

THE SILENT STRAIN: INVESTIGATING THE ROLE OF WORKPLACE OSTRACISM AND EMPLOYEES' TURNOVER INTENTIONS FROM THE EDUCATION SECTOR OF PAKISTAN

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Abstract

One of the most important factors affecting employee behaviour and organizational outcomes is workplace ostracism, which is defined as a person's sense of being disregarded or excluded in professional contexts. This study examines the effects of workplace exclusion on academic and academic support staff turnover intentions in Pakistani higher education institutions. The study investigates the association between workplace ostracism and turnover intentions by using unpleasant emotions as a mediating variable and cultural value collectivism as a moderator, drawing on Affective Events Theory (AET). The study collected 207 genuine responses from public and private organizations in Lahore and using a quantitative, explanatory research technique. Data analysis was conducted using SmartPLS 3 to evaluate structural correlations, validity, and reliability. The findings indicate that being ostracized at work results in negative emotional reactions and is a powerful indicator of plans to leave. In contrast to negative feelings, collective cultural beliefs also lessen the strength of this relationship. This study contributes to the body of literature by highlighting the need for institutional solutions to combat occupational exclusion and offering context-specific insights from Pakistan's higher education system. The study highlights how important it is to establish inclusive environments in order to enhance employee retention, mental wellness, and organizational performance.

INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal mistreatment in the workplace refers to situations where individuals violate normative interaction standards or display adverse behaviors toward colleagues (Yang, 2018). This concept encompasses a range of behavioral concerns, including workplace harassment, bullying, mobbing, and exclusionary social interactions (Takhsha, 2020). Among these, *workplace ostracism* is a distinctive form of mistreatment, characterized by individuals or

groups intentionally excluding a coworker from social or professional interactions, even when such inclusion is socially or professionally expected (Jahanzeb & Fatima, 2018). According to Reinhard (2020), approximately 63% of respondents reported feeling ignored by colleagues, and 27% noticed coworkers intentionally exiting rooms upon their arrival. This behavior directly threatens the fundamental human need for belonging and

acceptance. When individuals are excluded or rejected, especially in professional settings, it can severely impact their emotional well-being and professional functioning (Karim, 2021). Researchers in organizational behavior have increasingly focused on workplace ostracism due to its wide-ranging consequences. Studies reveal that workplace ostracism can lead to counterproductive work behaviors such as reduced self-esteem (Takhsha, 2020), decreased engagement (Haldorai, 2020), poor job performance (De Clercq, 2018), emotional distress, and increased turnover intentions (Anasori, 2021). Interacting with others in the workplace can influence how well a job is done. Having good relationships can improve performance, dedication, and satisfaction (Anjum, 2022). To add, workplace ostracism may affect both employees and the entire company in negative ways. Diener stated in 2009 that being ostracized lowers job satisfaction, weakens ties with the company, and reduces performance. When someone has strong turnover intention, it is almost certain they will resign soon. Often, workers begin investigating other jobs before resigning (Paşamehmetoğlu, 2022). Usually, during this stage, tasks are accomplished slower and less effectively. The constant need to replace employees increases costs for employers. Additionally, new employees may struggle to get along with coworkers, making the situation worse and causing them to feel even more isolated.

The spread of COVID-19 caused people to switch to conducting business online, even when they were not used to it (Ali Awad, 2022). Even though individuals could work from home, it also meant there was a decrease in face-to-face connections. Being on Zoom with others who seemed to disconnect frequently was a common cause of loneliness, which is a key factor in the experience of workplace ostracism. Across the globe, people are often shunned at their jobs. Tariq notes that a person can face exclusion from work groups by at least one or more of their co-workers. According to Anjum et al., more than two-thirds of their participants had experienced some ostracism in the past year. The study noted that when people are ignored by others, they get negative feelings and consider quitting their job. Turkoglu (2019) describes turnover intention as the willingness of people to quit their jobs or workplaces. Researchers in Pakistan and similar nations are paying more attention to the

problem of workplace ostracism. Patriarchy, a wide gap in power, and a social preference for groups can shape how offices behave (Fatima & Bilal, 2019). In addition, acts of mistreatment, such as harassment, discrimination, and incivility, are seen in both SMEs and in big corporations as a result of relatively little attention being given to human values (Samma, 2020).

