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Research Article

TOXIC LEADERSHIP AS A PREDICTOR OF PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL CYNICISM

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the relationships between organizational cynicism and toxic leadership among the teachers in the sample. The correlation values show that there is a very strong positive relationship between variables. Also, the toxic leadership with its sub-dimensions (unappreciativeness, utilitarian, egoistic and psychological dysfunction) can be considered as one of the predictors of the organizational cynicism (cognitive, affective, behavioral). Depending on the t-test results, there are significant differences between two groups with the organizational cynicism, while there are not any differences with the toxic leadership. Understanding the relationships between two negative perceptions can be useful to show and to comment the dark side of the organizations because this kind of leadership is as important as effective leadership to help employees to maximize efficiency and to achieve organizational goals.

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INTRODUCTION

Cross-functional collaboration or teamwork needs individual contribution as well as consistent organizational structure. According to the psychological contract, both employee and employer focus his or her own target to achieve the personal gain. It means that acting charitably with no thought of personal gain is against workplace's nature. For this reason, employees may have negative attitudes, feelings and behaviors about an organization. Organizational behaviors and decisions underlying these behaviors consist not only of personal traits but also of management style and organizational conditions. As it is well known, the personal trait of an employee can affect the emotions, thoughts, and behaviors directly. From this viewpoint, the cynicism which is adopted as a lifestyle at the beginning, or being cynic is one of the personal attitudes that affect behavior via intentions.

The Oxford English Dictionary (2018) defines the cynicism as “an inclination to believe that people are motivated purely by self-interest; skepticism”, “an inclination to question whether something will happen or whether it is worthwhile; pessimism” and “a school of ancient Greek philosophers, the Cynics”. As seen the determinations, cynicism is about a life perspective. Also, people who adopt an cynicism perspective are named cynic and defined as “a person who believes that people are motivated purely by self-interest rather than acting for honorable or unselfish reasons”, “a person who questions whether something will happen or whether it is worthwhile”

and “a member of a school of ancient Greek philosophers founded by Antisthenes, marked by an ostentatious contempt for ease and pleasure. The movement flourished in the 3rd century BC and revived in the 1st century AD” by the same dictionary. This term that the management sciences reviews to understand human behavior has five major conceptualizations in the literature as shown below (Dean *et al*, 1998):

- Personality approaches: This perspective shows that cynicism can be considered as an overall outlook on human nature. According to the first studies of cynicism is about the tendency of seeing others uncaring or selfish and untrusting in relationships. This trait-based approach brings about constant or little changeable cynicism characteristics in the human nature.
- Societal/institutional focus: According to this perspective, cynicism is about the unmet expectations of society, institutions or other authorities. Therefore, cynicism requires some bad experiences which include disappointment in oneself and others. The disillusion or betrayal feelings also cause cynicism in this focus. Not only demographic factors but also the failed promises of society can be the main reason of cynicism. Thus, the level of cynicism can be managed by the culture of an organization.
- Occupational cynicism focus: Losing the respect for a job or disparaging mistrust toward the service of the people can cause a kind of cynicism such as police

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cynicism, organizational cynicism or work cynicism. Because fewer complex work details or working in a precinct can lead some negative work attitudes. The basic characteristics of work and organization are important for the perceptions of the employees.

- Employee cynicism focus: the business organizations in general, corporate executives and other workplace object are seen as the potential targets for cynicism in this perspective. Employee cynicism is related to poor organizational performance, high levels of executive compensation and harsh organizational layoffs.
- Organizational change focus: The relationship of the cynicism and organizational change is one of the most common research topics in this area. Because it is believed that cynicism is an attitude consisting of the futility of change along negative attributes of change facilities. Some activities of the organizational structure can lead the negative perceptions. And so, the employee may feel or perceive less participation in decision and poor information flows. Organizational cynicism able to be managed by the talented manager and optimal organizational structure.

