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# Relationship between workplace ostracism and job productivity: the mediating effect of emotional exhaustion and lack of motivation

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Drawing on the transactional theory of stress and coping, this paper aims to identify the relationship between workplace ostracism and job productivity by analyzing the mediating role of emotional exhaustion and lack of motivation.

**Design/methodology/approach** – We collected data from a sample of 396 employees from 20 manufacturing companies in Jordan using a survey-based, two-tiered approach. The partial least squares structural equation modeling method was used to test the direct and indirect effects of ostracism on productivity.

**Findings** – The findings show that workplace ostracism increases emotional exhaustion and motivation, and indirectly decreases job productivity through the mediating role of emotional exhaustion and lack of motivation.

**Originality/value** – The study provides a theoretical foundation on which various companies can base their understanding of workplace ostracism and its relationship to job productivity. By focusing on increased exhaustion and lack of motivation, this study analyzes current literature to establish the impacts on areas of interest and identify expectations in the context of productivity, as well as enhance comprehension of the detrimental effects of workplace ostracism on productivity.

**Keywords** Ostracism, Emotional exhaustion, Workplace motivation, Productivity

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

Workplace ostracism is a situation where individuals perceive exclusion by others, who could be an individual or group of individuals. Therefore, it denotes a form of passive mistreatment among employees, which includes neglectful actions. Workplace ostracism involves both episodic and long-term exclusion behavior by the ostracized or targeted employees. Since the ostracized employees represent the most aggravated and weak side of this passive interpersonal relationship, they represented the focus of previous research, studies aimed at investigating their perspectives (Sharma and Dhar, 2021), and this research as well.

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Workplace ostracism succeeded in gaining the attention of researchers for its negative impact on employees and their relationships with people within organizational boundaries (Mohamad Ibrahim *et al.*, 2022). The issue that causes ostracized employees to experience anxiety and adopt maladaptive behaviors, subsequently leading to negative consequences for job productivity, has been identified by Jiang *et al.* (2020). According to Zhu *et al.* (2017), workplace ostracism is characterized by three main aspects: lack of a specific motivation to harm the ostracized employees, for example, ignoring others for workload reasons. Furthermore, some situations involve excluding ostracized employees, while others encourage them to interact with others. The third case is when people do not give positive attention to the ostracized employees rather than negative attention.

A study by O'Reilly *et al.* (2014), as cited in Sharma and Dhar (2021), revealed that over 71% of surveyed employees reported experiencing workplace ostracism. The negative attitudes towards ostracized employees in the workplace have negative impacts on employees' job productivity because employees express their intentional counterproductive behaviors that hinder financial resources and confuse the organizational culture (Zahid *et al.*, 2021). However, productivity will remain one of the most crucial goals that organizations will seek to achieve.

Scholars, like Jiang *et al.* (2020), investigated the relationship between emotional exhaustion and workplace ostracism due to lack of support and losing emotional connections with others and found a significant relationship between them. Moreover, Steinbauer *et al.* (2018) argue that ostracism influences employees' motivation significantly. Nevertheless, the various perspectives for understanding how the demotivation resulting from exclusion threatens productivity and the best approaches to solving it are hardly sufficient to explain the nature of the problem. Therefore, we expect both emotional exhaustion and a lack of motivation to mediate the relationship between workplace ostracism and job productivity.

Additionally, it is anticipated that a varied study will shed light on possible approaches and methodologies for identifying and quantifying the ground realities for offering a basis for companies to comprehend workplace ostracism and its impact on job productivity, most especially in a manufacturing sector in a developing nation like Jordan. Furthermore, we investigated the mediating effect of emotional exhaustion and a lack of motivation on the relationship between OS and EP. The current empirical findings significantly contribute to understanding and applying the relationship between workplace rejection and productivity, specifically examining the impact of emotional exhaustion and lack of drive on this relationship. With regards to its contribution to knowledge, this study has fused the transactional theory of stress and coping to provide a unified conceptual model for use in the context of Jordanian manufacturing performance from the perspective of workers in relation to their job productivity. Therefore, we implemented this research to explore how emotional exhaustion and a lack of motivation mediate the relationship between workplace ostracism and decreased job productivity. However, the investigation is based on the assumptions of the transactional theory of stress and coping (Dillard, 2019).

In light of the foregoing, this paper examines and confirms that the transactional theory of stress and coping (TTSC) is suitable for considering the capacity of workplace ostracism to predict manufacturing worker productivity, and that emotional exhaustion and a lack of motivation act as mediators in this relationship. Previous scholars have not investigated manufacturing job productivity in conjunction with the TTSC theory under a single framework. Through the PLS-SEM approach, this study addresses the following research questions (RQs):

*RQ1.* What is the impact of workplace ostracism on emotional exhaustion?