If an employee is shunned in a workplace, they might face negative consequences in terms of emotional health and even consider stopping work there (Qi et al., 2020). While the effects of workplace ostracism are becoming clear, not much is known about the processes behind why it affects the intention to leave the job, especially in Pakistan's higher education sector. Research has examined factors that impact and shape the relationship between being ostracized at work and intending to leave the job. Specifically, De Clercq looked at whether burnout in the workplace mediates a relationship, while Chung and Mao assessed stress and incivility separately. Even so, very few studies have been carried out, especially at higher education institutions (HEIs).

HEIs are vital to the progress of society because they produce well-trained workers. In line with Majeed's study (2021), research indicates that women in universities are often targeted with workplace ostracism. However, there has been limited study of how critical non-academic support staff are to a school's achievements. Furthermore, Pakistan currently lacks effective frameworks or policies to handle harassment in the workplace. Sometimes, employees do not know what to do if they feel isolated at work. For this reason, individuals may become discontent and possibly decide to quit their jobs. This issue has not been widely studied in Pakistan. The research in the education field concerning the roles of artificial intelligence for academic support staff is quite minimal (Fatima & Bilal, 2021).

We aim to identify the effect of being ignored at work on deciding to leave, considering the impact of cultural value collectivism and negative feelings among people who work in higher education in Pakistan.

- *To determine if being ignored at work can affect a teacher's intention to leave their job in Pakistan.*

- To look at whether collectivism in culture plays a role in how workplace ostracism relates to employees' intentions to quit their jobs.

- To analyze if the link between workplace ostracism and the intention to quit is due to negative feelings.

Using these goals, the research tries to address the subsequent questions:

- How has the practice of workplace ostracism affected the desire to leave among those in Pakistan's higher education sector?

- What is the role of collectivism in cultural value on how ostracism at work influences an employee's decision to leave?

- How much do unpleasant emotions influence the link between feeling left out at work and the intention to quit?

2. Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

Theoretical Framework

AET states that experiences at work trigger emotions, and these emotions can impact a person's feelings and behaviors. This study looks at how being ignored at work can enhance an employee's desire to leave, with negative mood and collectivism involved. The insights from AET explain the effect of emotions arising from relationships among workers on the performance of the organization.

Research Design

This investigation collects data and analyzes it numerically to examine the possible affair between being ostracized at work and wanting to quit. The approach is commonly used in similar research projects (De Clercq, 2018; Gurlek, 2019; Fatima, 2020). They help test whether a hypothesis is likely by using information from observed scenarios.

In accordance with this, the research is based on the assumption that what is seen and found is not influenced by the observer. People regularly use this method in the social sciences to confirm research findings and conclusions.

The authors start with broad ideas, conduct deductive reasoning, and then put it to the test using specific experiments. Using deductive techniques while analyzing data ensures all summaries are relevant to the question being asked.

Explanatory research was conducted to clarify the relationship between workplace ostracism, turnover intention, and the roles of negative emotions and collectivism in the higher education sector of Pakistan. When we have little knowledge about a subject, explanatory research looks into the reasons why certain things happen.

It explores how people who feel left out end up wanting to leave the group. The reason this method is chosen is based on the available time, the budget, and the questions being studied.

Target Population

Both teachers and administrators from publicly and privately funded universities in Lahore are included in the survey. Previously, most studies left out academic support staff, but this gap has been filled by including them. This meeting involves lecturers, professors, deans, guests, and people from subscription and library, operational support, examination, student affairs, human resources, finance, IT, and the general administration department.

Since Lahore is a large city with many universities, it fits the bill perfectly. 250 participants are planned, to give the findings a strong basis.