Organizational cynicism is defined with three ways in light of these developments. Firstly, it is a belief that the organization lacks integrity. Secondly, organizational cynicism is a negative affect toward the organization. Finally, it can be said that this term is about the tendencies to disparaging and critical behaviors toward the organization that are consistent with negative beliefs and affect (Dean *et al*, 1998). In some situation, it is hard to recognize the behaviors and perceptions which cynical attitudes are based. But generally, the term of organizational cynicism are accepted with three sub-dimensions in the literature. This three-dimensional definition, which is also used in this study, can be summarized as below (Naus *et al*, 2007; Uysal and Gedik, 2017):

- Cognitive: The cognitive dimension is about the employees' disbelief in their organizations. Employees believe that there is a lack of some certain values such as fairness and sincerity in the practices or behaviors. This dimension refers to the beliefs that organizational practices betray the employees. The cognitive side of organizational cynicism causes the employees see the organization as an unprincipled and immoral place.
- Affective: This dimension refers to emotions against an organization that cause a disbelief in the organization. These emotions include anxiety, disappointment or pessimism. Moreover, this dimension is about strong emotional reactions towards the organization such as disrespect, shame, anger, and boredom. Because cynics may feel anger and disrespect towards their organizations when they think about the workplace.
- Behavioral: The behavioral dimension refers to the observable side of the organizational cynicism that includes employees' fierce criticisms of the organization such as belittlement, condescension, and denigration. This part of the cynicism can let the employees alienate from an organization. Therefore, cynical employees do not only hinder their own development but that of the organization too.

Moreover, various researchers have analyzed and interpreted the term of organizational cynicism from different viewpoints. Firstly, the procedural and interactional justice can predict organizational cynicism. Moreover, each kind of justice interacts with cynicism to predict change commitment (Bernerth *et al*, 2007). On the other hand, high cynicism can construe levels of support negatively. In additionally, cynics' performance can be highest when perceived support is at the moderate level, while cynics' performance can be lowest when perceived support is either high and low (Byrne and Hochwarter, 2008). Moreover, cynics can report higher levels of work effort when faced with perceived job insecurity than non-cynics. So, work effort would increase concurrently with cynicism with insecure work environment (Brandes *et al*, 2008). Finally, some other researches can be summarized as below:

- Internet would be a viable method of conducting organizational research such as commitment or organizational cynicism. In the scope of the research, an internet group is in tendency to be more cynicism and judges their organization more cruelly than a non-internet group (Eaton and Struthers, 2002).
- The cynicism can influence both leader and employee outcomes negatively when the organizational changes occur (Rubin *et al*, 2009).
- Organizational cynicism can interfere in the relationships employees develop with their supervisors. Also, there are some significant relationships with this kind of cynicism and employee' performance (Neves, 2012).
- There is a significant relationship between organizational cynicism and organizational trust. Moreover, some attitudinal outcomes such as job satisfaction, commitment and intention to quit can be affected by cynicism. Also, the job performance can consider as one of the behavioral outcomes defined by organizational cynicism (Chiaburu *et al*, 2013).
- There is a significant negative relationship between all sub-dimensions of the ethical leadership and organizational cynicism. Also, the ethical leadership explained 17% of the variance of organizational cynicism (Akan *et al*, 2014).

The leadership is the second variable of this study and some significant relationships can be seen between leadership and organizational cynicism in the literature. In light of this information, there would be some relationships between the dark side of the leadership and organizational cynicism. Because sustained destructive leadership behaviors can lead negative outcomes that cause serious workplace problems. The reason is that followers or members may cope with toxic leader behaviors. Websters *et al*. (2014) examine the psychological, emotional and physical consequences of the leader behaviors in their study. And they find that employees are affected by the leader' behaviors, because of the coping strategies.

Leadership studies have mostly focused on the positive outcomes of leader behaviors or actions. There are some harmful or problematic outcomes for the followers except the heroic conceptualization. For the reason that leaders can make some decisions that harm followers and decrease organizational performance in a long time. Thereby, various dysfunctional

traits and nefarious behaviors are associated with destructive leadership style in connection with harmful outcomes (House and Howell, 1992). This kind of negative leadership is named variously such as abusive supervision, narcissistic leadership, and toxic leadership. The reason of aversiveness may come from outer factors such as organizational climate and standards of performance as well as inner factors such as intention, gender, personality and perceptions (Thoroughgood *et al.*, 2011).