*RQ2.* What is the impact of workplace ostracism on lack of motivation?

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*RQ3.* Does work ostracism influence decreased productivity?

*RQ4.* Does emotional exhaustion mediate the relationship between workplace ostracism and decreased job productivity?

*RQ5.* Does lack of motivation mediate the relationship between workplace ostracism and decreased job productivity?

To investigate the proposed RQs, we gathered 396 cross-sectional data from twenty manufacturing firms in Jordan and analyzed it in a structural equation model (SEM) framework. Consequently, we can make several specific contributions, as follows: First, the results of our study will enable firm management to look at how ostracism at work affects employees' health, job performance, and the organization's success over time. In turn, this can help us get a better picture of how ostracism affects people over time and the possible benefits of actions meant to stop and deal with it in the Jordanian manufacturing industry. Second, the results of our study will aid other growing economies and sectors that may face similar challenges with productivity in the future in the context of workplace ostracism.

## 2. Review of literature and hypotheses development

### *2.1 The transactional theory of stress and coping*

According to Lazarus and Folkman's transactional theory of stress and coping, people constantly assess environmental cues. When we perceive stimuli as dangerous, difficult, or detrimental, we experience emotions. In response to this distress, we develop coping mechanisms to control our feelings or try to eliminate the source of the stress. The person-environment interaction changes because of coping mechanisms and this change might be viewed in a positive, negative, or unresolved light.

The transactional theory of stress and coping has emerged from stress conceptualizations. The theory asserts that interactions between individuals, situations, and the environment cause stress. Both appraisals and coping influence transactions through various perceptions of the ability to adapt versus harm. Accordingly, the theory argues that people filter their emotional experience according to their beliefs that they can reduce losses and harm, or, on the contrary, challenge the unaccepted behavior of others that negatively impacts their productivity. Therefore, the challenge suggests that stressed individuals dedicate themselves to harm, threat, and challenge (Dillard, 2019).

The transactional perspective considers coping to be a behavioral and cognitive process to control and reduce the external factors developed by stressful transactions. The transactional theory of stress and coping can lead to two cognitive scenarios, where the individual confronting an encounter condition can conduct an initial cognitive assessment to gauge the potential threat. If the threat exists, he can implement a second iteration of cognitive appraisal to evaluate the coping resources and their effectiveness. These two processes enable the individual to select a coping strategy and estimate its effectiveness. If it results in ineffective outcomes, he can select an alternative strategy and repeat the trial until he achieves satisfactory results (Hansen, 2016).

Individuals' perceptions of the level of danger and their beliefs about their own agency determine the probability of favorable or unfavorable outcomes in stressful situations, as stated in the transactional theory of stress and coping. When discussing the importance of judgment, investment, motivation, beliefs, and intensity in comprehending personal emotional experiences, Lazarus (2012) referred to Arnold, Aristotle, and Roberston as notable critical thinkers. Several studies (Folkman, 1997; Folkman and Lazarus, 1985, 1988; Lazarus *et al.*, 1985; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984) suggest that positive resolution of stressors

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leads to positive emotions. On the other hand, when stressors are unresolved or negatively resolved, they cause distress, which in turn prompts the individual to consider additional coping mechanisms to resolve the stressor.

Many patterns, reflected in the basic assumptions, emerged from the research on the transactional theory of stress and coping. For everyone, a variety of personal and contextual factors significantly influence the onset and persistence of distress. According to Lazarus (1999), who placed an emphasis on the whole system, a skewed or incomplete view of an emotion system results from failing to identify possible factors at any point in the system. Factors that may influence the outcome, the mediating process, and the antecedents are all worth considering. However, studies that look at stress outcomes don't often use Lazarus's full model. Also, partial models can't prove or disprove the transactional theory of stress and coping because they don't show the model's inherent covariance and mediating processes.

Considering the negative consequences of workplace ostracism that contribute to deviant behaviors, lower citizenship and belonging behaviors, cases of withdrawal or exclusion of prosocial behaviors, decreased satisfaction, and emotional exhaustion. Workplace ostracism significantly impacts job performance. Therefore, it is a critical issue for employees to cope with ostracism. Integration is a common coping strategy with ostracism, which represents a behavioral way to increase individual attractiveness in people's eyes. Despite this, adopting coping strategies could be effective in mitigating the impact of ostracism on individuals because they might result in worse situations (Wu *et al.*, 2012). In this regard, Oberai (2021) argues that adopting integration to cope with ostracism varies from one individual to another, and the person who selects this strategy should be an expert in influencing people towards him.

