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Workplace Ostracism: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to review research on workplace ostracism and its impact on employees and analyze gaps that require further research. The methodology used was collecting articles on workplace ostracism published in Scopus between 2020 and 2025 using open access. These articles cover various industries such as healthcare, manufacturing, consumer goods, hospitality, and education, with over 50% of the research conducted in Asian countries, primarily China and Pakistan. The study found that workplace ostracism occurs at various organizational levels and is associated with factors such as performance and job stress. Other factors such as leadership and culture also influence employee behavior. Key findings indicate that workplace ostracism negatively impacts employee psychological aspects, such as burnout, job satisfaction, self-esteem, and well-being. Employees who feel neglected feel unappreciated, which can decrease performance and lead to information avoidance, as well as increase intentions to leave the job. Ostracism also impacts employees' personal relationships, including with family. Therefore, it is important for organizations to identify and prevent ostracism to maintain employee psychological health and organizational performance.

Keywords: Workplace Ostracism, Counterproductive Behaviour, Knowledge Hiding, Turnover Intention

INTRODUCTION

Workplace ostracism refers to a workplace situation whereby employee perceives him/herself as being alienated or ignored by others, that could be his/her coworkers or supervisors in the workplace (Ferris, et al., 2008; Yee, etal., 2019). Thus, it appears to be real problem that generate individual and also at organizational consequences (Attaulah, Bilal,2021), because it causes increasing on employee's psychological stress and might lead into psychical problem and trigger deviant behaviour that at the end affect organization's operation (Howard, et al., 2020; Wang, et al., 2023). Further, employees who experience workplace ostracism tends to have anxiety, tension and emotional exhaustion which appear to destroy their good experiences in work (Wang, et al., 2023), that will also influence on organization performance. Specifically, employees who experiences coworker ostracism seem to have increasing counterproductive work behaviour addressed to both coworkers and the organization, while the employees who experience supervisor ostracism, tend to have

increasing counterproductive work behaviours targeted at the organization (Hitlan and Noel., 2009; Brison, Noemie et al., 2024).

The aim of this paper is to analyse research on workplace ostracism in different industries. How the previous research explains influence of workplace ostracism to psychological aspect of employee and how it influences employee behaviour. First, the paper will look more detail on most psychological aspect which affected by workplace ostracism. The psychological aspect emerged as respond of workplace ostracism will emerge in behaviour of employee affected. Also, the paper will look also on how the psychological aspect influence employee himself in terms of personality or perspectives Then, the paper will analyse the psychological aspects emerged as behaviour of employee as respond of workplace ostracism in the work place. How these behaviours influence some aspects, for example, relationship of employees and employee's performance. Further, the paper will look also on the behaviour affects organization, in terms of performance. Based on these objectives, the following research questions are formulated:

RQ1. What industries are being subject of the research?

RQ2. How workplace ostracism affect organization and employee?

METHOD

The author follows some stages of methodology adapted from Jesson et al. (2011):

First, the author define the research question about topics on workplace ostracism at work place and then design the research based on systematic literature review. The systematic literature review was chosen since it would provide general perspective on specific area stated and able to provide different data of different region or industries. Therefore, it would make an ease for the author to draw general analysis and conclusion form the researches conducted previously. The author limits the searching from the article published in scopus and apply criteria to differ articles that will be analysed. The criteria used as inclusion criteria is : paper in form of article, final publication, English language and open access. The author excluded grey literature such as reports, non-academic research and languages other than English. The next stages are shown in Figure 1.

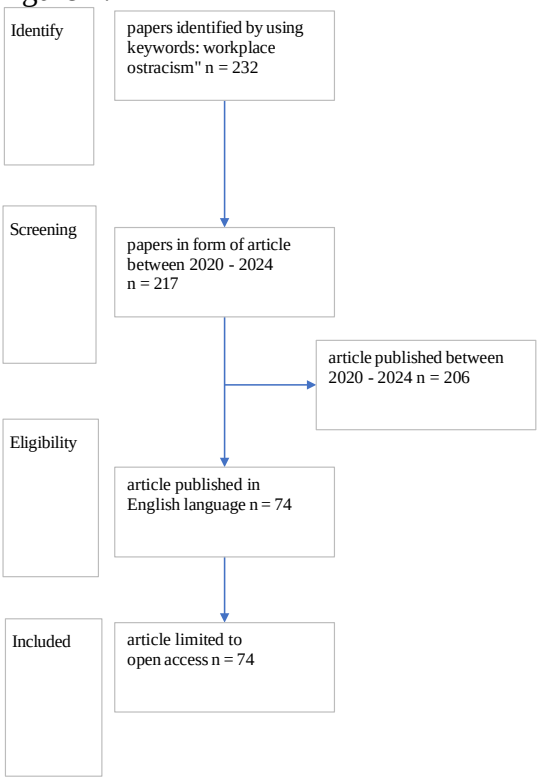


Figure 1. Workflow

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To answer research question about the topics being studied in workplace ostracism, the research finds as follows:

