Silent suffering: exploring the far-reaching impact of supervisor ostracism via sociometer theory

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Abstract

Purpose – A limited number of empirical studies have indicated that individuals who experience workplace ostracism tend to engage in subtle and retaliatory behaviors as a means of seeking inner peace. However, research on organizational behavior and employee psychology in relation to ostracism is still in its nascent stages. Specifically, further investigation is warranted to explore how supervisor ostracism influences task procrastination (TP) through psychological processes such as self-efficacy, self-esteem and motivation. Notably, a significant gap exists in the ostracism literature, as it has yet to thoroughly examine employee behaviors related to knowledge hiding (KH) and TP in the context of individual or team-based work (Zhao et al., 2016; Brouwer and Jansen, 2019). Therefore, the present study aims to address this gap and expand the research stream within the education sector by introducing “threat to self-esteem” (TSE) as a mediating factor in the outcomes of ostracism.

Design/methodology/approach – The study employed a quantitative approach, using questionnaires to collect data and mainly focused on statistics and standards. The authors used SPSS and Smart-PLS to employ numerical values developed from questionnaire surveys. Likewise, we employed primary data collection tools, including mixed survey analysis (self-reported and peer-reported). The data were collected from middle-level managers working in three public sector universities. By using a three-wave research design with a two-week interval in each phase, we were able to separate the measurement of the predictor and moderator factor (supervisor ostracism SO) and individual resilience (IR), mediator (TSE) and outcome variables (KH and TP).

Findings – The study has discovered a substantial relationship between variables, and all hypotheses are accepted according to the data results and findings. The study measures the effects of supervisor ostracism on knowledge hiding and task procrastination through mediating effect of threat to self-esteem, which individual resilience moderates. This study adds a few contributions to the current literature, following the goals stated above. First, this attempts to highlight employee KH behavior and TP behavior by identifying SO as the primary predictor.

Research limitations/implications – The organization should closely monitor the level of workplace ostracism. One strategy to accomplish this goal is to routinely gauge the extent of ostracism at work using targeted techniques like surveys and observation. The organization can also create an employee assistance program for the workers to assist them in coping with the mistreatment and better adjusting to the workplace culture. Furthermore, employee empowerment and collaborative decision-making can boost workers’ self-esteem, eventually leading to diminishing knowledge-hiding and procrastination habits inside the organization.

Originality/value – There is a research gap regarding the barriers to KH from the perspective of team dynamics and interpersonal mistreatment at work because prior research has focused on knowledge sharing, organizational culture and organizational obstruction. Research on organizational behavior and employee

The authors declare that they have no known financial or interpersonal conflicts that could have appeared to have an impact on the research presented in this study.
psychology in relation to ostracism is still in its nascent stages. Specifically, further investigation is warranted to explore how SO influences TP through psychological processes such as self-efficacy, self-esteem and motivation. Notably, a significant gap exists in the ostracism literature, as it has yet to thoroughly examine employee behaviors related to KH and TP in individual or team-based work.

**Keywords** Individual resilience, Knowledge-hiding, Sociometer theory, Supervisor ostracism, Task procrastination

**Paper type** Research paper

1. Introduction

Individuals evaluate their self-worth based on the treatment they receive, particularly from their superiors, and this perception significantly influences their behavior within the workplace. The potential risks that employees may face from their colleagues or leaders, such as Ostracism, often remain unknown to them (Akhtar et al., 2020). There is an increasing recognition to the phenomena that supervisor ostracism (SO) leads to negative outcomes and fosters counterproductive work behavior among individuals (Zhao et al., 2016; Abubakar et al., 2018). As social beings, humans naturally seek to build and maintain relationships in both their personal and professional spheres. Given Pakistan’s collectivist society, the subject of organizational behavior in relation to SO has gained considerable attention. In a collectivist culture, the emphasis lies on interpersonal behavior, harmony and the avoidance of conflicts among organizational employees. Supervisors and coworkers in the workplace offer socio-emotional resources that satisfy individual needs for esteem, social acceptance and acknowledgment (Jahanzeb et al., 2018). When neglected or excluded by superiors, employees feel uneasy, offended and may exhibit defensive behavior.