Sampling Design

To make sure all individuals have an equal chance of selection, the researchers used a simple random sampling for their study. The main reason to choose this method is that it reduces biased samples, offers reliance, and is efficient and cost-effective (Polit & Hungler, 1986; Brayman & Bell, 2004; Mahfooz, 2017).

Data Collection Instrument

Information for the study will be gathered by using a scientific questionnaire based on proven and validated measures found in previous studies (Riaz, 2019). To make the questionnaire more accessible, it will be distributed via Google Forms and using in-person methods. In this research, we used Ferris et al.'s (2008) 13-item ostracism scale, a 3-item turnover intention scale built by P. Carlyon (2006), Chu Hui's (1998) 5-item collectivism scale, and a 13-item mood scale by J.L. Powell (1987). They will help explore how workplace ostracism, negative emotions, collectivism, and the intention to leave are related.

Data Collection Procedure

Google Forms will be used to gather the data as it is simple, affordable, and easy to distribute broadly. If the digital evidence does not give satisfactory results, the researcher will go to universities in Lahore for in-person data collection. As a result, we get information from both the academic team and faculty.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Percentiles will not be used in this study, but inferential statistics such as hypothesis testing and regression analysis will be significant. We will rely on Smart PLS for conducting our analysis because it supports structural equation modeling (SEM). The technique is valuable for helping social scientists break down and analyze the hidden factors and relationships (Haldorai, 2020). The Smart PLS software will allow researchers to test and analyze the relationships in their theoretical framework to ensure both validity and reliability of the results.

3. Results and Discussion

This section details the results of the study which investigated the influence of ostracism in the workplace on teachers' intentions to quit in Pakistani higher education. It further looks into the impact of negative emotions and culture collectivism on the association. Information was collected from the academic and support staff of universities in Lahore by using a quantitative technique and a structured questionnaire. This analysis consists of data on demographics, and evaluating the measurements using reliability and validity as well as testing the hypotheses using structural modeling.

Sample Description

We provided 306 questionnaires to ensure we had an adequate sample among those targeted. From these, 207 acceptable messages were received, which meant a response rate of 67.6%, with 99 not included because they lacked values. The research questionnaire asked about gender, age, education, job coverage, and position in an organization.

Gender Distribution

In this study, the researchers began by looking at gender as a demographic variable. Of the 207 answers,

123 were provided by men and 84 by women. So, there were 59.4% male participants and 40.6 % female (refer to Table 1 and Figure 1). The statistics on gender reveal that the findings are likely to apply well to men and women alike.

Age Bracket

How old someone is often matters in studies of organizational behavior and also affects behavior in the workplace, like ostracism. The study looked at age groups among the respondents. 126 respondents or about 60.9% were aged under 30 years. Out of the remaining respondents, 16.4% were between 30 and 39 years, 16.4% were between 40 and 49 years, and 6.3% were between 50 and 59 years. None of the participants were from the 60+ age group. From these results, it appears that younger people in the workforce were more responsive to issues of ostracism than their older colleagues.

Job Experience

Five sections were made for job experience: the first group for 1-5 years, the second for 6-10 years, and so on. Out of the total respondents, 149 people, or 72.0%, have 1-5 years of work experience. There were 37 respondents (17.9%) who had worked for 6 to 10 years, 9 (4.3%) for 11 to 15 years, and another 12 (5.8%) for 16 to 20. Everyone in the study had less than 20 years of experience (refer to Table 2 and Figure 1). Because inexperienced professionals are in the majority, they may be excluded by others because they have very little influence in the workplace.

Educational Qualification

Respondent's educational levels were also reviewed for the study. A total of 116 people, constituting 56% of the group, held PhD degrees, as the study centered on PhD students. An extra 50 people (24.1%) possess an M.Phil. degree, and 41 respondents (19.8%) have a Master's Degree. The explanation for the students possessing Master's degrees is due to having academic staff present (as detailed in Table 1 and Figure 1). The levels show that universities are rigorous and teach students to manage ostracism in a range of situations.

