



A Comparative Study of the Levels of Toxic Leadership, anti-Citizenship Behavior, Aggression & Job Stress among Primary School Principals in Iran and Iraq

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: 28 December 2024 Revised: 09 April 2025 Accepted: 23 May 2025 Online: 19 March 2026</p>	<p>The main goal of study was to comparatively examine toxic leadership, Anti Citizenship Behavior, aggression, and job stress among primary school principals in Iran and Iraq. Employing a causal-comparative research design, the statistical population comprised primary school principals from Khorramabad city, Lorestan province, Iran and Nasiriyah city, Dhi Qar province, Iraq. A proportional stratified random sampling method, was used to select a sample size of 115 principals (56 Iranian and 59 Iraqi) according to Krejcie and Morgan's table. Data were collected using four standardized questionnaires, all exhibiting Cronbach's alpha coefficients above 0.70. The validity of the questionnaires was confirmed by educational sciences experts. Data analysis was conducted using an independent samples t-test via SPSS software. The findings revealed that the mean scores for toxic leadership among Iranian and Iraqi primary school principals were 1.93 and 2.89; for aggression, 1.86 and 3.05; for Anti Citizenship Behavior, 1.76 and 2.79; and for job stress, 2.55 and 2.73, respectively. Consequently, a significant difference was observed between school principals of Iran and Iraq across all the investigated variables while Iranian principals demonstrating more favorable status. Based on these findings, it is recommended that stakeholders in the Iraqi educational management system prioritize the implementation of professional development programs, encourage principals to foster constructive leadership, and cultivate supportive work environments within schools to mitigate detrimental managerial behaviors.</p>
<p>KEYWORDS</p> <p>Anti Citizenship Behavior Aggression Job Stress School Principal Toxic Leadership</p>	

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1. Introduction

Undoubtedly, nowadays schools as one of the most important social institutions, play a pivotal role in training the future generation. In the meantime, school principals - as educational leaders - have a significant influence on the school climate, interactions among individuals and quality of education (Oluwasanu, Oladepo & Ibitoye, 2021). Accordingly, school principals should have strong management, communication and leadership skills to be able to interact constructively with staff, pupils and parents (Yalçınkaya et al., 2021). Of course, principals do not necessarily and always have positive behavior and their ineffective leadership should be taken into account (Qaidamini Harouni et al., 2022). Therefore, in the organizational management literature, terms such as sabotage, deviant work behaviors, and unethical & antisocial behaviors of principals have become very common (Raisi and Nasti Zaei, 2020). One of the destructive and antisocial behaviors of principals is toxic leadership, which is seen today as a painful prevalent reality and one of the most toxic leadership styles in organizations (Başar,2020). According to researchers, toxic leadership is an approach in which the leader of the organization harms the enthusiasm, creativity, independence and self-expression of staffs by creating a toxic environment (Gholizadeh et al., 2022). Toxic leaders use their sense and intelligence to deceive others by focusing on selfish and self-serving behaviors. The leaders' constant malice and intense hatred of others cause them to wish their failure and then enjoy it, even if the survival of the entire organization is at risk (Qaidamini Harouni et al., 2022). Dobbs & Do (2019), believe that toxic leadership includes five dimensions:

- Abusive supervision: Refers to the leaders' predominantly hostile behaviors towards employees, excluding physical contact.
- Authoritarian leadership: Actions and behaviors through which leaders attempt to exert excessive authority and control over subordinates.
- Narcissism: Refers to a style that aims to prove their superiority to employees through arrogant and self-centered actions by leaders. They often do not follow the organization's policies while expecting employees to do so.
- Self-promotion: Leaders, while promoting their achievements, blame others and do not accept responsibility for own mistakes.
- Unpredictability: Leaders, through their destructive and unpredictable actions and actions, make subordinates always watch their actions and behavior with fear and trembling.