### *2.2 Work ostracism*

Ostracism is the practice of ignoring or excluding someone. According to Ferris *et al.* (2008) and Hitlan *et al.* (2006), ostracism in the workplace can have a negative impact on both interpersonal behavior and job performance. Having a definition that captures and clarifies the core characteristic shared by all of these behaviors—what do exclusion, shunning, ignoring, and rejecting have in common that justifies putting them under a general construct labeled "ostracism"—would be valuable, even though these definitions do identify some behaviors included under ostracism. This category includes a person or group's failure to acknowledge, include, select, or welcome another person or group, as well as other behaviors involving a lack of suitable activities that would otherwise engage someone, such as social exclusion, ignoring, and shrugging.

Workplace ostracism is associated with other forms of interpersonal psychological neglect, such as bullying, incivility, or abusive supervision, which represent the "darker" side of organizational behavior (Leung *et al.*, 2011). Workplace ostracism is a type of passive hostility directed against the organization or its employees, in contrast to aggressive or abusive behaviors that involve exclusionary behavior (Hitlan *et al.*, 2006). When contrasted with more obvious types of undermining behavior (such as verbal abuse), workplace ostracism is frequently more subtle and covert (e.g. not responding to greetings or remaining silent) and has perceptual components that differ from person to person; what one person views as ostracism may not be what another person views as such (Williams and Zadro, 2001). Ostracism may be purposeful or non-purposeful. When there are few other ways to address problems, like in an organization with a flat hierarchy or a culture that discourages open conflict, employees may be more likely to engage in purposeful ostracism.

On the other hand, when people are geographically scattered or in stressful work environments, they are more likely to engage in non-purposeful ostracism. When ostracism is partial, occurs occasionally, comes from a small number of coworkers, and targets only one

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person, it will have a less negative impact on the employee than when it is widespread, chronic, and directed at many. Multiple models have concentrated on ostracism-related behaviors. Depending on the types of exclusive behaviors they identify, several of these constructs may capture very specific actions. For instance, according to Dotan-Eliaz *et al.* (2009), "any situation in which two or more people converse in a language that others around them cannot understand" is a prime example of linguistic ostracism. Social rejection is "when one person seeks to form and maintain at least a temporary alliance or relationship with someone else and that other person says no (at least implicitly)" (Blackhart *et al.*, 2009). As a last illustration, consider "the systematic exclusion of a person who was once an included member of the group" (Anderson, 2009) in the context of an organization. Despite the subtle differences among these concepts, they all pertain to situations where an individual loses their social relationship with another.

### *2.3 Emotional exhaustion*

One characteristic of burnout in the workplace is emotional exhaustion or "the feeling of being emotionally overextended and exhausted" (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). Emotional exhaustion, a common symptom of psychological overwork, can have a negative impact on employees' well-being, as well as emotional and psychological resources (Wang *et al.*, 2023a). Hobfoll and Ford (2007) suggest that emotional exhaustion can arise when workers perceive challenges to their important resources. Ostracism in the workplace is a stressor that can harm workers' mental health and endanger their resources (Heames and Harvey, 2006; Williams and Sommer, 1997). According to research (Lee and Ashforth, 1996) and studies (Heaphy and Dutton, 2008), employees who experience social exclusion from their workplace also experience a decline in their emotional relationships with loved ones.

### *2.4 Ostracism and emotional exhaustion*

Emotional exhaustion represents a negative consequence of ostracism at the workplace. It refers to the feeling of becoming emotionally depleted and overextended by an individual's emotional resources. According to Qi *et al.* (2020), the biggest challenge in addressing ostracism is that it is hardly noticeable. Often, the victim has to report the case to the relevant stakeholders to investigate the matter. However, the lack of the necessary expertise might lead to the investigator failing to notice the problem. Emotional exhaustion is, therefore, highly related to different workplace behaviors, like job productivity, turnover intention, organizational commitment, and citizenship behavior in the case that the ostracized employee is unable to integrate with the group members or cope with them (Koay, 2018). The transactional theory of stress and coping assumes that certain individuals become more vulnerable when they experience any form of stress. In addition, the work environment could be discouraging for coping with stress and burnout feelings (Jiang *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, we find a positive correlation between workplace ostracism and emotional exhaustion, suggesting that the deprivation of emotional resources may lead to emotional exhaustion. Based on these assumptions, we hypothesize a relationship between ostracism and emotional exhaustion.

