consequences.

The evidence also demonstrates the vividness of toxic leaders' behaviours. Participants in the open-ended questions defined toxic leadership in terms of what the toxic leaders did, particularly how they interacted with others. Four categories of toxic leadership—egotism, ethical failure, incompetence, and neuroticism—emerged dominantly from the responses which corroborated with the previous findings of the Toxic Leadership Scale.

The behaviours that fit within these categories, however, show that they are not generic and that they overlap. Egotism is substantially (if not entirely) to blame for ethical failure. Similarly, incompetence or lack of interpersonal skills may be a sign of extreme self-centeredness because no attempt is taken to apply them. Manipulating others can be a sign of a neurotic disorder and, in certain cases, is unethical. In other words, it would be more accurate to think of these four toxic leadership categories as fields within a larger spectrum of toxic leadership behaviours, and the linkages between them create a complicated network. Toxic academic supervision can make students vulnerable to a variety of psychological and physical ailments, as a consequence reducing overall performance.

Limitation:

The emotionally charged nature of the discussion most likely inhibited some of those who were invited from participating, and, some of those who did opt to participate might have done so more out of a desire to vent long-simmering animosities than a desire to deliberate about their experiences. Despite this, the statistics show that toxic leadership is pervasive and that it follows observable patterns of conduct.

A significantly more comprehensive research design than what was anticipated in this study would be needed to comprehend how these hazardous behaviours affect the psychological wellbeing of senior school students. This study suggests that additional research is needed to further develop the toxic leadership theory, the existing model, in order to provide it with more substantive explanatory power to examine toxic leadership among academic employees.

Summary and Recommendations

90% of the participants in this investigation reported having encountered a toxic leader either in the past or present, confirming the presence of toxic leadership in educational organizations. The prevalence of toxic leadership documented in business, healthcare, and military institutions is comparable to the incidence of toxic leadership in schools, colleges, and universities. Although the qualities of toxic leaders can vary, they can be categorized into the following groups: (a) egotism; (b) ethical failure; (c) incompetence; and (d) neuroticism.

Most students realize their concerns as anxiety or stress that are brought on by being humiliated, denigrated, and alienated, as a primary cause of psychological suffering because of their teachers' toxic behaviour. The majority of students believed their distress was serious and had an impact on their learning and social interactions. The report contributes to the body of research by shedding light on the psychological distress senior secondary students in Indian schools feel and pinpointing the toxic teacher behaviours that contribute to that misery.

The research findings can be used to guide academic stakeholders in developing methods to reduce students' suffering and provide counselling during their crucial years of higher education.

Examining the link between toxic leadership and the psychological suffering of senior secondary students in Indian schools is the study's most significant conclusion. The results of this study have highlighted the severe effects of toxic leadership on senior secondary students' psychological distress.

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