Another problem of contemporary organizations is the existence of undesirable behaviors such as laziness, bullying, stubbornness, intimidation, and resentment that can have a negative impact on the organization's performance, interpersonal relationships and spirit of collaboration of employees. Such behaviors - known as anti-citizenship behaviors - if manifested by the manager or other employees can prevent the organization from achieving its goals (Farhadi & Faridpour, 2023). Organizational anti-citizenship behaviors can be considered to include deviant behaviors that, contrary to organizational norms and with unknown & ambiguous intentions, seek to harm the others (Kazemzadeh, Vedadi & Teymournejad, 2021). Physical violence, hidden violence (backbiting), sabotage, rumor-spreading, lying and blaming are considered organizational anti-citizenship behaviors (Shool et al., 2019). According to Shojaei, Sadeghi & Salehi-Rad (2018), the dimensions of organizational anti-citizenship behavior include the following:

1. **Stubbornness and Arrogance:** Includes overt behavior by the principal that directly contradicts the organization's policies and expectations and is consistently, openly, and hostilely displayed.
2. **Resistance to Authority:** Unlike stubbornness and arrogance which are directly and openly expressed, this dimension of anti-citizenship behavior occurs covertly and without public protest. These behaviors result from resistance to the authority of organization and its management and include things like covert opposition, lack of privacy, attempts to control group affairs, and bypassing or ignoring superiors.
3. **Work Evasion:** Any action that an individual takes to escape duties and responsibilities. This behavior is more common - especially in governmental organizations - and includes behaviors such as absenteeism, non-response, and delay in completing tasks.
4. **Resentment:** It is any type of behavior that a person does to compensate for the harm they have already suffered in the present and future. Although what they perceive as harm and loss may not be real but may be the result of individual fantasies.
5. **Aggression:** It refers to any physical or verbal expression of emotions that a person uses to express anger, disagreement or protest against colleagues, managers or clients.

Therefore, it can be said that anti-citizenship behavior has many negative and destructive effects and consequences. These behaviors, especially if occur by leaders who are responsible for leading the organization, can have more serious consequences. Another deviant behavior observed in organizations nowadays is aggression, which is a major challenge for employees and managers.

Aggression defined as behavior aimed at harming others physically or psychologically may have physical, relational and emotional forms (Fite, Tampke & Griffith, 2023). Buss and Perry (1992) have categorized aggression into four groups:

- ❖ Physical aggression: Behavior that is intended to cause physical harm to other person or that has the potential to cause physical harm (Okuda et al., 2015).
- ❖ Verbal aggression: A type of aggression that includes actions such as swearing (Gallen and Underwood, 1997).
- ❖ Anger: An intense emotional response to deprivation or provocation characterized by increased nervous system activity and physical arousal (Kendall, 2000).
- ❖ Hostile aggression: A type of reactive and impulsive aggression that occurs in response to a threat or insult (real or imagined) and caused by the individual's intense emotions and loss of control (Brosbe, 2011).

According to Ersan (2020), organizational aggression, as a destructive behavior in the workplace, not only threatens the mental health of employees but also affects organization's overall performance. This type of aggression, which is often associated with chronic stress in the workplace, can lead to a tense and unpleasant atmosphere.

Job stress, as another destructive behavior in the workplace, refers to the tensions and pressures that employees experience as a result of performing job duties. These tensions can be caused by various factors such as high workload, inappropriate scheduling of work shifts, and social pressures from colleagues or clients. In the last few decades, stress has become an increasing phenomenon worldwide for employees of organizations (Khan & Rammal, 2022). Since job stress can have negative effects on employee performance and satisfaction, a large number of researchers have focused on this subject (Behnood Sharif & Khalili, 2024). For example, Griffin (2021) believes that the highest level of mental stress comes from the workplace. Therefore, job stress can be considered another destructive and negative behavior in the organization, which if present in the behavior and interactions of school principals, can put psychological pressure on them in various ways.

Reflecting on what has been said, one of the fundamental challenges of the Iran's education system is the existence of destructive and negative behaviors such as toxic leadership, anti-citizenship behaviors, aggression, and job stress in the behavior and interactions of school principals. As Shirbegi and Moradi (2017) found inappropriate interactions of school principals with teachers and other staff are quite evident today. The results of research by Rahmani and Ghanbari (2022),

Brahoui & Nasti Zaei (2019) and Yarahmadi & Zaree (2023) also indicated that negative behaviors such as toxic leadership, job stress, aggression, and anti-citizenship behaviors are prevalent among school principals in Iran and have significant negative consequences on the school work environment and the mental health of employees. Also, the observations and lived experience of the main researcher of the present study during 24 years of teaching in various schools in Iran show that whenever the positive interactions of school principals with employees have declined, the quality of work life and sufficient motivation to carry out educational activities have decreased to the same extent.