*H1.* Ostracism positively affects emotional exhaustion.

### *2.5 Ostracism and motivation*

The need to belong motivates individuals to cope with others and preserve their interpersonal attachments, considering the need to belong or the desire to feel interpersonal attachment. Moreover, it influences individuals to gain acceptance from group members and avoid conflicts. Accordingly, the need to belong agrees with the transactional theory of stress and

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coping in terms of motivating individuals to eliminate the negativity of feeling excluded (Kwan *et al.*, 2021). Another viewpoint assumes that some individuals have a high desire for affiliation; therefore, when they experience ostracism, they are still motivated to correct any wrong behavior from their side and adopt a coping strategy to integrate with others. On the contrary, if the ostracized individuals experience a low desire for affiliation, they do not consider ostracism to be a threat and become less motivated to engage in prosocial behavior (Haldorai *et al.*, 2022). According to Kawamoto *et al.* (2013), the other party with a low desire for affiliation experiences more social pain when they feel excluded. If ostracism causes psychological problems, highly sensitive people can detect it. Therefore, they are highly devoted to adverse feelings, and they experience a great shift in motivation and a withdrawal state under the exclusion conditions. These assumptions lead us to hypothesize a relationship between ostracism and a lack of motivation.

*H2.* Ostracism positively influences the lack of motivation.

### *2.6 Ostracism and productivity*

Ostracism is among the factors that cause reduced job productivity. Zahid *et al.* (2021) argue that the relationship between ostracism and job performance is weak and causes workplace deviance. Furthermore, Liu and Xia (2016) have found a significant negative impact of ostracism on counterproductive behavior, albeit with a positive correlation. The low job productivity of ostracized employees is due to their failure to accomplish the required work, limiting the time they spend working to be lower than the indicated work time by the organization through reaching the office late, taking long breaks, absenteeism, or leaving the office early (Fatima, 2016).

De Clercq *et al.* (2019), as cited in Preena (2021), argue that excluded employees become stressed for fear of losing their positions. The problem weakens their focus and discourages them from exerting the necessary effort to meet job objectives. This results in low job productivity as employees struggle to preserve their knowledge and resources in order to overcome their anger. Accordingly, Fatima (2016) argues that the negative behavior due to ostracism harms organizations and productive work behaviors by not only harming the ostracized individuals but the organization. Thus, we hypothesize the following link between workplace ostracism and job productivity:

*H3.* Ostracism positively influences the decreased productivity.

### *2.7 Emotional exhaustion and productivity*

Emotional exhaustion represents an important factor in job burnout. It causes individuals to feel that their valuable resources are at risk of loss. Since workplace ostracism causes stress due to a lack of support from colleagues and supervisors and a loss of emotional connections with others, According to Jiang *et al.* (2020), there is a positive correlation between ostracism and emotional exhaustion. Conversely, the ostracized employees' job productivity reflects their emotional exhaustion, which leads to a bad mood. High levels of ostracism often lead emotionally exhausted employees to engage in negative behaviors. For example, they tend to hide their knowledge rather than share it with colleagues, a matter that negatively impacts their productivity because of similar attitudes from others (Koay, 2018).

Moreover, Ayub *et al.* (2021) argue that workplace ostracism results in deviant behaviors, withdrawal, low satisfaction, and emotional exhaustion. On the other hand, Uslu (2021) indicates the involuntary psychological reactions of ostracized employees, like experiencing high blood pressure, low job satisfaction, emotional exhaustion, and mental depression. Accordingly, Farasat *et al.* (2021) assume that ostracized employees face social stressors and suffer from exhaustion that leads to cognitive tiredness and failure in task performance,

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lower self-control, memory perception, and retention related to bad job performance. Based on these assumptions, we hypothesize that emotional exhaustion plays a mediating role.

*H4.* Emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between ostracism and decreased job productivity.

*2.8 Motivation and productivity*

Because motivated employees believe their supervisors will appreciate their efforts, high motivation significantly boosts productivity. Based on this assumption, ostracism causes employees to feel targeted by others, resulting in a low intrinsic motivation level that impacts their sense of belonging. Additionally, their performance reflects their negative feelings. However, in cases where ostracism is episodic, the ostracized performance of employees changes according to their experienced feelings. Ostracism creates a sense of rejection from others, leading to demotivation and poor performance. Furthermore, the leadership style has an impact on motivation, as ostracized employees may choose to cope with supervisors and colleagues and avoid social isolation (Mlika *et al.*, 2017). Despite this, the paradoxical motives of ostracism, which lead to antisocial responses and low production levels (Gamian-Wilk and Madeja-Bien, 2021), make coping with its consequences challenging, a matter that this study needs to investigate. Based on these arguments, we propose a lack of motivation as the mediating effect.