Position in the Organization

Survey respondents were classified according to how they were positioned in the organization. From the 207 valid responses, 146 (70.5%) were given by

academic staff, while the remaining 61 (29.5%) came from academic support staff (see Table 1 and Figure 2). Looking at both types of employees gave a stronger insight into the issue of being ostracized at work in higher education.

Empirical Findings

The empirical findings of the study are presented in two main parts: measurement model assessment and structural model assessment. These analyses are crucial for evaluating the reliability and validity of constructs and testing the proposed hypotheses.

Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)

The VIF values were used to see if multicollinearity existed in the independent variables. All results of VIF varied from 1.090 to 1.294, and this implies they were all within the allowable range. Since multicollinearity is not present, the model can be analyzed further (see Table 2).

R-Square and Adjusted R-Square

The R^2 value for negative emotions was 0.662, meaning that 66.2% of its variance is explained by workplace ostracism. The adjusted R^2 was 0.650, accounting for model complexity. For turnover intention, the R^2 value was 0.232, indicating that 23.2% of its variance can be explained by the independent variables. The adjusted R^2 was 0.219. These values suggest that negative emotions are a strong predictor in the model, while turnover intention is moderately explained by the existing variables.

Convergent Validity

For the convergent validity assessment, factor loading, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were reviewed. The standards for the different constructs were achieved. As an example, workplace ostracism had a CR of 0.972, Cronbach's Alpha at 0.969, and AVE set to 0.733. Negative emotion received a CR of 0.970, an Alpha of 0.967, and an AVE of 0.714. Table 3 indicates that collective action and intention to turn over were also reliable and valid. These results indicate that the measure used is suitable and appropriate for all the constructs.

Discriminant Validity

Three methods were used to assess discriminant validity: cross-loadings, Fornell-Larcker method, and HTMT ratio.

Every dimension was loaded more on its own construct than on the others, according to the requirements for discriminant validity (see Figure 2). In most cases, the Fornell-Larcker criterion demonstrated that the square root of AVE was above the correlations of different constructs. Meanwhile, turnover intention and cultural value collectivism had equally slight concerns, since the correlation between these variables and the others was not as high (see Figure 2).

All pairwise results of HTMT were below 1.0. An illustration is that the HTMT result between negative emotion and feeling left out at work was 0.831, between intention to quit and feeling left out at work it was 0.655, and between feeling left out at work and the importance of the group over the individual was 0.426. This shows that the values prove the construct is different from others (see Figure 2).

Structural Model Assessment

To determine significance, path coefficients, t-values, and p-values were used for all the research hypotheses. The study concluded that all five proposals were accepted.

There was a strong positive link detected in H1, where workplace ostracism and negative emotion correlated, with beta equal to 0.904 and p-value being 0.000. H2 suggested that when employees feel negative, they report a 0.492 increase in turnover intention, while the p-value was 0.000. In H3, researchers found that workplace ostracism leads to turnover intention through the mediating effect of negative emotions, with a significant indirect path and a beta of 0.443 (p-value = 0.000).

Hypothesis four (H4) proved that there is a direct relationship between collectivism and negative emotions, but the link is weak. In summary, the moderated mediation positive association between experienced workplace ostracism and intensified negative emotions, appears when cultural beliefs about collectivism are prevalent, equal to 0.100 and statistically significant at $p = 0.029$ (see Table 4 and Figure 4).

Summary of Findings

The part under discussion confirms the principle stated in the study. All the measurement tools were found to be reliable and valid. Both distinctiveness and consistency were supported in each construct by the validity tests. It was found that ostracism from colleagues in the workplace raises negative feelings, which increase the likelihood of quitting the job. Furthermore, culture’s prominence in the group is said to significantly affect these results.

According to the results, those aged below 30 and those who have worked for 1–5 years have the highest risk of being ostracized. Attention must be given to both groups at higher education settings since they can both face exclusion and rejection. Making sure people feel connected to their jobs and happy at work may decrease the risk of leaving a company for people who have been ignored.