In the case of Iraq, evidence reveals that over the past hundred years, the country has been grappling with countless challenges in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres. These factors have naturally affected the education system and the interactions of school administrators in this country. Rebellions, coups, revolutions, and civil wars have created a fragile and inefficient social structure for this country (Budaghi, , Khalili & Heydari, 2021). In general, since the beginning of Iraq's independence in 1921, the country has faced a heterogeneous population structure that has not been integrated as a "*single political community with a common identity*." Therefore, the rulers of Iraq have chosen the education system as the most important and best tool for creating and expanding a common "*national identity*" (Khakrand, & Yadollahi, 2019). However, the Iraq's education system faces numerous challenges, including imbalances in educational resources and inadequate infrastructure.

Many schools in Iraq do not perform well due to insufficient financial resources and lack of attention to the specific needs of students (Samir Hariz et al., 2025). The findings of research reveal that Iraqi administrators often make illogical and irrational decisions without the necessary knowledge, mostly based on personal opinions & tastes and implemented in an authoritarian manner without consulting others (Abubakar et al., 2019). On the other hand, tension and violence between different political groups in Iraq have weakened the government's ability to provide security and have further promoted fear, terror and violence in society. Naturally, these conditions have led to the spread of a spirit of non-acceptance of others, lack of an atmosphere of tolerance & peaceful coexistence, and the promotion of an atmosphere of violence in Iraq's social, cultural and educational environments (FP and Fund for Peace, 2016). Therefore, given the complex conditions and challenges above, it is not far-fetched to expect that destructive behaviors such as toxic leadership, anti-citizenship behaviors, aggression, and stress will be prevalent in various environments, including schools.

2. Literature Review

In this section, the research literature is briefly mentioned:

Balaban & Kazancı-Tınmaz (2024) investigated the relationship between toxic leadership behaviors of school principals and perceived stress of teachers in primary and secondary schools in Kayseri province, Turkey. The findings indicated that gender did not make a statistically significant difference in perceived stress and dimensions of toxic leadership. Also, the stress level and perception of toxic leadership dimensions of indifference, self-interest, and negative mental state of secondary school teachers were significantly higher than those of primary teachers. Ozcan & Maya (2024) identified the correlations between toxic leadership characteristics of school principals and teachers' perceptions of bullying, as well as levels of toxic leadership characteristics of school principals and teachers' perceptions of bullying in schools in Çan, Turkey. The findings reveal that teachers' perceptions of toxic leadership characteristics of school principals and their perceptions of bullying were generally at an average level. Teachers' perceptions of toxic leadership also differed significantly by gender, education level, and school type. On the other hand, positive and significant correlations were found between toxic leadership characteristics of principals and teachers' perceptions of bullying. Gheitarani et al (2024) examined the influence of contextual factors on organizational anti-citizenship behaviors using a meta-analysis method. The findings showed that there is a positive and significant relationship between contextual factors of organizational anti-social behaviors (structural, organizational, managerial, employment & professional and socio-economic & cultural factors) and occurrence of these behaviors. Özaslan et al. (2024) conducted a phenomenological research to investigate the different ways in which school principals perceived anger and aggression towards teachers. Phenomenological analysis of the interviews revealed that all participants perceived anger in six different ways, but they came to a common understanding that anger is "*an emotion that needs to be controlled.*"

In Indonesia, Kilag et al. (2023) examined the effectiveness of an anger and stress management intervention program on burnout, stress, anger and leadership skills of school principals. The findings indicated that school principals participating in the intervention program had significant improvements in terms of reducing burnout, aggression, stress, anger, and leadership skills. The relationship between these variables also indicates that effective anger and stress management can lead to reduced levels of stress and aggression, thereby reducing burnout and facilitating the improvement of leadership skills. Oplatka, & Nupar (2023) examined the sources of perceived anger and aggression of school principals and traced their forms of anger regulation in the workplace. The

findings suggest that this classification of these sources includes three types of perceived anger regulation: Superficial anger and acting out, moderate anger expression, and genuine anger expression. While teachers and students may provoke the principal's anger, it is usually higher-level institutions (e.g., the Ministry of Education, local education authorities) that provoke their intense anger. Yüksel and Özgenel (2022) conducted a study to identify the antecedents, consequences, and coping strategies of job stress among school principals in Turkey. The results indicated that issues such as "responsibility" and "problems with colleagues and loneliness" cause the most stress among principals. Also, due to job stress, principals do not devote enough time to their families, which negatively affects the work environment. The findings also indicate that school principals use individual coping strategies to manage stress.