SO refers to “the experience of being neglected by a leader or superior at the workplace” (Ferris et al., 2008; Jahanzeb et al., 2018). Workplace ostracism, SO and coworker ostracism have been used interchangeably in previous literature. Ostracism is characterized by subtle actions that exclude or isolate the individuals, manifesting as the failure to engage in socially expected behaviors. Employees feel demotivated to contribute their best efforts due to lack of recognition or supervisor support. This is thought to have a significant negative effect on employees’ psychological well-being and performance (Choi, 2019). Scholars also have identified a significant relationship between workplace ostracism and negative work-related outcomes, such as destructive attitude, intention to leave, employee dissatisfaction and physical strain (De Clercq et al., 2019; Hsieh and Karatepe, 2019; Li et al., 2018).

1.1 Study rationale

A limited number of empirical studies have indicated that individuals who experience workplace ostracism tend to engage in undefined and retaliatory behaviors as a means of seeking inner peace (Ferris et al., 2015). The existing literature has identified several factors that contribute to the occurrence of ostracism, including organizational culture, power distance, personality traits and favoritism, all having negative effects on employees and lead to negative work behavior (Hitlan and Noel, 2009; Hen et al., 2021). However, the study of employee psychology and organizational behavior in relation to SO is still understudied in higher education sector. One’s self-esteem that is linked to self-worth can cause low morale and dissatisfaction at work due to perceived exclusion from supervisor.

Notably, a significant gap exists in the ostracism literature, as it has yet to thoroughly examine employee behaviors related to knowledge hiding (KH) and task procrastination (TP) in the context of individual or team-based work (Zhao et al., 2016; Brouwer and Jansen, 2019). Based on the notion of sociometer theory, the study suggests that self-esteem influences people’s emotional and psychological reactions based on social conditions. Therefore, the present study aims to address this gap and expand the research stream within the higher
education sector by introducing “threat to self-esteem” (TSE) as a factor that mediates the effects of ostracism on certain outcomes.

The study acknowledges that not all will react to this threat in the same way since resilient people may be better able to keep a high self-esteem despite facing ostracism. Individual resilience refers to the unique capacity to bounce back from challenging situations and is employed by individuals to navigate difficult times. Resilience, as a psychological resource, might help the individuals to cope better with ostracism (Waldeck et al., 2015). The study findings could guide organizational tactics for reducing the negative effects of SO and promoting a more progressive working environment in education.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses development
Guided by the sociometer theory, this study investigates how SO affects the self-esteem of individuals and ultimately reacts accordingly in the form of psychological behavior outcomes (Peng and Zeng, 2017). Being accepted by others is one of the basic human needs as per this conception. Self-esteem further act as a “sociometer” that monitors and responds to social value indicators (Ng et al., 2022). Self-esteem has been proposed as an important mediating mechanism in literature for its impacts of Ostracism on individual behavior. Exclusion by others reduces one’s perceived social value and threatens their self-esteem; subsequently provoking particular behavior to avoid such threats.

The study incorporates sociometer theory to test the model because it offers a framework for comprehending how social exclusion affects people’s behavior and emotions. The theory enlightens the impact of perceived social worth on individuals’ decisions to comply with or resist authority and to complete or delay tasks. The sociometer stimulates emotional suffering as an alarm signal when undergoing relational devaluation and prompts the behavior to obtain, maintain and repair relational appreciation (Liu and Zhang, 2020). Individuals become more inclined to self-enhance their survival through incorporating resilience power. Based on existing literature and related arguments, we propose sociometer theory as a suitable paradigm to gain new insights within the domain of ostracism in higher education (Jahanzeb et al., 2021). Figure 1 depicts the research model.

Figure 1. Research model

Source(s): Authors’ own work
2.1 Supervisor ostracism and threat to self-esteem

SO refers to the degree to which supervisors disregard coworkers’ opinions, avoid eye contact, or ignore them during work activities (Jahanzeb et al., 2021). Ostracism is a powerful and pervasive phenomenon in an organizational setting and causes several negative outcomes at the workplace (Sharma and Dhar, 2021). It is characterized by a type of interpersonal exploitation (Anasori et al., 2021); social rejection (Gruter and Masters, 1986); and being overlooked or ignored by others (Sharma and Dhar, 2021). It is a human psyche that need for social connections are fulfilled when people are welcomed or accepted by others. Ostracism and social rejection, on the other hand, hinder this need from being encountered. Previous research shows that supervisors ostracize workers by using authority to limit their self-efficacy and work proficiency (Akhtar et al., 2020).