Table 1. Industries Coverage the Research

Industries	%
Hospitality	7%
Multiple sectors	48%
Nursing	7%
SME to ME	4%
Education	7%
Service industry	7%
Information technology	3%
Healthcare (not specified)	9%
Government & public sector	4%
Banking	3%
Engineering & business sector	1%
Not acquired	1%
Total	100%

Tabel 2. Issued Related to Workplace Ostracism

Aspect	Factors	Issues related to workplace ostracism
Organization	Engagement, turn over, team collaboration, leadership, culture, etc	24
Employee	Performance, behavior and emotional responses	47
Others	Family conflict	3
	Perpetators	1

The table shows most topics about workplace ostracism talk about how it influences the aspects in organization and employee. Next, we explain how selected papers analyse workplace ostracism based on each aspect.

Organization:

Workplace ostracism and turn over intention (13 papers)

To discuss about workplace ostracism, we might see form social identity theory perspective, as workplace ostracism leads the reduction of sense of affiliation, respect, control, and meaningful existence that are highly important for organizational working life. Workplace ostracism also invalidates the authority, autonomy, and responsibility which employee should receive from the organization, which at the end make employee fails from forming a psychological attachment to the organization or group (Williams, et al., 1997; Kim, et al., 2021). Therefore, when employee experience workplace ostracism, e.g abusive leadership, they have intention to resign because of lack of attachment to the organization he works for. (Ozkan, 2021). Oskan (2021) furthers explain about employees who experienced neglect or social exclusion, either it directly perceived supervisors or indirectly coming from peers who mirrored the leader's behaviour will emerge feeling of socially unsafe and undervalued within employee. This social alienation undermined commitment and heightened intentions to quit. Özkan's

results demonstrate how a toxic leadership climate perpetuates ostracism as an accepted norm, thereby accelerating voluntary turnoverIn the other side, workplace ostracism causes employee to encounter job stress that influence employee to have higher possibility to leave the organization. (Yee, Koon Vui., et al., 2019)

Workplace ostracism and leadership (5 papers)

While workplace ostracism reduces employees' wellbeing, it might be helped by a style of authentic leadership that can mediate subjective wellbeing through need satisfaction, for example: enhancing interdependence, promote relationship building, and also considering levels of autonomy which help individuals grow and enhance their well-being. (Jang, Eunmi., Chen, Xing, 2022). By doing this, leaders help employee by developing trust and friendship relationship, employee will feel less ostracised. (Chaman, Seemab., et al, 2022). When leader able to "practice what they preach", it will enhance interpersonal trust, which in turn reduces perceptions of ostracism among subordinates. Leader action become a crucial antecedent of good relationship between leader and employee. employee will value fairness, honesty that fostering trust and psychological safety that reduce workplace ostracism perception (Chaman, Seemab., et al, 2022). In addition, Jang, Eunmi, Chen, Xing (2022) explain leaders as providers of psychological resource within organization by encouraging open dialogue, ethical consistency, and empathy. This behaviour will minimize impact of workplace ostracism. Employee who see the leader behaviour will feel more capable and autonomous. As addition, Jang, Eumni., Chen., Xing (202) mentions about leadership as not as is not merely positional authority, rather it a relational process that determines whether organizational climates become exclusionary or empowering employee.

Workplace ostracism and cultural influence (2 paper)

Bila et al. (2021) explain about workplace ostracism impact in collective cultures, lead to stronger negative effects as employees place a high value on social belonging. In collectivist cultures, ostracism reflects not merely interpersonal animosity but a culturally sanctioned strategy to maintain order and conformity within organization or society. The results of workplace ostracism damages cohesive ties among employees which reduces their social interaction and it possibles to promote exclusion in the workplace. Employees who perceive workplace ostracism are divided into some responses, the first is to indulge in protest to raise concern about workplace ostracism, while other employees show aggression behaviour toward the employees who ostracize them. Meanwhile, employee who are behave submissive, more likely to have aggression behaviour on others, that is, family and friends. (Bilal, Raza, et al 2021).