*H5.* Lack of motivation mediates the relationship between ostracism and decreased job productivity.

## 3. Method

*3.1 Participants and procedures*

The study subjects were first-level workers from 20 manufacturing companies in Jordan. To reduce any bias, we collected data in two tiers: March 2022 and June 2022. Tier 1 focused on demographics, productivity, emotional exhaustion, and motivation loss, while Tier 2 focused on workplace ostracism. According to Olaleye (2022), Olaleye *et al.* (2020), and Podsakoff *et al.* (2003), this helps to lower the level of bias and fix issues with the privacy and anonymity of the participants. It also lowers or eliminates the threat of social desirability and common method variance.

Each of the companies' human resources departments randomly distributed the questionnaires to a sample size of 800 workers. Linguistic experts coded and translated the distributed questionnaires into Arabic before translating them back into English.

Out of the 800 questionnaires, the first tier returned 510 with a 63.7% response rate, and the second tier returned 425 with an 83.3% response rate. The study sample comprises 61.4% males and 38.6% females, indicating gender equality. On average, the majority are married, having their age fall within 31–40 years, while the least age group is above 50 years of age. Statistics of the highest educational qualification revealed that most of the respondents (58.1%) attained a university degree diploma, while the least possess a high school certificate. Finally, the job tenure shows that the majority had been working between 4 and 6 years, as opposed to 11.6% having professional experience of less than one year. This implies that the chosen respondents are fully equipped and knowledgeable about manufacturing operations and performances. Therefore, we present the demographic profile in Table 1 below:

*3.2 Ethical issues*

In this investigation, we obtained the participants' consent. We applied a variety of important ethical ideas to our research operations, including respect for society and other individuals,

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| Measures | Items | Frequency ($n$ = 396) | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 243 | 61.4 |
| | Female | 153 | 38.6 |
| Age | 30 and under | 98 | 24.7 |
| | 31–40 | 186 | 47.0 |
| | 41–50 | 73 | 18.4 |
| | 50 and above | 39 | 9.8 |
| Education | High school | 28 | 7.1 |
| | Diploma | 83 | 21.0 |
| | University degree | 230 | 58.1 |
| | Postgraduate degree | 55 | 13.9 |
| Job Tenure | Less than a year | 46 | 11.6 |
| | 1–3 years | 81 | 20.5 |
| | 4–6 years | 147 | 37.1 |
| | Over 6 years | 122 | 30.8 |

**Source(s):** Own work

**Table 1.** Demographics

research regulation, the use of resources and research outputs, and the prevention of scientific misconduct. The subject of this study is unfettered by any kind of sponsorship or organizational influence. Everyone who took part in the data collection had plenty of time to answer the questions at their own pace and in their own words. To gather data, there were no user-friendly interfaces. The researcher did not grant anyone else permission to access or use any of the collected surveys. This study solely utilized the collected data for analytical purposes. After keeping the data secure, the authors analyzed and reported on it. The study disclosed no identifiable information, instead presenting all data objectively and impersonally.

### *3.3 Measurement scales*

Ferris *et al.* (2008) used ten items to measure ostracism. The research study included samples such as "Others ignored me at work." Schaufeli *et al.* (1996) used five questions to assess emotional exhaustion. Examples of these include a model item like "I feel emotionally drained from my work." Gagné *et al.* (2015) conducted measures of loss of motivation using three items. Samples of these include "I really feel that I'm wasting my time at work." De Cooman *et al.* (2009), Pradhan and Jena (2017), and Koopmans *et al.* (2016) used six items to measure productivity. Samples of these include "I used to complete my assignments on time." Participants completed all the measures using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree.

We validated the questionnaire's content, face, and concept validity through both pilot and pre-testing. By analyzing previous studies that were associated with the study measures, we were able to ascertain the instruments' content validity for this investigation. This assured us of the content's reliability. A small group of specialists in organizational behavior and human resource management pre-tested the scale items to ensure they adequately reflected the concepts under investigation (Bahadır *et al.*, 2024). Consequently, they modified the survey and deleted a number of statements. A subset of respondents filled out an early version of the survey to establish its validity. The study was then piloted by thirty workers from manufacturing companies in Lagos, Nigeria. All the variables in this pilot study have Cronbach's alpha values between 0.72 and 0.81. As a result, the items used to evaluate the study's variables are internally consistent, according to this reliability evaluation.