The main priority of an organization should be integrating contemporary leadership styles into effective workforce management and boosting staff performance (Nasir et al., 2022). Experiencing SO leads to a serious threat to one’s self-esteem through being excluded or ignored. Self-esteem is referred to one’s self-worth relating to the personal attributes that constantly increase the understanding of organizational behavior (Takhsha et al., 2020). Human beings are supposed to be strongly and extensively concerned with their self-esteem which encompasses the beliefs about one’s self-worth and identity. Therefore, the level of self-esteem has been highlighted as a substantial mediator in the literature related to behavioral outcomes caused by Ostracism (Peng and Zeng, 2017).

The study of Zhang explored how workplace ostracism indirectly affects employee creativity and harms their well-being, using organization-based self-esteem (OBSE) as a measure (Zhang et al., 2023). At the same time, the evidence for an association between ostracism and behavioral outcomes is varied based on certain situations (Thau et al., 2007; Ferris et al., 2008). It is observed that self-esteem ultimately delivers the basis for cognitive roles intended for mindful individuals (Saklz et al., 2021). Therefore, the feeling of ostracism was found to be a multiplicative function of trait self-esteem (Kong, 2016). Based on the above arguments, the following hypothesis is stated:

**H1.** The perceived supervisor ostracism positively relates to employee’s TSE.

2.2 Threat to self-esteem and knowledge hiding

KH refers to the employee’s intentional action to hide or obscure knowledge from the person who sought it (Soral et al., 2022). It sometimes creates negative retribution between knowledge hiders and seekers, resulting in several detrimental workplace outcomes (Cerne et al., 2014). Researchers also argue that employees take KH as a defensive coping mechanism against the threat they feel toward their self-esteem or self-respect (Soral et al., 2022). Previous research has shown that self-esteem has a critical moderating effect on the voice, with persons having varying levels of positive beliefs that influence the degree of voice (Ma, 2016). Individual employees tend to engage in positive or negative behaviors depending on their contingent self-esteem. Here, contingent signifies a specific set of outcomes where an individual has linked their self-esteem. Consequently, their perception of value is based upon their perceived success or failure (Crocker and Wolfe, 2001). Ferris et al. (2015) has incorporated self-esteem as a moderator in his study to directly measure the degree to which self-esteem is based on a specific domain. Researchers found that KH behavior can be viewed as a protective reaction that serves to both shelter the person from more possible threats and help them regain control over their self-esteem (Wu et al., 2023). Therefore, this study hypothesized:

**H2.** There is a direct and positive relationship between TSE and KH.
2.3 Threat to self-esteem and task procrastination

Steel (2007) defines Procrastination as "to voluntarily delay an intended course of action despite expecting to be worse off for the delay." This study has considered TP as an intentional delay in work or adopting an irrational behavior as a coping mechanism against anxiety. Several research has found that self-esteem is the most important factor in producing procrastination (Steel and Klingsieck, 2016; Litvinova et al., 2020). Studies have reported a significant relationship between both in a way that self-esteem predicts psychological adjustment and well-being, while procrastination predicts self-esteem (Bajaj et al., 2016; Lin, 2015). The level of procrastination increases as a result of an increase in threat against one's self-esteem.

Authors argue that procrastination is a defense mechanism for people with low self-esteem or who fear failure, often used to delay important tasks allocated by supervisors (Batool et al., 2017). Literature also suggests self-efficacy acts as situational self-esteem, leading to procrastination when individuals doubt their ability to fulfill the jobs (Batool et al., 2017; Pahlavani et al., 2015). Past research indicates that employees' self-worth influences their behavior, with contingent self-esteem guiding their positive or negative actions (Ferris et al., 2015). The measures of workplace significance are also moderated by the degree to which an individual’s self-esteem is based on their performance at work (Ma, 2016). When individuals feel threatened by their esteem, their logical reasoning is diminished, leading to a decomposed cognitive state and intentionally negative reactions (Hen et al., 2021).