Tables and Figures:

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Category	Group	Count	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	123	59.4
Gender	Female	84	40.6
Age	Under 30	126	60.9
Age	30–39	34	16.4
Age	40–49	36	16.4
Age	50–59	11	6.3
Experience	1–5 Yrs	149	72.0
Experience	6–10 Yrs	37	17.9
Qualification	Masters	41	19.8
Qualification	PhD	116	52.0
Position	Academic	146	70.5
Position	Support Staff	61	29.5

Table 2: Model Fit: VIF, R² and Adjusted R²

Variable	VIF	R Square	Adjusted R Square
Negative Emotion	1.294	0.662	0.65
Workplace Ostracism	1.191		
Cultural Value Collectivism	1.191		
Turnover Intention	1.09	0.232	0.219

Table 3: Convergent Validity Metrics

Construct	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Workplace Ostracism	0.969	0.972	0.733
Negative Emotion	0.967	0.97	0.714
Cultural Value Collectivism	0.889	0.917	0.69
Turnover Intention	0.827	0.892	0.736

Table 4: Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Beta Coeff	T Statistic	P Value	Result
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H1	WO → NE	0.904	9.814	0.0	Accepted
H2	NE → TI	0.492	4.404	0.0	Accepted
H3	WO → NE → TI	0.443	4.462	0.0	Accepted
H4	CVC → NE	0.099	1.798	0.013	Accepted
H5	CVC → WO → NE	0.1	1.932	0.029	Accepted