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*3.4 Analysis and results*

To analyze the research model, the study employed a partial least squares analysis using SmartPLS 3.3.2. According to Kock and Lynn (2012), we conducted a full collinearity test using the variance inflation factor (VIF) for values above 3.3 to guarantee bias-free results. The results were indeed free from bias, as the VIF range was 1.639–2.546.

We analyzed the study's constructs using indicator loadings, internal consistency, discriminant validity, and convergent validity, as shown in Table 2 below. The results of factor loading for all items exceeded 0.7 (Hair *et al.*, 2017). Cronbach's alpha for all items is greater than 0.6. (Hair *et al.*, 2017). The results show enough construct validity as all rho values exceeded 0.7 (Henseler *et al.*, 2016; Odunjo-Saka *et al.*, 2023; Olaleye *et al.*, 2022; Vetbuje and Olaleye, 2022; Wang *et al.*, 2023b). The average variance extracted (AVE) values were above 0.50, according to Fornell and Larcker (1981). We estimated internal consistency using Dijkstra-Henseler's rho (pA), and the study's results support convergent validity.

Table 3 below illustrates the correlation between the means and standard deviations of the variables. Finally, we need to exclude the possibility of common method bias (CMB) from our questionnaire data collection. According to Podsakoff *et al.* (2003), Harman's one-factor test is the most widely used approach for detecting CMB. To further overcome typical methodological biases, we used unrotated exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to identify the single component that explained most of the variation across all our study variables. The single-factor variance indicates a bias in the technique, thereby verifying the conclusions of

| Item code | Loadings | α | rho (ρA) | AVE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ostracism | | 0.936 | 0.937 | 0.594 |
| OS1 | 0.704 | | | |
| OS2 | 0.755 | | | |
| OS3 | 0.732 | | | |
| OS4 | 0.750 | | | |
| OS5 | 0.821 | | | |
| OS6 | 0.796 | | | |
| OS7 | 0.773 | | | |
| OS8 | 0.735 | | | |
| OS9 | 0.778 | | | |
| OS10 | 0.850 | | | |
| Emotional Exhaustion | | 0.889 | 0.892 | 0.614 |
| EE1 | 0.892 | | | |
| EE2 | 0.803 | | | |
| EE3 | 0.728 | | | |
| EE4 | 0.735 | | | |
| EE5 | 0.746 | | | |
| Loss of Motivation | | 0.835 | 0.842 | 0.629 |
| LM1 | 0.748 | | | |
| LM2 | 0.744 | | | |
| LM3 | 0.879 | | | |
| Productivity | | 0.917 | 0.918 | 0.648 |
| EP1 | 0.784 | | | |
| EP2 | 0.782 | | | |
| EP3 | 0.828 | | | |
| EP4 | 0.836 | | | |
| EP5 | 0.757 | | | |
| EP6 | 0.838 | | | |

**Table 2.** Results for constructs

**Note(s):** α: Cronbach's alpha; ρA: Dijkstra-Henseler's-rho; AVE: average variance extracted
**Source(s):** Own work

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Podsakoff *et al.* (2003). The findings revealed that a single factor's Eigenvalue could only account for 37.2% of the overall variation, which is below 50%. To put it another way, it proves that technique bias is not an issue.

As per Henseler *et al.* (2016), Table 4 below shows that the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) of correlations was less than 0.85 (the lower limit), which proves that the discriminant is real.

We executed the PLS-SEM estimation once we had completed all tests from the measurement model assessment. Figure 1 summarizes the results of the PLS-SEM hypothesis testing. The *p*-value supports the hypothesis's relevance. As a rule, in behavioral science, the *p*-value must be less than 0.05 to reject the null hypothesis (Andres, 2012; Charoensukmongkol, 2023). Kock (2021), Chin *et al.* (2003), and Hossain *et al.* (2023) also use this criterion in PLS-SEM analysis to reject the null hypothesis.

| | M | SD | OS | EE | LM | DP |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Ostracism (OS) | 3.769 | 0.737 | | | | |
| 2. Emotional Exhaustion (EE) | 3.664 | 0.784 | 0.434** | | | |
| 3. Loss of motivation (LM) | 3.540 | 0.841 | 0.484** | 0.375** | | |
| 4. Decreased productivity (DP) | 3.702 | 0.693 | 0.609** | 0.533** | 0.571** | |