In Iraq, Alhasnawi, & Abbas (2021) examined the mediation effect of organizational aggression and workplace hostility on the relationship between narcissistic leadership and workplace deviance. Findings reveal that organizational aggression partially mediated the positive relationship between narcissistic leadership and workplace deviance. In addition, the relationship between organizational aggression and workplace deviance depended on changes in the level of hostility. Accordingly, they concluded that when leaders adopt narcissistic behaviors to achieve their personal interests, this behavior leads to increased levels of organizational aggression and workplace deviance, and ultimately increased levels of hostility. Günçavdı , Arslan & Polat (2020) determined the causes of negative emotions among Turkish school principals and how they managed them. The results revealed that school principals defined negative emotions as emotions that destroy their motivation. They also all experienced negative emotions such as fear, anger, stress, anxiety, and regret. They attributed the causes of negative emotions to work-related and stakeholder issues. Ismail Saleh and Batmani (2024) investigated relationship between perception of ethical leadership and job stress with deviant behaviors among chemistry teachers in public schools in Diyala, Iraq. The findings showed that ethical leadership and job stress can significantly predict teachers' deviant behaviors. In particular, ethical leadership has a significant relationship with behaviors such as fairness, ethics, role clarity, and power sharing. The relationship between job stress (especially stress in interpersonal and physical relationships) and deviant behaviors is also significant. Therefore, ethical leadership can lead to a reduction in job stress and as a result, a reduction in deviant behaviors in teachers.

Iranian researchers have also been paying attention to the role of variables of present study in the performance of school principals. For example Molla Hosseini, Ghyathvand Ghyasi & Taherkhani (2024) examined the relationship between toxic leadership style of school principals and

organizational silence of primary school male teachers in Takestan city. The findings revealed that there is a positive and significant relationship between toxic leadership style of principals and organizational silence of male teachers, in a way that this relationship has been generalized to all dimensions of organizational silence. Norouzinia, Ahmadzadeh, & Feizolahzadeh (2024) examined violence and aggression in the workplace and its relationship with job stress. The findings indicated that there is a significant relationship between job stress, work experience, and age of employees, so that with increasing age and work experience, job stress decreases; however, no significant relationship was found between exposure to workplace violence and level of job stress. Zalbeigi & Molla Hosseini (2023) investigated relationship between social self-esteem of educational administrators and the tendency towards toxic leadership style in secondary schools of Qazvin. The results highlighted that there is a negative relationship between these two variables; meaning that the higher the social self-esteem of principals, the less likely they are to use toxic leadership style. Mirzaei and Erfanian (2023) investigated relationship between aggressive behavior of the executive unit supervisor and organizational pessimism with regard to the mediating role of employee self-efficacy in the city of Mashhad. The findings revealed that there is a positive and significant relationship between executive unit supervisor's aggression and organizational pessimism. In addition, the findings indicate an inverse and significant relationship between aggression of the executive unit supervisor and employee self-efficacy. Ghiyashi and Feizollahi (2023) conducted a research with the aim of identifying drivers of the formation of anti-citizenship behaviors in employees of Iran governmental organizations. The findings led to the identification of ten items in the form of three main concepts of individual, organizational and management factors. The results also showed that aggression, organizational injustice, and gossip rank first to third among the most important drivers of employees' organizational anti-citizenship behavior. Yarahmadi and Zaree (2023) investigated relationship between job stress and professional ethics and social competence of school principals in Yazd city. The findings revealed that there is an inverse and significant relationship between job stress and these two variables. Rahmani & Ghanbari (2022) examined the effect of toxic leadership of principals on organizational trauma with regard to the mediating role of emotional exhaustion of teachers in secondary schools of Khuzestan province. The findings indicated that toxic leadership of managers has a positive & significant effect on organizational trauma and also on emotional exhaustion of teachers. In addition, emotional exhaustion of teachers acts as a mediating variable, so that toxic leadership increases organizational trauma indirectly through increasing emotional exhaustion. Abdollahi Godollo & Seyed Ameri (2020) examined relationship among organizational anti-citizenship behavior, organizational laziness, and organizational harm