H3. There is a direct and positive relationship between TSE and TP.

2.4 Individual resilience b/w supervisor ostracism and threat to self-esteem

The study proposes that the relationship between SO and TSE is subject to moderate through "individual resilience". Authors define Resilience as "a particular capability to get back from stressful situations that one uses to recover himself from stress and adversity" (Anasori et al., 2021). According to previous research, employees with more resilience capability have greater emotional and mental power to cope when encounter with undesirable conditions. Similarly, studies have documented that resilient employees are better able to handle stressful situations and emotional exhaustion. Past literature has also incorporated self-compassion as a favorable substitute to the construct of self-esteem for influencing against Ostracism (Gunnell et al., 2017). Self-compassion refers to the generous and understanding to one self during difficult situations. Former researchers investigated the comparison effects of self-esteem on emotional, cognitive and behavioral responses to ostracized experiences. And the conclusion backs up the idea that IR and self-esteem serve as protective buffers against the harmful effects of ostracism in the short run (Hsu and Lin, 2017).

SO has several negative effects in terms of personal and organizational aspects but this effect could be reduced by being ostracized in couples with self-esteem contingency on workplace performance (Ferris et al., 2008). Kong (2016) believes that Mindful employees are well aware of their internal and external environment, so they maintain a calm state with the help of coping techniques. As a result, employees with high resilience power can identify multiple pathways that would enable them to tackle exclusion problems at work (Hsu and Lin, 2017). Ostracism leads to various negative behaviors like burnout, turnover and dissatisfaction, but can be mitigated by inner strength and self-sufficiency (Choi, 2019; Fatima et al., 2019).

H4. IR weakens the relationship between SO and TSE so individuals with high resilience power feel the lesser threat to their self-esteem.
2.5 Supervisor ostracism and knowledge hiding

SO has been previously related with diverse impacts in terms of counter-productive work behavior, emotional exhaustion (Li et al., 2021), deliberate silence and turnover intentions (Fatima et al., 2019). Aside from the psychological impacts, Ostracism also has work-related outcomes which deviate from the actual employee behavior and provokes them to behave unethically (Akhtar et al., 2020). Researchers observed that ostracized employees feel excluded from formal discussions and workplace meetings, leading them to involve in KH behavior. There have been a few more attempts to investigate this problem in the context of knowledge sharing in organizations (Zhao et al., 2016) but the literature suggests to recognize the major veracities at work (Alyoussef and Al-Rahmi, 2022). The receipt of a “silent treatment” or not being invited to business meetings/gatherings cause the reason to hold important information with employees (De Clercq et al., 2019). It has also been observed that employees tend to promote pretended behavior and try to engage in playing dumb, just as a result of finding ostracized behavior from supervisors (Hewlin et al., 2017).

Ostracism was found as one of the most significant predictors of KH and signifies an important issue to be investigated in empirical studies (Takhsha et al., 2020; Zhao et al., 2016). Nowadays, KH has become a very common approach at different workplaces, intending to display hostile reactions against ostracism and put down the supervisor (Pertiwi et al., 2023). It’s worth noting that information sharing is a choice practice that is not explicitly specified in job descriptions. Employees' prosocial and voluntary engagements like information sharing are reduced when they are shunned (De Clercq et al., 2019). Based on Kouchaki and Wareham’s observation (2015), workplace or SO may cause harmful behaviors on behalf of employees and deviate them from real performance.

**H5.** The perceived SO positively relates to knowledge-hiding behavior.

2.6 Supervisor ostracism and task procrastination

The ostracized employees are excluded from the social circles and consequently turn into the form of “social death”. Experiencing Ostracism at work, especially from a supervisor can instigate several consequences in terms of threatening one’s esteem, psychological illness and engaging in unethical and sabotage work behaviors (Hen et al., 2021; Sharma and Dhar, 2021). A form of sabotage behavior reflects in TP which may adversely affect on organizational effectiveness. Authors define TP as “an unreasonable desire to put off doing something or making a decision despite knowing the fact that doing so will make one worse off” (Ferrari and Díaz-Morales, 2014). Basically, procrastination is a counter-productive or dysfunctional job behavior with the intent to delay the designated task. The previous literature enlightens this issue as the act of deferring or postponing a planned action, whether it is decision-oriented or task-related (Howell and Watson, 2007; Chauhan et al., 2020).