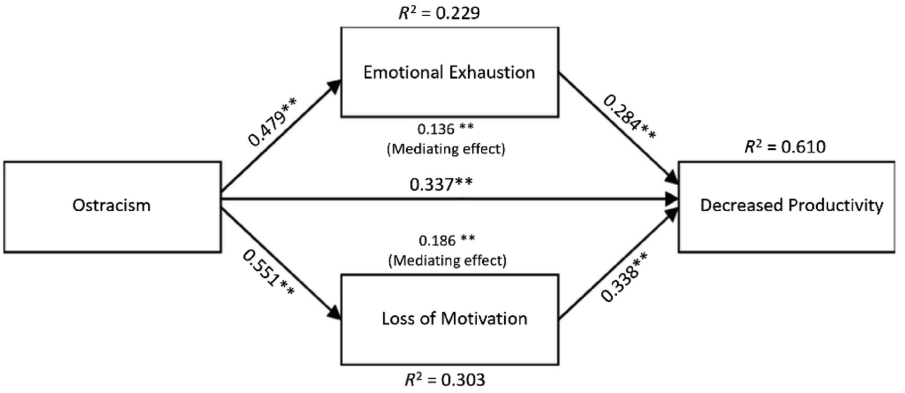
**Note(s):** $N = 396$; M = means; SD = standard deviation; $^{**}p < 0.01$
**Source(s):** Own work

**Table 3.**
Correlation matrix

| | OS | EE | LM | DP |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Ostracism | | | | |
| 2. Emotional Exhaustion | 0.473 | | | |
| 3. Loss of motivation | 0.547 | 0.434 | | |
| 4. Decreased productivity | 0.657 | 0.593 | 0.649 | |

**Source(s):** Own work

**Table 4.**
Discriminant validity (HTMT0.85 criterion)




**Note(s):** $^{**}p < 0.05$
**Source(s):** Authors' computation

**Figure 1.**
Assessment of structural mode

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We evaluated the model's predictive capability by assessing the value of the determinant coefficient ($R^2$). We used a criterion where $R^2$ is at least 0.10, as proposed by Falk and Miller (1992). Figure 1 below demonstrates that we achieved $R^2$ values ranging from 0.229 to 0.610. Evaluating the measurement model was a prerequisite to studying the structural model. The $R^2$ value represents a structure's descriptive capacity, which means that it explains the dependent variable as well as its independent factors. As shown in other studies (Bahadır *et al.*, 2024; Qing *et al.*, 2023), we used a bootstrapping procedure (one-tailed) with 5,000 subsamples to find the path coefficients' weights and significance. Ostracism may explain 22.9% of the variance in emotional exhaustion and 61% of the variation in decreased productivity, according to Table 5. Like another $R^2$, ostracism explains 30.3% of the variance in lack of motivation.

Hypothesis 1 states that ostracism is positively associated with emotional exhaustion. The positive association between the variables was shown in the model estimation ($\beta = 0.479$, $t = 10.004$, $p < 0.05$). The statistical significance of the association supports Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 states that ostracism is positively associated with a loss of motivation. The positive association between the variables is shown in the model estimation ($\beta = 0.551$; $t = 11.751$, $p < 0.05$). The statistical significance of the association supports Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3 states that ostracism is positively associated with decreased productivity. The positive association between the variables was shown in the model estimation ($\beta = 0.337$; $t = 17.137$, $p < 0.05$). The statistical significance of the association supports Hypothesis 3. Therefore, the results support all direct paths (H1, H2, and H3).

Table 5 presents the proposed approach by Rungtusanatham *et al.* (2014), which analyzed the indirect impact of ostracism on decreased productivity using loss of motivation and emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, the researcher examined the serial mediation effect of emotional exhaustion and loss of motivation on the relationship between ostracism and decreased productivity. The result showed that the indirect effect of ostracism and decreased productivity through EE and LM was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.136$, $p < 0.05$; $\beta = 0.186$, $p < 0.05$; 95% CI [0.01, 0.05]). Therefore, we strongly support hypotheses 4 and 5.