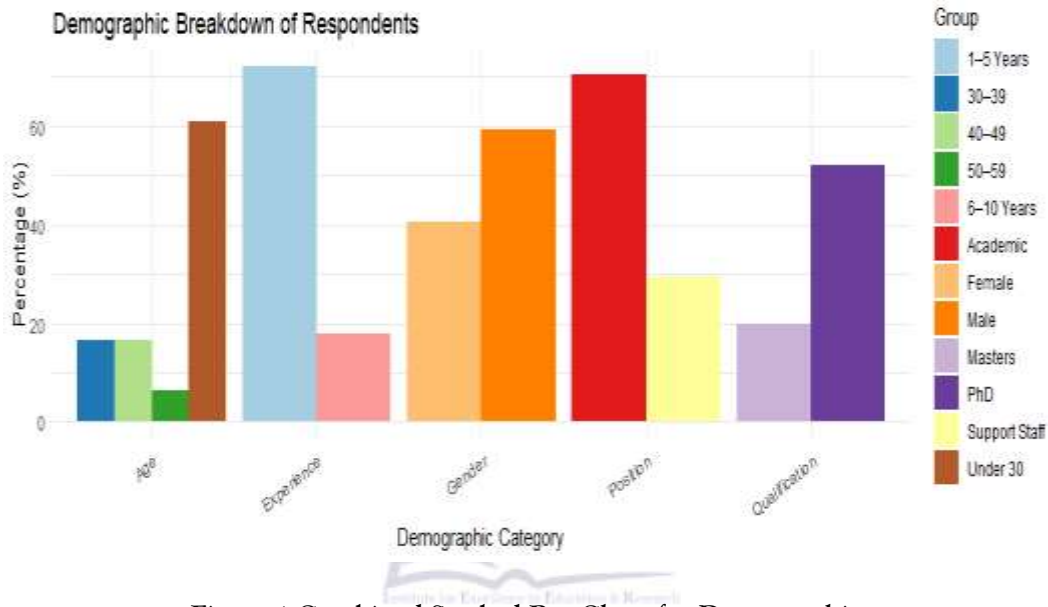


Figure 1 Combined Stacked Bar Chart for Demographics

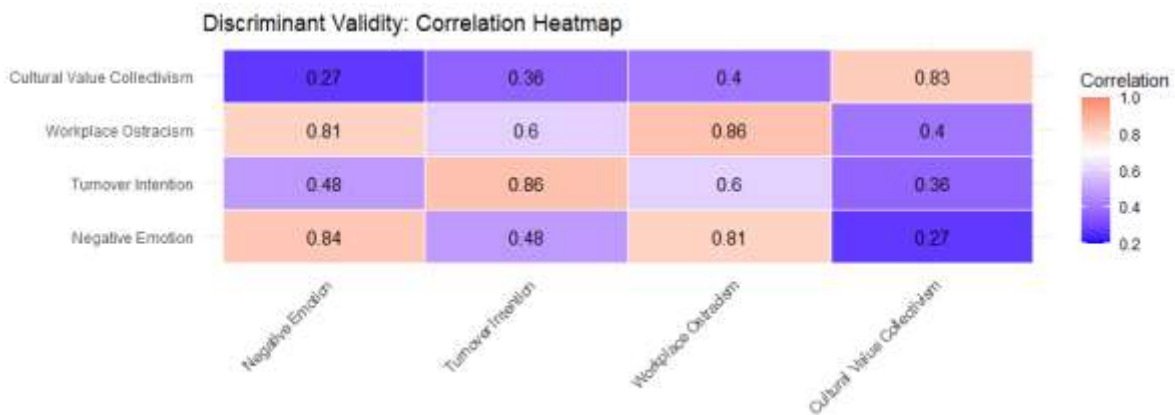


Figure 2 Correlation Heatmap for Discriminant Validity

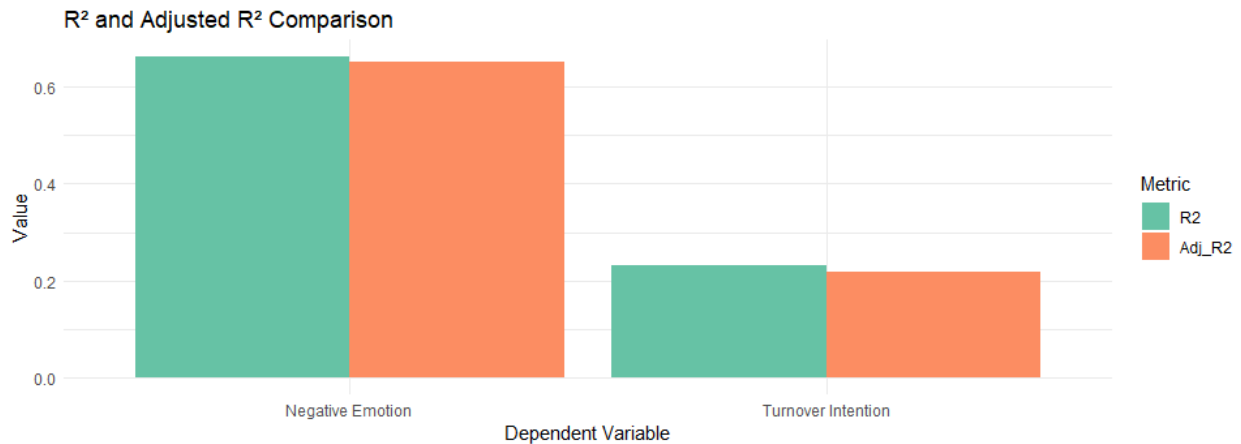


Figure 3 R² & Adjusted R² Comparison Bar Plot

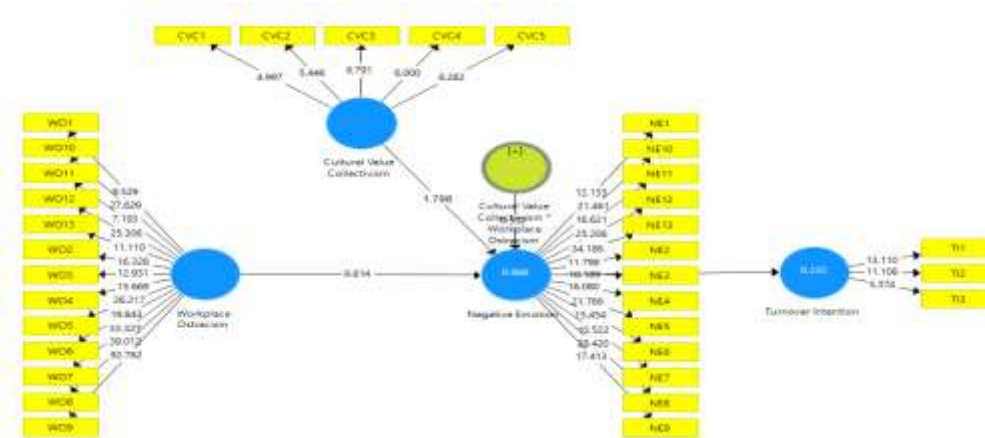


Figure 4 Structural Model

Discussion

Workplace ostracism is a type of workplace mistreatment in which an individual consider himself/herself being isolated or ignored by their co-workers. The act of workplace ostracism affects the employee’s emotional well-being in two ways, i.e., hurts the feeling of attachment & belongingness and creates the negative emotions that lead toward poor productivity, lack of commitment and finally intentions to quit (Anjum M. A., 2022). Due to the existence of this phenomenon, both, employees as well organization are at the losing end. The employees unable to fulfill their assigned tasks, that triggers the negative emotions and affect their overall productivity. Similarly, organizations, due to lack of productivity of their employees unable to achieve their desired short term and long-term goals, that

eventually hits the overall organizational brand image and customer’s loyalty (Aplin-Houtz, 2022). Workplace ostracism is a world-wide phenomenon, and its existence cannot be ignored in any case, even in the most sophisticated MNC’s of the first world countries. Despite of the researcher’s efforts to identify and explore its negative consequences, only a few organizations have taken steps to formulate the policies that can overcome this practice in the long run. Various other factors such as globalization, flexible work arrangements due to Covid-19, multicultural work environment and evolution of virtual teams also some of the key factors that results in the continuation of this phenomenon since the last decade. It is the need of the hour, to identify and

analyze the factors that directly and indirectly impact on workplace ostracism.