The reasons for such intentional delays or handicapped behaviors are associated with ostracism after-effects (Li et al., 2021). The employees perceived as having “no attention” may suffer from negative thoughts and self-protective responses and lessen work efficacy (Zhao et al., 2016). Subsequently, such employees start delaying the work-related task as a sabotage reaction to ostracism. The researchers found that the resources obtained from a formal network are missed when a subordinate is deprived of his/her supervisor. As a result, they tend to channel their emotions adversely and react destructively (Yaakobi and Williams, 2016). Ultimately, it also has a psychological impact on other informal networks within the organization, resulting in workplace deviance and TP behaviors:

**H6.** The perceived SO positively relates to TP behavior.
3. Methods and data presentation
The study employed a quantitative approach, using questionnaires to collect data and mainly focused on statistics and standards. The authors used SPSS and smart PLS for its efficiency in management and social sciences with small samples (Ringle et al., 2020). Data were collected from middle-level managers with more than one-year experience in three public sector universities in Pakistan, employing purposive sampling. By using a three-wave research design with a three-week interval in each phase, we were able to separate the measurement of the predictor and moderator factor (SO and IR), mediator (TSE) and outcome variables (KH and TP).

With the assistance of human resource (HR) departments, we were able to compile a list of full time employees for distribution of survey. For time one (T1), researchers distributed 500 self-reported survey questionnaires with questions about SO and IR as well as demographic information of the respondents. 372 useful responses were obtained. For time two (T2), with time interval of three weeks, 372 self-reported survey questionnaires were distributed to same respondents to get feedback on TSE. At T3, the coworkers were again given questionnaire to complete which included questions about TP and knowledge-hiding (KH). After completion of all three-time intervals, 235 correctly filled out questionnaires were used for data analysis, with an overall response rate of 47%.

The research questionnaire comprised 28 study items, based on a five-point Likert scale and encompassing five constructs. All research items were adapted from existing literature and based on validated scales. The “Supervisor Ostracism” scale was adapted by replacing workplace ostracism to SO (Ferris et al., 2008; Hitlan and Noel, 2009). The five measurement items were modified a little in the context of current study including “My Supervisor does not invite me to take part in work-related activities”, “My Supervisor ignores me at work”, “Supervisor not responding to my requests/questions within a reasonable time period”. Next, “Threat to one’s Self esteem” scale is based on “self-esteem” 10-item scale given by previous study (Rosenberg, 1965). Based on the contextual relevance and methodological precision of the original scale, the current study adapted few questions to measure “threat to one’s self esteem”. The sample measurement items including, e.g. “I feel my self-esteem is threatened, when I get ignored”, “Social rejection makes me feel bad about myself”, “I feel that I’m not a person of worth with others”. The “Knowledge Hiding” scale (Evans et al., 2015) measures KH intentions of employees through asking certain questions including “I keep information confidential until the suitable time”, “I don’t divulge knowledge to others because I want to keep control,”, “I intentionally control the release of information”. The sample measurement items for “Task Procrastination” scale (Svartdal et al., 2020) include, “I don’t begin writing until a week before the deadline”, “I use to unnecessarily delay finishing jobs, even when they are important”. Lastly, “Individual Resilience” (Winwood et al., 2013) intends to measure research questions including, e.g. “I am aware of my personal strengths and consistently employ them in my job”, “When necessary, I can adjust my attitude at work”, “I am able to utilize some effective strategies to cope with stress at work”.

3.1 Data analysis and study results
The most recent Smart-PLS version 3.3 was used to analyze the structural equation model (SEM). Measurement of the link between the dependent, independent and mediator is done using structural equation modeling technique. There are two analytical stages in the SEM as described in the following section.
3.2 Measurement model assessment
Data was analyzed first with preliminary testing assumptions with descriptive statistics, central tendency measures (Mean), measures of dispersion (standard deviation) and correlation coefficients (r) given in Table 1. The structural model was then put to the test using Cronbach alpha, composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) to ensure its validity and reliability. Table 2 displays reliability and CR values that surpass the 0.70 level. The AVE for all constructs meet the threshold value of 0.05. The study’s subsequent section uses a number of techniques to verify the data’s discriminant validity. Factor loading for study items also meet the acceptable range, exceeding 0.70 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Using the crossloading of every variable listed (Table 3) and the criterion (Table 4) provided by Fornell and Larcker (1981), the discriminant validity was examined.