Workplace ostracism, work engagement, organization commitment (3 papers)

The findings shows that workplace ostracism relates negatively with employees' job engagement because it reduces employees' sense of obligation to the work itself (Xu, Xiaofeng., et al, 2020). The study by Howard et al. (2020) further clarifies emotional pathway from ostracism to disengagement, that employees who experience sustained ostracism exhibit a loss of engagement and depersonalization toward their organization. This disengagement reflects both emotional withdrawal and motivational depletion. These are predictors of declining organizational commitment. Employees who feel socially excluded interpret ostracism as institutional neglect, perceiving the organization as complicit in their exclusion. As a result, they disengage from the organizational mission and show lower continuance and affective commitment. Further, employee will exhibit behavioural expression of declining commitment to organization. Also, being ostracized by working environment, employees tend to perceive that they are not able, not competent and have no access for their own decision. These feeling becomes their reflection that led into lower job engagement (Dong, Niannian., et al, 2024) and

lower their commitment to organization indeed (Risgiyanti., et al, 2023). This condition is merely caused by lower psychological empowerment within employee that lead into emotional detachment and gradually disengage and detach from organizational goals (Xu, Xiaofeng., et al, 2020).

Workplace ostracism and sense of belong (1 paper)

Kwan et al. (2022) provide compelling evidence that the need to belong is a powerful antecedent of workplace behaviour and social dynamics. this study also underscores the cultural importance of belonging in collectivist societies, in which harmony and interdependence are central to social and organizational life. In this context, ostracism is especially painful because it violates shared cultural expectations of group inclusion. Kwan et al. (2022) note that collectivist values amplify the psychological salience of belongingness, making employees more sensitive to both acceptance and exclusion. Ultimately, nurturing organization culture that values inclusion and belonging not only minimizes ostracism but also strengthens collective engagement and cohesion. Its a vital step toward sustainable organizational life between employee.

Employee:

Workplace ostracism and counterproductive behaviour (12 papers)

Workplace ostracism indeed relates to counterproductive behaviour in terms of attitude as impact of it (Zhu, Yingge and Zhang, Denghao, 2021). When employee perceive behaviour through ignoring or isolation form ostracised workplace, these may lead into anger (Zhu, Yingge and Zhang, Denghao, 2021) and another poor attitude (Awad, et al., 2023). Attaullah & Afsar (2021) extend this emotional mechanism through a stress-based lens, they found that workplace ostracism significantly predicts job stress, which, in turn, mediates engagement in counterproductive behaviour. In other words, employee experience workplace ostracism displays active engagement in non-productive activities. (Ali, et al., 2020). For example, driven by anger, employee may lose ability to control, instead do something counterproductive to relieve their emotions (Zhu, Yingge and Zhang, Denghao, 2021). Other employee will commit abuse, sabotage, production deviance, withdrawal, and theft as result of counterproductive behaviour (Awad, et al., 2023).

Workplace ostracism and knowledge hiding (5 papers)

Workplace ostracism plays significant factor to influence knowledge hiding, since it creates emotional depletes that lead into anxiety, insomnia and depression that lead employee to conceal information from coworkers or doing resource retention, because of conserving resources of employee. (Mohsin, et al.,2022). Thus, ostracism indirectly promotes knowledge hiding via heightened job anxiety, revealing the psychological mechanism connecting social exclusion to counterproductive knowledge behaviour. In other word, workplace ostracism influence employees to have feeling of obligation to act negatively by hiding relevant information whenever needed as feeling of insufficient belonginess to the organization (Al-Dhuhouri, et al., 2023).

Workplace Ostracism, deviant behaviour, psychological aspects : well-being, self-esteem, job satisfaction and burnout, etc. (12 papers)

Workplace ostracism directly influences employee deviant behaviour as result of being ignored or excluded such as reduced organizational commitment and sabotage (Luo, Jian et al, 2022). Moreover, if employee with low esteem, will easily to have deviant behavior when perceive workplace ostracism (Zafar, Usman., Mahmood, Asif, 2022).Workplace ostracism affect employee to feel envy, which leads into emotional exhaustion (Wang, Long Mei., et al, 2023) that reflect in job stress and reduce feeling of wellbeing (Kim, Hyunghoon., Jang, Eunmi,

2023). This environment may damage both psychological safety and other personal resources. It leads into deplete resources such as belongingness needs, self-control, wellbeing, etc., which consequently leaving employee perceive emotionally drained and reduce commitment. (Noor, Shahida., and Muhammad Abbas, 2024)

Workplace ostracism, coping mechanism and self-control (9 papers)

The result of the study provides how employee generally perceive and cope with workplace ostracism. The employees tend to avoid coping response as minimize than approach orientation such as confrontation or support seeking unless they perceive workplace ostracism are quite intense. (Meral, O.,Erdem., et al, 2022). Workplace ostracism triggers deviant behaviour in employees because of weaker relationship between employee, thus it means positive relationship is not occur between employees. (Luo, Jian., et al, 2022). This situation may affect employee who have low self-control to fail when working within organization with high workplace ostracism. Instead, they may have more seriously respond to the situation (Hua, Changhua, et al, 2023). According to Ahmad et al. (2024), ostracism diminishes an individual's perceived control. When employee face exclusion, they experience resource depletion, kind of emotional erosion and cognitive energy needed for self-regulation. This is related with research by Noor and Abbas (2024), that found that social exclusion and ostracism reduce employee capacity for self-regulation, increasing vulnerability to emotional exhaustion and disengagement. Then ostracized employees redirect cognitive energy toward coping with social pain, thereby depleting willpower and reducing their ability to maintain goal-directed behavior. This condition often exhibit in reduced motivation and lower affective commitment to the organization