As far as the presence of workplace ostracism in Pakistani organization is concerned, it is true that a large number of employees feel themselves ostracized, ignored at workplaces, especially at the very start of their professional careers. One of the key reasons is that due to collectivist culture and patriarchal approach, employees from the same region or community, tends to socialize with the people of the similar community (Basavaraj, 2021). Also, there is a bifurcation of people, based on their language, caste, sect and rural cities, from where their ancestors belong to. Due to increase in population and lack of availability of jobs in the rural and sub-urban areas of Pakistan, most of the educated people move to two major big cities of Pakistan, i.e., Karachi and Lahore. But their migration for better job and earning the livelihood for their family in the big city is a new beginning. The people who are qualified and have good communication skills able to adjust in the new community easily, but a number of people face “ostracism” due to lack of exposure, skills, relevant experience in the local as well as multinational organizations.

The purpose of this research work is to analyze the impact of workplace ostracism on turnover intentions, by considering the moderating and mediating factors, which are quite relevant to the above-mentioned variable. The moderating variable, selected for this research work is “cultural value collectivism”, which is highly relevant to this study, because, the employees, who belong to similar cultural values tends to stay in the same groups at workplace and they unintentionally become the source of workplace ostracism. The mediating factor of this research work is “negative emotions”, whose intensity varies from person to person based on her ability to cope up with this phenomenon. The research is based on the education sector, i.e., higher educational institutions which are considered as the key pillars of the economy as well as the society at large (Huang, 2023).

This research work is unique and one of its kinds, as it considered both key pillars of the educational institutions, i.e., academic staff and academic support staff. Only a very few researches, especially from the context of Pakistan, have made such type of research

at such a significant scale. We have chosen five private and five public sector universities of the Pakistan’s second largest city (Lahore), to ensure better reliability of the research work.