3.3 Structural model assessment
The suggested hypotheses were tested by looking at the structural path model, which included the standardized coefficient \( \beta \), t-value and \( p \)-value (Ringle et al., 2020). Given that the \( p \) values are significant and the t values are higher than 1.96, all hypotheses are accepted and supported. The results of path analysis (Figure 2, Table 5) show that SO is positively associated with TSE \( (\beta = 0.31, p = 0.001) \). The relationship between SO and KH is considerable and positive \( (\beta = 0.25, p = 0.001) \), henceforth the hypothesis is accepted and supported. The effect of TSE on KH is indicated with values \( (\beta = 0.23, p = 0.001) \). TSE exhibits a substantial positive connection with TP \( (\beta = 0.467, p = 0.000) \), indicating that the hypothesis is accepted and supported.

The mediation of TSE has a significant relationship between SO and KH \( (\beta = 0.075, p = 0.003) \). The mediation of TSE has a significant relationship between SO and TP \( (\beta = 0.147, p = 0.001) \). The interaction effect of IR exists between SO and TSE \( (\beta = -0.156, p = 0.003) \). Figure 3 demonstrates that the impact of SO on TSE will be weaker when the IR is high.

4. Study results
The study has following results:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>SO</th>
<th>TSE</th>
<th>KH</th>
<th>TP</th>
<th>IR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SO</td>
<td>3.3806</td>
<td>0.772</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>3.6043</td>
<td>0.766</td>
<td>0.306</td>
<td>(0.927)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KH</td>
<td>3.2064</td>
<td>0.789</td>
<td>0.327</td>
<td>0.316</td>
<td>(0.958)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP</td>
<td>3.9920</td>
<td>0.643</td>
<td>0.486</td>
<td>0.572</td>
<td>0.361</td>
<td>(0.907)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IR</td>
<td>3.3106</td>
<td>0.698</td>
<td>0.338</td>
<td>0.235</td>
<td>0.194</td>
<td>0.488</td>
<td>(0.903)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, correlation coefficients

Note(s): SO: Supervisor Ostracism; KH: Knowledge Hiding; TP: Task Procrastination; TSE: Threat to self-Esteem; IR: Individual Resilience

Source(s): Authors’ own work
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>Cronbach’s α</th>
<th>CR</th>
<th>AVE</th>
<th>Factor loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supervisor ostracism</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My supervisor does not actively involve me in work-related activities and decisions</td>
<td>0.864</td>
<td>0.965</td>
<td>0.822</td>
<td>0.881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My supervisor does not acknowledge my presence at my workplace</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I perceive that my supervisor treats me as if I am invisible or not important</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My supervisor ignores me at work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My supervisor does not respond to my requests/questions within a reasonable time period</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Threat to self-esteem</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that I’m not a person of worth with others</td>
<td>0.927</td>
<td>0.945</td>
<td>0.774</td>
<td>0.849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel a negative attitude toward myself</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At times, I experience feelings of failure and doubt my capabilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel my self-esteem is threatened, when I get ignored</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social rejection makes me feel bad about myself</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.878</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that I’m not a person of worth with others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge hiding</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I intentionally keep information about my work progress hidden until it’s necessary to share</td>
<td>0.858</td>
<td>0.968</td>
<td>0.857</td>
<td>0.902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I avoid releasing certain information to maintain control over a situation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I selectively control the release of information to present a particular image to others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that safeguarding information is crucial in the workplace</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t divulge knowledge to others because I want to keep control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Task procrastination</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tend to delay starting important tasks until they are close to the deadline</td>
<td>0.907</td>
<td>0.926</td>
<td>0.643</td>
<td>0.735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Even when tasks are crucial, I sometimes unnecessarily delay completing them</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t begin writing until a week before the deadline</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use to unnecessarily delay finishing jobs, even when they are important</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.779</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I find it difficult to maintain consistent focus and productivity to complete task in time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual resilience</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am aware of my personal strengths and use them effectively in my job</td>
<td>0.803</td>
<td>0.926</td>
<td>0.679</td>
<td>0.808</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I actively employ effective strategies to cope with stress and pressure at work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe that developing resilience is essential for a successful career</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am aware of my personal strengths and consistently employ them in my job</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When necessary, I can adjust my attitude at work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.871</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am able to utilize some effective strategies to cope with stress at work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.785</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source(s):** Authors’ own work