Workplace ostracism, employee creativity and job performance (9 papers)

Workplace ostracism damages creative behaviour as employee perceive it form coworkers (Zhang, Rui., et al, 2022), because it creates malicious envy between employees (Zhang, Wen-Gang., et al, 2024). Thus, employee perceive suffers from workplace ostracism leads into loss of creativity (Zhang, Rui., et al, 2022). Employees who experience workplace ostracism cannot exposed expected performance since they more likely to spend more energy and time solving their own interpersonal problems and then fail to acquire critical information about the job (Bas, Murat., Sirin, M.Sabri, 2023). In addition, their perceptions about self-regulate on workplace perception and behavior also affected, and these make they less engage in social interactions with workplace to provide suggestion about the completion of the work. (Cung, Yang Woon, (2020).

Extending perspective on workplace ostracism, Samma et al. (2020) explored the effect on innovative work behaviour through the mediating role of job anxiety. They revealed that ostracism threatens key psychological resources, as belonging and respect, which lead to heightened anxiety that suppresses innovative behaviour. Job anxiety diverts cognitive energy away from creative problem-solving toward self-preservation, reducing the capacity for risk-taking and experimentation essential to innovation (Samma et al., 2020). This study highlights the emotional cost of ostracism: when employee focus on coping with exclusion, the employee will have less focus on generative thinking or creative exploration. From the perspective of job performance, Chung (2020) found that workplace ostracism disrupts team member exchange (TMX), that weakening cooperative dynamics and information sharing. When job tasks require frequent collaboration, ostracism emerges a stronger negative influence on performance because excluded employees are cut off from work networks (Chung, 2020). This lead into less performance because of lack of coordination and supports of exclusion employee.

Family :

Workplace ostracism and family effect (3 papers)

Aside from effect on self-esteem, sense of belonging, workplace ostracism influence employees to engage in antisocial behaviour and make them perceive poor personal reputation which in turn negatively affects their provision of social support to family members. (Zhang, Haina, et al, 2023). According to Zhang et.al (2023), when employee perceived ostracism in the work place, such as being ignored or excluded, the employee will involve in certain condition that erode personal reputation, because of lack of competence or being acceptance in the workplace. This condition will reduce employee capability to support both emotional and behavioural in family. Besides, employees who suffer from workplace ostracism have more possibility to experience negative emotions (e.g., anxiety, depression), and they need an extra time and effort to adjust the negative emotions and psychological stress, both of which consume psychological resources (Zhang et.al, 2023). This occurs because employee already deplete resources to coping stress at workplace because of perceiving ostracism. (Zhang&Xu,2024). In other word, being ostracized at work undermines how employees see themselves and how much support they can do for family members at home, unless the work context supplies offsetting support (Zhang et.al.,2023).

Other :

Workplace ostracism and perpetrators (1 paper)

The study explains verifies that when employees who act as perpetrators of workplace ostracism, have feeling of guilty because of hurting others, and they feel loss of moral credits, will adopt helping behaviour to restore their damage image. Besides, they will provide a help to others as act of psychological compensation. The Perpetrators who have guilty experience and a loss of moral credits perception would have a stronger tendency to help others and have willingness to do more help behaviour especially when they have high moral identity symbolization (He, et., al,2023). He, et.,al (2023) relates this behaviour to moral cleansing theory, mentioned that employee strives to maintain a balanced moral self-concept, or the equilibrium between their ideal moral self-image and their actual self-evaluation. Therefore, the perpetrators urge to fix this equilibrium to bring balance moral concept.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review conducted has some limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the study only analyses the journals published within year 2020 – 2024. Second, the study does not include other journals that not listed in Scopus and journals not published in English language. We have suggestion to study on workplace ostracism deeper within industries, for example by collecting more samples on different level of work, location or work method that will enrich perspectives of workplace ostracism and may lead into understanding of specific kind of ostracism of different work field. Also, the study needed to be enlarge to cover more different kind of employee based on gender, culture, age to have broad point of view on workplace ostracism, such as what different norms of culture that may lead ostracism and how ostracism emerge between gap of age. These future studies will expose to us how ostracism occurs and how we face and minimize it in organization.

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