with work conscientiousness of physical education teachers through the mediating role of organizational pessimism in West Azerbaijan province. Their findings reveal that the first three variables had a direct and significant effect on organizational pessimism and work conscientiousness, although the relationship between organizational harms and work conscientiousness was not significant. Also, the indirect effect of organizational anti-citizenship behavior, organizational laziness, and organizational harm variables through the organizational pessimism on work conscientiousness was significant. Shirazi & Mohammadi (2021) studied the effect of two styles of authentic leadership and hypocritical management on anti-citizenship behavior through the mediating role of organization's moral climate. The findings showed that both authentic leadership styles and hypocritical management have a significant direct effect on organizational anti-citizenship behavior. Also, the organization's moral climate acts as a mediating factor in this relationship, such that authentic leadership can reduce anti-citizenship behavior by creating a positive moral climate, while hypocritical management strengthens this type of behavior by creating an instrumental moral climate. Brahoui & Nasti Zaei (2019) investigated the effect of work alienation on occurrence of organizational anti-citizenship behaviors with the mediating role of burnout among principals and vice-principals of secondary schools in Zahedan. The findings indicated that work alienation has a positive and significant effect on the occurrence of organizational anti-citizenship behaviors, both directly and indirectly through burnout.

A brief review of the above findings shows that previous research have mainly examined the relationship between these variables separately. Also, comparative research in this field have been limited. Therefore, by comparatively examining toxic leadership, anti-civil behavior, aggression, and job stress among school principals in Iran and Iraq - and filling the gap in previous research - the present study can contribute to a better understanding of the factors affecting performance of school principals and educational systems challenges of these two countries, and provide solutions to improve the leadership situation in schools, reduce aggression & stress, and promote positive behaviors in educational environments. Therefore the research hypotheses are as follow:

- There is a significant difference between Iranian and Iraqi primary school principals in relation to toxic leadership.
- There is a significant difference between Iranian and Iraqi primary school principals in relation to the level of anti-citizenship behaviors.
- There is a significant difference between Iranian and Iraqi primary school principals in relation to the level of aggression.
- There is a significant difference between Iranian and Iraqi primary school principals in relation to the level of job stress.

3. Research Method

The research method was causal-comparative and "similar social systems, different educational outputs" strategy for selection of country and standard questionnaires for collection of data were used respectively. The statistical population of the research in Iran included all primary school principals in District 1 of Khorramabad City, Lorestan Province (over 68 people) and in Iraq, the primary school principals in Nasiriyah City, the capital of Dhi Qar Province (over 70 people). In order to select the research sample, a relative stratified sampling method was used and 115 people (56 principals from Iran and 59 Iraqi principals) were selected as samples. In order to collect data, the standard toxic leadership questionnaire of Schmidt (2008) - with 28 items and a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.85 -; Rasouli's Job Stress Questionnaire (2005) - with 15 items and a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.79 -; Rahmani's Anti-Citizenship Questionnaire (2013) - with 24 items and a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.76 -; and Arnold Bass & Mark Perry's Aggression Questionnaire (1992) - with 29 items and a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.8 -; were used. Although all of the aforementioned questionnaires were standard, their validity was also examined and confirmed by the faculty members of the Educational Sciences Department of Lorestan University. The questionnaires were translated from Persian to Arabic and their text was smoothed by Iraqi students of Lorestan University under supervision of a member of the Department of Arabic Language. The questionnaires were also distributed and collected among selected principals in Iran by the main researcher and in Iraq by several Iraqi students of Lorestan University. SPSS26 software and two-sample independent t-test were used to analyze the data.