**Table 2.** Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

**Table 3.** Cross loadings of the variables
Construct | IR | KH | SO | TP | TSE
--- | --- | --- | --- | --- | ---
KH4 | 0.199 | 0.937 | 0.327 | 0.355 | 0.3
KH5 | 0.193 | 0.924 | 0.319 | 0.348 | 0.284
SE1 | 0.197 | 0.287 | 0.307 | 0.493 | 0.849
SE2 | 0.234 | 0.31 | 0.281 | 0.54 | 0.919
SE3 | 0.264 | 0.283 | 0.292 | 0.515 | 0.88
SE4 | 0.217 | 0.243 | 0.235 | 0.463 | 0.874
SE5 | 0.205 | 0.272 | 0.25 | 0.509 | 0.878
SO1 | 0.313 | 0.313 | 0.881 | 0.489 | 0.318
SO2 | 0.316 | 0.326 | 0.898 | 0.425 | 0.283
SO3 | 0.31 | 0.33 | 0.93 | 0.459 | 0.275
SO4 | 0.313 | 0.311 | 0.919 | 0.451 | 0.3
SO5 | 0.316 | 0.299 | 0.939 | 0.45 | 0.292
SO6 | 0.28 | 0.204 | 0.872 | 0.372 | 0.204
TP1 | 0.35 | 0.278 | 0.433 | 0.735 | 0.433
TP2 | 0.414 | 0.319 | 0.384 | 0.857 | 0.507
TP3 | 0.403 | 0.299 | 0.384 | 0.803 | 0.461
TP4 | 0.468 | 0.267 | 0.36 | 0.779 | 0.456
TP5 | 0.403 | 0.297 | 0.371 | 0.837 | 0.486

Note(s): Italic values indicate the item loadings on constructs. SO: Supervisor Ostracism; KH: Knowledge Hiding; TP: Task Procrastination; TSE: Threat to self-Esteem; IR: Individual Resilience

Source(s): Authors’ own work

Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>IR</th>
<th>KH</th>
<th>SO</th>
<th>TP</th>
<th>TSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IR</td>
<td>0.824</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KH</td>
<td>0.196</td>
<td>0.926</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SO</td>
<td>0.341</td>
<td>0.332</td>
<td>0.907</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP</td>
<td>0.494</td>
<td>0.362</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.802</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSE</td>
<td>0.254</td>
<td>0.318</td>
<td>0.311</td>
<td>0.574</td>
<td>0.880</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note(s): SO: Supervisor Ostracism; KH: Knowledge Hiding; TP: Task Procrastination; TSE: Threat to self-Esteem; IR: Individual Resilience

Source(s): Authors’ own work

Table 4.

Figure 2.
Results from structural equation modeling (SEM)

Source(s): Authors’ own work
5. Discussion and conclusion
All hypotheses are supported by the data results and study findings, which indicate that the variables in the current study have a strong and statistically significant relationship. Specifically, the study focuses on analyzing how SO affects employee KH and TP. This influence is mediated by the impact of threats to self-esteem, while also taking into account the moderating effect of IR. The research contributes significantly to the existing literature by fulfilling the objectives outlined in the study.

The investigation of employee behavior pertaining to information concealment and TP fills a significant gap in the existing literature of ostracism and employee psychology (Zhao et al., 2016; Brouwer and Jansen, 2019). These relationships have significant implications from organizational and management perspectives. First, it becomes substantial how important social dynamics are in determining the employee behavior at work. Second, using lens of sociometer theory, the study highlights the impact of ostracism on employee’s psychological behavior and productivity in the form of KH and TP. The study findings show alignment with earlier research indicating that when subjected to ostracism, employees tend to exhibit some sort of psychological resistance responses (Gonsalkorale and Williams, 2007).