Toxic leader is shortly defined as “leaders who engage in numerous destructive behaviors and who exhibit certain dysfunctional personal characteristics” and “a leadership approach that harms people and, eventually, the company as well, through the poisoning of enthusiasm, creativity, autonomy, and innovative expression” (Lipman and Blumen, 2005). Schmidt (2008) developed the toxic leadership scale with the sub-dimensions of abusive supervision, authoritarian leadership, narcissism, self-promotion, and unpredictability. Çelebi *et al.* (2015) suggest the four-dimensional model of toxic leadership and developed a local scale to measure the teachers' perception of toxic leadership based on the previous studies. This toxic leadership scale or classification is also considered as the second variables of this study. The content and sub-dimensions of the toxic leadership can be explained as the following:

- Unappreciativeness: When the leaders are unappreciative, members feel that they did their best or they tried but the environment is indifferent or antagonistic. So, their efforts are not appreciated and then the fault.
- Utilitarian: when the ethical rules become advisory guidelines, leaders may not feel guilty about their values and behaviors. The power differentials of the leaders can lead the tendency of narcissism that is about the making themselves a priority at the expense of group members.
- Egoistic: Egoist leader tends to hold ultimate desires for its own well being only, while altruist tends to hold ultimate desire for others' well being. So, egoistic leaders make helping decisions more slowly, and with more recourse to costly cognitive resources like concentration and attention.
- Psychological dysfunction: The loneliness of command, fear of envy, addiction to power and depression are seen as the resources of the psychological pressure of leadership. Leadership into a state of psychological dysfunction facilitates the leader-member relationship is erroneous because of disconnecting from broader contextual factors.

The researches about the toxic leadership show that this kind of leadership can affect the follower's perception to be harmful not only to their psychological well being but also the organizational well being such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Mehta and Maheshwari, 2013). The consequences of negative behaviors are seen obviously in hierarchic organization like military service. According to the Schmidt (2014), toxic leadership has a direct negative effect on group cohesion through self-promotion, unpredictability and group level job satisfaction. Moreover, the destructive leader is not enough alone, the follower's reaction and conducive environments are also necessary for the decrease of

performance (Padilla *et al.*, 2007). As a negative organizational factor, toxic leadership has negative effect on commitment while it remains inconclusive on organizational citizenship and turnover behavior in the nonprofit organization sample (Hitchcock, 2015). On the other hand, toxic leaders can cause serious harm to the morale and welfare of soldiers (Mueller, 2012). A bad role model and poor leadership practices can lead serious injury and even sometimes death as well as psychological issue in the army. In the light of all the facts mentioned above, the relationships between toxic leadership and organizational cynicism are analyzed in the next section of the study.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The problem of the study and its importance

The purpose of this study is to assess certain factors predicting the organizational cynicism as well as to determine the levels of organizational cynicism. For this purpose, perceived organizational cynicism, with three sub-dimensions as cognitive, affective and behavioral is accepted as the dependent variable. Also, toxic leadership with four sub-dimensions, which includes unappreciativeness, utilitarian, egoistic and psychological dysfunction, is considered as independent variable. Also, the gender, age and marital status, known as demographic factors, are analyzed as independent variables. Therefore, the relational screening model is used for this study.

Toxic leadership has not analyzed as a predictor of organizational cynicism before. Thusly, the main aim of the study is to contribute to the literature through the answering various questions. Here the problem of current study is defined as identifying the levels of the organizational cynicism and demographic factors that are characteristic of teachers in light of their perception of toxic leader, and this could be achieved by answering the following questions:

- What are the levels of the organizational cynicism and toxic leader among teachers?
- Does toxic leadership (unappreciativeness, utilitarian, egoistic and psychological dysfunction) predict organizational cynicism?
- Are there significant differences in the level of variables among teachers due to the demographic factors such as gender, age, and marital status?

According to these questions, the hypotheses developed for research can be shown as below:

- Hypothesis 1: There is a relationship between the toxic leadership and the organizational cynicism.
- Hypothesis 2: The toxic leadership affects organizational cynicism positively.
- Hypothesis 3: The sub-dimensions of the toxic leadership affect organizational cynicism positively.
- Hypothesis 4: There is a statistically significant difference between groups in terms of organizational cynicism.
- Hypothesis 5: There is a statistically significant difference between groups in terms of toxic leadership.

Scale and measurement

The toxic leadership scale was developed by Schmidt (2008) and then revised by Çelebi et al. (2015) for the local culture. The scale has 30 items to measure the toxic leadership and has 4 sub-dimensions as unappreciativeness, utilitarian, egoistic and psychological dysfunction. On the other hand, the organizational cynicism scale is developed by Dean *et al.* (1998) and has three sub-dimensions as cognitive, affective and behavioral.