4. Findings

Demographic Data Analysis

Based on the demographic data analysis, 56 (48.7%) of the participants in this research were Iranian primary school principals and 59 (51.3%) were Iraqi primary school principals. Also, in terms of gender, 71 (61.7%) of the respondents were male and 44 (38.3%) were female. In terms of service experience, 22 (19.1%) respondents had less than 5 years, 18 (15.7%) between 6 and 10 years, 26 (22.6%) between 11 and 15 years, 22 (19.1%) between 16 and 20 years, 14 (12.2%) between 21 and 25 years, and 13 (11.3%) more than 25 years length of service experiences. In terms of management experience, 73 (63.5%) respondents had less than 5 years, 32 (27.8%) between 6 and 10 years, 4 (3.5%) between 11 and 15 years, and 6 (5.2%) between 16 and 20 years length of management experiences. Also, in order to ensure the normality of the data, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used. The results of this test for the research variables are given in Table 1:

Table 1. Examination of the normal distribution of the research variables

Variable	Values of z-statistics in k.s test	Significance level	Result
Toxic Leadership	0/082	0/200	Confirmation of normality
Anti-Citizenship Behavior	0/128	0/200	Confirmation of normality
Aggression	0/112	0/200	Confirmation of normality
Job Stress	0/144	0/114	Confirmation of normality

According to the contents of Table 1, from the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, it can be seen that the significance level values for the research variables are within the standard range ($p > 0.05$), therefore the research variables have a normal distribution and parametric tests can be used to test the hypotheses.

Hypothesis Testing

In order to test the research hypotheses, an independent two-sample t-test was used. If the difference is significant at the 95% confidence level, the null hypothesis is rejected and the research hypothesis is confirmed.

Table 2. Frequency, mean, standard deviation, t-values, and significance level for comparing the variables under study among primary school principals in Iran and Iraq

Variable	Iran		Iraq		Levene's test for equal variances		t-statistic	df	Sig
	Average	SD	Average	SD	F values	Significance level			
Toxic Leadership	1/93	0/436	2/89	0/762	18/747	0/001	8/312	93/252	0/000
Anti-Citizenship Behavior	1/76	0/516	2/79	0/927	28/170	0/001	7/404	91/732	0/000
Aggression	1/86	0/390	3/05	0/723	8/353	0/005	10/960	99/170	0/000
Job Stress	2/55	0/418	2/73	0/383	0/267	0/607	2/421	113	0/017

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant difference between primary school principals of Iran and Iraq in terms of toxic leadership.

According to the contents of Table 1 and the results of the two-sample independent t-test, given that the t-statistic value of the toxic leadership variable is 8.312 and the significance level is 0.00, and these values are within the standard range ($p < 0.05$ and $t < 1.96$), it can be concluded that there is a significant difference between the behavior of Iranian and Iraqi school principals in terms of the toxic leadership variable, and therefore the first hypothesis of the research is confirmed. Also, examining the means of the two groups reveals that in terms of the toxic leadership variable,

Iranian school principals - with a mean of 1.93 - are in a more favorable situation compared to Iraqi school principals - with a mean of 2.89.

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant difference between primary school principals of Iran and Iraq in relation to anti-citizenship behaviors.

Based on the contents of Table 1 and the results of the two-sample independent t-test, given that the t-statistic value of the anti-citizenship behaviors variable is 7.404 and the significance level is 0.00, and these values are within the standard range ($p < 0.05$ and $t < 1.96$), it can be inferred that there is a significant difference between Iranian and Iraqi school principals in relation to the anti-citizenship behaviors variable. Therefore, the second hypothesis is also confirmed. Also, examining the means of the two groups indicates that in terms of the anti-citizenship behaviors variable, Iranian school principals - with a mean of 1.76 - have a more favorable situation compared to their partners in Iraq - with a mean of 2.79.

Hypothesis 3: There is a significant difference between Iranian and Iraqi elementary school principals in terms of aggressive behavior.

According to the contents of Table 1 and results of the two-sample independent t-test, given that the t-statistic value of the aggression variable is 10.960 and significance level is 0.00, and of course these values are within the standard range ($p < 0.05$ and $t < 1.96$), it can be inferred that there is a significant difference between Iranian and Iraqi school principals in terms of this variable, and therefore, the third hypothesis of the research is also confirmed. In addition, examining the means of the two groups indicates that in terms of the aggressive behavior variable, Iranian school principals - with a mean of 1.86 - demonstrate this behavior less than Iraqi school principals - with a mean of 3.05.