The study was based on quantitative research and is “exploratory in nature, to explore and analyze the impact of workplace ostracism on turnover intentions of higher education institutions of Pakistan. The data collection was made within the assigned timeline given by our department, and smart PLS 3 was used for data analysis. The research reveals that all the variables chosen in this research have a valid and significant relationship with each other, and the model created for this research is a “good fit”. Moreover, validity and reliability test further authenticate the research variables, models and proved that all the proposed hypothesis, are “accepted”.

The first hypothesis stated that workplace ostracism is positively associated with turnover intention. As it is already discussed by a number of scholars that phenomenon of workplace ostracism results in counterproductive work behaviors such as poor productivity, lack of commitment towards work and dissatisfaction from the workplace. Similarly, the results of our research also proved the same that workplace ostracism is positively associated with turnover intentions.

The second hypothesis stated that workplace ostracism is positively associated with turnover intentions. As per the literature review the employees feel them “deprived” that results in the creation of negative emotions, such as stress, anger and humiliation in the long run. Thus, our study proved the same after data analysis that workplace ostracism is positively associated with negative emotions, impacting the emotional well-being of the employees in negative way.

Another important perspective of this research work is to analyze the connection between negative emotions and turnover intentions, due to perceived sense of being “isolated”, a number of employees unable to achieve the necessary information suitable for their career growth. This results in the creation of negative emotions that eventually leads to turnover intention, which showed our third hypothesis about the positive association of negative emotions and turnover intentions to be true or “accepted”.

The fourth value addition that has been made through this research is to identify the factors that moderate the relationship of workplace ostracism and turnover intentions. As the study is based on the Pakistani educational sector organization which is considered as collectivist culture-based country, therefore, it is proved through data analysis results that cultural value collectivism moderates the relationship of workplace ostracism and turnover intentions.

Lastly, the fifth hypothesis is about analyzing the mediating factors such as turnover intention between workplace ostracism and turnover intention. As it is described that employees, who face the phenomenon of workplace ostracism, feel themselves socially excluded, thus resulting in creation of negative emotions, thus leading to turnover intentions, the results of the data analysis proved this statement to be true, and added a value in the literature of workplace and its related variable that directly or indirectly impact on this phenomenon in a particular organizational setting.

Conclusion

Workplace ostracism is a type of mistreatment that occurs in any workplace setting, in which an individual consider himself socially excluded from the organizational environment. The feeling of being excluded becomes so strong that it results in creating negative emotions, that eventually leads towards hurting the emotional well-being of the employees. Due to emotional distress and negative emotions, employees exhibit counterproductive work behaviors, that affect their overall productivity and organizational commitment, which in turn leads towards turnover intentions and finally quitting their jobs. The purpose of our research is to analyze the mediating and moderating factors that impact the relationship of workplace ostracism and turnover intentions. For that particular research, cultural value collectivism and negative emotions were taken as moderating and mediating variables respectively. The research has made a valuable contribution in the area of organizational behavior, which is a key area of focus, in the field of social sciences in the modern era. Only a few scholars have made their contribution related to workplace ostracism in Pakistani organization in services or corporate sector. This

research is unique and one of its kind as it not only focused on the higher educational institutions, but also consider the both key pillars of the educational institutions, i.e., academic staff and academic support staff. Previously most of the researches have been made on the topic of workplace ostracism by considering the sample of “academic staff” only.

It is highly recommended to work on the phenomenon of workplace ostracism, especially in Pakistan based educational sector organizations, and to analyze different factor that may impact on this phenomenon directly and indirectly. This research has not only identified the mediating and moderating factors to add value in the literature of workplace ostracism theoretically, but also will open new horizons for the future researchers to identify these factors in various other sectors of the Pakistan’s economy. Also, this research has added value in the knowledge of policy makers and decision makers of the higher educational institutions in Pakistan, such as vice chancellors, deans, associated deans, program directors and head of the departments to design and develop the policies to overcome this phenomenon for better productivity of the organizations and better emotional well-being of the employees as well.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Credit author statement

1st name: and, Visualization, Investigation. **2nd name:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Software, Data curation, Writing- Original draft preparation, Supervision, Writing - review & editing. **3rd name:** and. **4th name:** Software, Validation.

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