### Table 5.
Standardized regression estimation structural model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Path</th>
<th>Standardized coefficient</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor ostracism → Knowledge hiding</td>
<td>0.258</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor ostracism → Task procrastination</td>
<td>0.344</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor ostracism → Threat to self-esteem</td>
<td>0.316</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat to self-esteem → Knowledge hiding</td>
<td>0.238</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threat to self-esteem → Task procrastination</td>
<td>0.467</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Indirect effect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Path</th>
<th>Standardized coefficient</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor ostracism → Threat to self-esteem → Knowledge hiding</td>
<td>0.075</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor ostracism → Threat to self-esteem → Task procrastination</td>
<td>0.147</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Moderating effect

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Path</th>
<th>Standardized coefficient</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual resilience x Supervisor ostracism &gt; Threat to self-esteem</td>
<td>−0.156</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note(s):** *p* < 0.05, **p** < 0.01, ***p*** < 0.001. SO: Supervisor Ostracism; KH: Knowledge Hiding; TP: Task Procrastination; TSE: Threat to self-Esteem; IR: Individual Resilience

**Source(s):** Authors’ own work

**Figure 3.** Moderating role of individual resilience (IR) between supervisor ostracism (SO) and threat to self-esteem (TSE)

**Note(s):** IR dampens the positive relationship between SO and TSE

**Source(s):** Authors’ own work
Furthermore, the findings supported the moderating effect of IR on the relationship between TSE and SO. IR has been found to have a dampening effect on TSE. Specifically, the results suggest that as employees experience more ostracism, less resilient employees are more open to the hidden toll of ostracism effect. The findings are consistent with previous studies (Anasori et al., 2021; Waldeck et al., 2015). The findings of this study further align with previous research indicating that employees who experience ostracism are less engaged in appropriate organizational behavior (Ma, 2016). SO elicits painful emotions, leading employees to react negatively as a means to alleviate this distress (Li et al., 2021). The study reveals that when individuals' relational needs are threatened, they are more inclined to adopt different psychological behaviors in order to gain acceptance from those who exclude them.

6. Study limitations and future directions
This study has a few limitations that should be acknowledged. First, this study is quantitative in nature. So, future studies can adopt qualitative or observational strategies to give researchers and practitioners a better understanding on the subject. Second, even though, authors used time-lagged design to determine the cause and effect relationship between variables, but still there are chances of error until the data are of a correlational nature. Hence, we recommend additional experimental or longitudinal study design in future with more specific demographics.

Third, respondents were employees from Pakistan's higher education sector, which highly demands knowledge sharing and active involvement as a significant field. However, a similar study carried out with a large sample size in an individualistic culture and different sectors can have diverse findings. Lastly, future studies may also use organizational identity and social support as moderating variables to lessen the effects of SO.

7. Study implications
This study has several implications for managers and practitioners from the perspective of organizational psychology. According to the study, employee ostracism in the way of feeling excluded or shunned may have the tendency to act unethically, ultimately harming organizational concerns. The study results suggest that managers in organizations in the education sector should identify Ostracism sooner and put relevant efforts to lessen its negative effects. In this current era of a knowledge-based economy, KH among employees has become a significant complication to achieving organizational tasks efficiently. Besides this, procrastination in academic tasks due to Ostracism is a significant issue and also obtained great consideration in the past by researchers.

A research void exists in understanding the obstacles to KH within the context of team dynamics and interpersonal mistreatment at workplace. This gap arises due to previous studies primarily concentrating on knowledge sharing, organizational culture and organizational obstruction (Akhtar et al., 2020). Therefore, the present study covers this gap through seeking the after-effects of SO in the form of counter-productive work behavior. The threat to one’s self-esteem plays the role of mediator in providing more urge towards these unethical work behaviors. Therefore, the organization should closely monitor the level of workplace ostracism through routinely gauge the work place using targeted techniques like surveys and observation. Furthermore, employee empowerment and collaborative decision-making can boost workers' self-esteem, eventually leading to diminishing KH and procrastination habits inside the organization.
References


Further reading


Corresponding author
Binesh Sarwar can be contacted at: bineshsarwar@yahoo.com