For the first problem of the study, the frequency and percentage distribution of the variables have been observed to see what the features of the sample are. For the second problem, multiple regression analysis is used to understand which are considered to predict the organizational cynicism. For the third problem, the group tests are used to analyze how are the variables, which include gender, marital status, and age, differences between groups.

Study sample

The study has been conducted on the teachers working in a state school in Silifke, Mersin, Turkey, 2017-2018 academic year. The study group of the research consists of 150 teachers working in a high school who have following characteristics.

Table 1 The Frequencies and Percentages of the Participants

Variables		f	%
Gender	Female	85	56,7
	Male	65	43,3
	Missing Value	0	0
Age	18-25	21	14
	26-33	60	40
	34-41	53	35,3
	42-49	14	9,3
	50 +	2	1,3
Marital status	Married	97	64,7
	Single	53	35,3
	Missing Value	0	0
Total	N	150	100

According to the results of descriptive statistic, the percentage of the female is more than male by a narrow margin. Otherwise, the biggest part of the participants is seen between 26 and 33 ages and then 34 and 41 ages. Lastly, marital status of the participant is mainly shown as married.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this research, the toxic leadership is one of the main variables and it has four sub-dimensions as unappreciativeness, utilitarian, egoistic and psychological dysfunction. Table 2 shows the results of descriptive analyses of the toxic leadership and its sub-dimensions.

Table 2 Descriptive Analyses of Toxic Leadership and Its Sub-dimensions

Variables	Unappreciativeness	Utilitarian	Egoistic	Psychological dysfunction	Toxic leadership
Mean	1,899	1,979	2,293	2,353	2,131
Std. Dev.	0,738	0,890	1,002	0,950	0,818
N:150					

The means of all variables are above the midpoint of 5 points Likert Scale which includes strongly disagree for 1, disagree for 2, neither agree nor disagree for 3, agree for 4, strongly agree for 5. The highest mean value can be seen the psychological dysfunction (Table 2). The other main variable is

organizational cynicism with three sub-dimensions and their values of the means and standard deviations can be seen as below (Table 3).

Table 3 Descriptive Analyses of Organizational cynicism and Its Sub-dimensions

Variables	Cognitive cynicism	Affective cynicism	Behavioral cynicism	Organizational cynicism
Mean	2,261	1,848	2,637	2,249
Std. Dev.	0,931	0,883	0,834	0,741
N:150				

Table 3 shows that the behavioral cynicism has the highest mean among the sub-dimensions of the organizational cynicism. This sub-dimension includes behavioral expressions such as “criticize my organization institution or complain others about my firm”.

Table 4 Correlation Analyses of Toxic Leadership, Organizational Cynicism, and their sub-dimensions

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Unappreciativeness	r 1								
	p 0,821**								
2. Utilitarian	r 0,000	r 1							
	p 0,707**	p 0,825**							
3. Egoistic	r 0,000	r 0,000	r 1						
	p 0,694**	p 0,790**	p 0,818**						
4. Psychological dysfunction	r 0,000	r 0,000	r 0,000	r 1					
	p 0,523**	p 0,564**	p 0,435**	p 0,549**					
5. Cognitive cynicism	r 0,000	r 0,000	r 0,000	r 0,000	r 1				
	p 0,439**	p 0,526**	p 0,368**	p 0,414**	p 0,671**				
6. Affective cynicism	r 0,000	r 0,000	r 0,000	r 0,000	r 0,000	r 1			
	p 0,391**	p 0,481**	p 0,369**	p 0,422**	p 0,441**	p 0,547**			
7. Behavioral cynicism	r 0,000	r 0,000	r 0,000	r 0,000	r 0,000	r 0,000	r 1		
	p 0,540**	p 0,626**	p 0,467**	p 0,553**	p 0,851**	p 0,884**	p 0,778**		
8. Organizational cynicism	r 0,000	r 0,000	r 0,000	r 0,000	r 0,000	r 0,000	r 0,000	r 1	
	p 0,867**	p 0,939**	p 0,928**	p 0,912**	p 0,564**	p 0,475**	p 0,455**	p 0,596**	
9. Toxic leadership	r 0,000	r 0,000	r 0,000	r 0,000	r 0,000	r 0,000	r 0,000	r 0,000	r 1
	**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). N: 150.								

As can be seen in the correlation table, there are several highly significant correlations. In addition to that, all variables in the model exert a highly significant (p<0, 01) influence on either one of the dependent variables. The correlation coefficients and their significance levels can be seen clearly from the last line of verse named toxic leadership. The total perception of toxic leadership has highly significant correlations with all the variables about organizational cynicism.