Hypothesis 4: There is a significant difference between Iranian and Iraqi elementary school principals in terms of job stress levels.

Based on the contents of Table 1 and the results of the two-sample independent t-test, given that the t-statistic of job stress variable is 2.421 and its significance level is 0.017, and these values are within the standard range ($p < 0.05$ and $t < 1.96$), it can be concluded that there is a significant

difference between school principals of Iran and Iraq in terms of job stress level. Therefore, based on this finding, the fourth hypothesis is confirmed. In addition, examining the means of the two groups also indicates that in terms of job stress, Iranian school principals - with a mean of 2.55 - are in a more favorable situation compared to Iraqi school principals - with a mean of 2.73.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this research reveal that Iranian primary school principals display more positive and constructive behaviors and interactions with their employees compared to their Iraqi counterparts. Iranian principals also have more desirable behaviors and are less likely to engage in negative behaviors - such as toxic leadership, anti-civic behaviors, stress, and aggression. Given this finding, it can be analyzed that the observed differences in the leadership styles of school principals in these countries are the result of a complex interaction of various environmental factors. For example, examining the demographic characteristics of primary school principals in the two countries makes it clear that Iranian principals have a higher level of education and work experiences, as well as more management experience and stability, compared to their counterparts in Iraq. The positive effect of these factors can probably be considered a reason for the lower incidence of deviant and negative behaviors - such as toxic leadership, job stress, anti-civic behaviors, and aggression - in the first group compared to the second group. This finding is consistent with the findings of Norouzinia , Ahmadzadeh, & Feizolahzadeh (2024), and Vaziri et al. (2020) who found that with increasing age and work experience, negative and destructive behaviors - such as job stress among employees - gradually decrease.

On the other hand, the negative impact of political crises on the education system in Iraq should not be neglected, such as displacement, migration, spread & prevalence of a culture of violence & extremism, reduction of social cohesion & degradation of collective identity, along with the increase in ethnic & religious differences and cultural anomalies. This result supports the findings of Moharrami (2016) and Mehrabi Tavana et al. (2022) which show that the emphasis on the culture of authoritarianism and political intervention in education leads to the emergence of bullying and antisocial behaviors such as toxic leadership, anti-civic behaviors, stress and aggression by school administrators.

Another finding of research is that one of the factors that can increase the incidence of toxic leadership, anti-civil behavior, aggression, and job stress among Iraqi school principals is their exposure to stressful environments with noise pollution - loud and irritating sounds - and lack of adequate financial, health, and treatment facilities. This finding supports Sadock, & Sadock (2005)

which emphasize that people exposed to loud and irritating sounds demonstrate more severe violence and destructive behaviors than people who are not exposed to such situations. Considering the findings, the following practical suggestions are offered to those involved in the Iraqi educational management system:

- ❖ Implementing professional training programs for school principals: Including designing special training courses for Iraqi principals focusing on healthy leadership skills, stress management and conflict resolution using successful experiences of Iranian principals (such as holding joint workshops or knowledge exchange) to transfer practical experiences.
- ❖ Requirement to improve the level of education and selection of school principals: Requiring school principals to obtain university degrees related to educational management to hold school management positions in Iraq through the establishment of master's degrees in educational management in collaboration with reputable international universities.
- ❖ Psychological support for school principals: Setting up counseling and psychology units in Iraqi education departments to reduce the incidence of stress-based behaviors, aggression, and other negative behaviors through holding regular group therapy sessions for principals and sharing challenges and receiving support.
- ❖ Improving work and environmental conditions: Ensuring job and financial security for principals (through salary increases, establishing special health insurance) to reduce pressures resulting from political unrest, etc.
- ❖ Equipping schools with basic facilities (such as ventilation systems, appropriate physical space) to reduce environmental stress.
- ❖ Macro-educational policymaking: The Iraqi government's collaboration with international institutions (such as UNESCO) to design a sustainable educational leadership framework appropriate to the country's cultural context.

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