The correlation values discuss mainly in three parts as high degree, moderate degree, and low degree. High value refers that coefficient value lies between ± 0.50 and ± 1 and it means that there is a strong correlation between variables. Further, if the coefficient value lies between ± 0.30 and ± 0.49, it is considered as moderate degree relationship. Lastly, if the value lies below + .29, it is named as low degree of coefficient value and there is a small correlation between variables. Normally, the zero value means that there are not any correlations. When these triple classifications are elaborated, the five classifications are obtained about correlation value. If Pearson’s Correlation value is +.70 or higher, it is considered as “very strong positive relationship” whereas +.40 to +.69 is considered “strong positive relationship”. Additionally, if the value is between +.30 to +.39, it is said to be a moderate positive relationship, while the value is named weak or no relationship under +.20 point (Nakip, 2013). In the light of this information, the correlations between toxic leadership and organizational cynicism are strong positive relationship (r:0,596; p:0,000). Also, the sub-dimensions of the

organizational cynicism have strong positive relationship with toxic leadership with the 0,01 level significant (r: 0,564; r:0,475 and r: 0,455). So, the hypothesis about the relationships between variables is accepted (Hyp. 1).

any significant effect. Also, the last regression model shows the direct effect of toxic leadership on organizational cynicism. As seen Table 6, the toxic leadership can be considered as a predictor of the organizational cynicism in this sample.

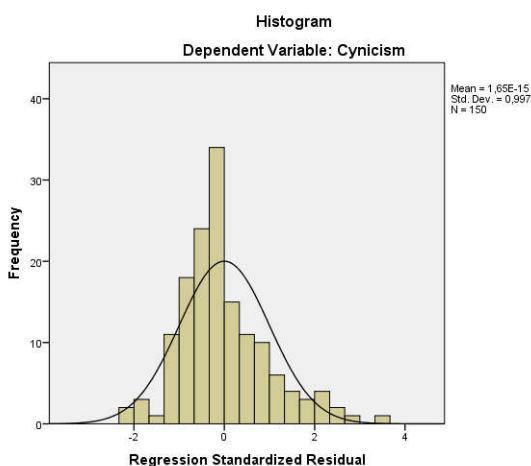
Table 5 Regression Analysis: Toxic Leadership and sub-dimensions as Predictors of the Organizational Cynicism

Dependent Variables	Independent Variables	β	t	Sig.	R	R ²	F	Sig.	Result
1. Regression Model									
Cognitive	Constant	0,851	4,717	0,000					
	Unappreciativeness	0,199	1,362	0,175					
	Utilitarian	0,401	2,579	0,011					
	Egoistic	-0,293	-2,381	0,019					
	Psychological dysfunction	0,387	3,228	0,002					
					0,615	0,378	22,023	0,000	Accept
Regression Model (Organizational cynicism): 0,851+(0,401*Utilitarian)+(-0,293*Egoistic)+(0,387* Psychological dysfunction). Excluded Variable: 0,199* Psychological dysfunction									
2. Regression Model									
Affective	Constant	0,831	4,567	0,000					
	Unappreciativeness	0,038	0,260	0,795					
	Utilitarian	0,629	4,011	0,000					
	Egoistic	-0,235	-1,898	0,060					
	Psychological dysfunction	0,102	0,843	0,400					
					0,543	0,295	15,151	0,000	Accept
Regression Model (Organizational cynicism): 0,831+(0,629* Utilitarian)+(-0,235* Egoistic). Excluded Variable: 0,038*Unappreciativeness+0,102* Psychological dysfunction									
3. Regression Model									
Behavioral	Constant	1,710	9,610	0,000					
	Unappreciativeness	-0,024	-0,170	0,865					
	Utilitarian	0,467	3,050	0,003					
	Egoistic	-0,158	-1,301	0,195					
	Psychological dysfunction	0,174	1,473	0,143					
					0,495	0,245	11,788	0,000	Accept
Regression Model (Organizational cynicism): 1,710+(0,467*Utilitarian). Excluded Variable: (-0,024* Unappreciativeness)+(-0,158* Egoistic)+(0,174* Psychological dysfunction).									

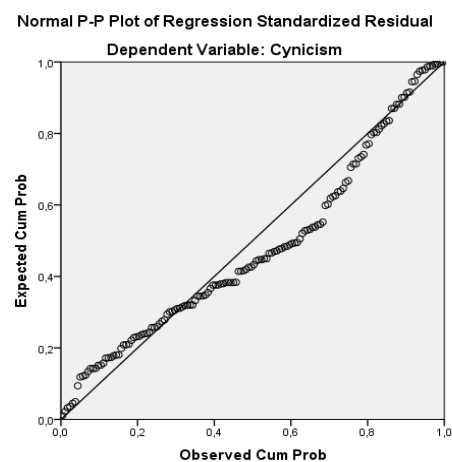
According to the regression models, the sub-dimensions of the toxic leadership affect organizational cynicism positively. It means that hypothesis 3 is accepted. The results of the multiple regression analysis clearly document the toxic leadership as positive predictor of organizational cynicism in this sample (R²: 0,355; p: 0,000).

Table 6 Regression Analysis of Toxic Leadership and Organizational Cynicism

Dependent Variable is	Independent Variables	β	t	Sig.	R	R ²	F	Sig.	Result
Organizational Cynicism	Constant	1,099	8,055	0,000					
	Toxic Leadership	0,540	9,029	0,000					
						0,596	0,355	81,524	0,000
Regression Model Y (Organizational cynicism): 1,099+0,540* Toxic leadership									



a) The regression histogram



b) The normal P-P Plot

Graph 1 Regression histogram and P-P Plot of variables

Also, the utilitarian as one of the sub-dimensions of toxic leadership has positive effect on whole sub-dimensions of the organizational cynicism, while the unappreciativeness has not

Thus, the hypothesis about the toxic leadership affects organizational cynicism positively is accepted (Hyp. 2).

The regression histogram and the normal p-plot show that the identified substantive departures from normality are acceptable

in terms of the variables. So, it can be said that the regression model which test the effect of the toxic leadership on the organizational cynicism is fit and the set of data is also normal. Finally, the group test of the variables can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7 Group test results of organizational cynicism

Independent Groups T-Test		t	df	p
Organizational	Marital status	0,767	148	0,042
Cynicism	Age	2,668	111	0,009

The age factors are considered as two main parts which include 26-33 (N: 60) and 34-41 (N: 53) ages. According to the t-test results, there are no significant differences between two groups with the toxic leadership, while there are some differences in the organizational cynicism. Likewise, F-test results show that there aren't any significant differences between groups. So, the results of the test indicated that the common perception of the toxic leadership came mid in general, it also indicated that there are no statistically differences on level of ($\alpha = 0.05$) attributed to the variables of gender (F:0,247; p:0,620), marital status (F:1,636; p:0,203) and age (F:0, 182; p:0,670) in all sub-dimensions of the toxic leadership. So the hypothesis about the group differences is accepted for organizational cynicism while it is rejected for toxic leadership (Hyp. 4 and Hyp. 5).

CONCLUSION

The traits or behaviors that make leaders effective are analyzed mostly, but the dark side of the leader is needed more research. The aspects and behaviors of the leader can affect the employee perceptions, attitudes and behaviors. So, the negative attitudes can be in a relationship with this kind of leadership. This relationship is a must to be studied because only a few researches have directly attempted to understand the nature and consequences of toxic leadership.

From this viewpoint, it is examined that which sub-dimension of toxic leadership and demographic factor predict the organizational cynicism includes cognitive, affective and behavioral parts in this study. The toxic leadership with the sub-dimensions of unappreciativeness, utilitarian, egoistic and psychological dysfunction is tested as independent variables. According to the results, all kind of toxic leadership has a positive predictive value in the organizational cynicism without unappreciativeness. Otherwise, teacher's t-test to detect a statistical difference in means between two normally distributed populations show that there are significant differences between two groups with the organizational cynicism, while there are not any differences with the toxic leadership.

A review of the literature shows that there is consensus on the relationships between the perceptions of organizational cynicism and behaviors of the supervisors or leaders in the organization. As a consequence, it can be said that the results about the effect of prediction on organizational cynicism are remarkably similar with literature. Moreover, the correlations between toxic leadership and organizational cynicism show that there are very strong positive relationships between variables with the 0,01 level significant. These findings show the importance of the leader for an organization and employees. If other negative perceptions can be used and the research can be developed to examine the predicting the organizational

cynicism, it can lead to substantial benefit for researchers and professionals.

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