## 4. Discussion and conclusion

### *4.1 Discussion*

This study investigates the impact of workplace ostracism on employees' productivity, as well as the consequences of a lack of motivation and emotional exhaustion. Our data analysis results support all the hypotheses proposed in this study. First, the findings reveal that employees in workplaces with strong ostracism are more likely to be emotionally exhausted. Previous studies, including Jiang *et al.* (2020), agree with the positive relationship between the two variables. In addition, Mirza *et al.*'s (2020) research results support this relationship by

| Hypothesis | Parameters | β | SE | *t*-value | $R^2$ | *p*-value | 95% CI | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Direct effects* | | | | | | | | |
| H1 | OS→EE | 0.479 | 0.048 | 10.004 | 0.229 | 0.000 | [0.387, 0.571] | Significant |
| H2 | OS→LM | 0.551 | 0.047 | 11.751 | 0.303 | 0.000 | [0.459, 0.643] | Significant |
| H3 | OS →PR | 0.337 | 0.057 | 17.137 | 0.610 | 0.000 | [0.225, 0.449] | Significant |
| *Indirect effect* | | | | | | | | |
| H4 | OS→EE→PR | 0.136 | 0.032 | 4.181 | – | 0.000 | [0.111, 0.264] | Significant |
| H5 | OS→LM→PR | 0.186 | 0.035 | 5.360 | – | 0.000 | [0.146, 0.299] | Significant |

**Note(s):** OS = ostracism; EE = emotional exhaustion; LM = loss of motivation; PR = decreased productivity
**Source(s):** Own work

**Table 5.**
Hypotheses testing

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declaring that a positive association exists between workplace ostracism and emotional exhaustion, as do Cizreliogullari *et al.*'s (2019), who found a great relationship between the two variables. Hence, the study results are in line with previous studies that support the existence of a positive relationship between ostracism and emotional exhaustion in the workplace.

Research has proven a positive relationship between ostracism and a lack of motivation, as evidenced in Hypothesis 2. Kawamoto *et al.* (2013), who declared that ostracism results in a lack of motivation, cognition, and effectiveness, support this finding. Furthermore, researchers find that ostracism positively impacts decreased productivity by excluding employees, disrupting their goals, and severing their sense of social unity and belonging. The issue of preventing ostracized employees from accessing information and sharing knowledge with colleagues due to exclusion has a negative impact on their job productivity. Rasool *et al.* (2019) found a negative relationship between ostracism and productivity, asserting that an increase in ostracism leads to a decrease in worker productivity.

In addition, Fatima (2016) discovered that workplace ostracism has a positive and significant impact on counterproductive work behavior, which supports this research finding. Moreover, Mirza *et al.* (2020) found that workplace ostracism has a substantial and negative impact on job performance, and Uslu (2021) found a low-level negative relationship between workplace ostracism and job performance.

This study also proved that emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between ostracism and productivity. Koay (2018) partially supports this finding, demonstrating that workplace ostracism significantly contributes to positive emotional and mental exhaustion, leading to psychological distress among ostracized employees that negatively impacts their productivity. Moreover, Mirza *et al.* (2020) found that emotional exhaustion partially mediates the relationship between ostracism and job performance, with a significant direct effect. In support of the fourth hypothesis's significance, there is evidence that EE acts as a mediator. This implies that early intervention by managers and leaders can limit or prevent employee exposure to negative emotions and counter-productiveness. Appraising employees' performance and appreciating their contribution to organizational success could accomplish this. Feeling valued by supervisors can positively impact employees and protect them from emotional exhaustion (Jiang *et al.*, 2020).

Finally, the study found that loss of motivation mediates the relationship between ostracism and productivity. Lyu and Zhu (2019) partially support this result by demonstrating that intrinsic work motivation enhances the relationship between workplace ostracism and job embeddedness, suggesting that the high intrinsic motivation of ostracized employees intensifies the negative relationship. In addition, Steinbauer *et al.* (2018) partially supported this research result by proving that intrinsic motivation changes the relationship between ostracism and job performance through self-leadership when they tested the developed moderated mediated model. They suggest that ostracized employees who are intrinsically motivated tend to use self-leadership strategies to improve their job performance, compared to their counterparts who lack intrinsic motivation. Hence, the findings are in line with the transactional theory of stress and coping.

### *4.2 Implications in theory and practice*

Drawing upon the assumptions of the transactional theory of stress and coping, the ability of employees to adapt to the environmental conditions accompanied by managerial support is likely to reduce or eliminate the negative emotional and productive impacts of workplace ostracism. The findings of this study, in support of previous literature, agree that workplace ostracism has a negative impact on the organization. Therefore, managers and leaders should prepare the environment to avoid mistreatment among employees and become ready for an inclusive interpersonal environment.

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Secondly, by incorporating the mediating function of emotional exhaustion and lack of motivation, our research enhances the concepts of the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping Theory. Our findings, in line with the studies and the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping Theory, indicate that EE and LM mediate the connection between ostracism in the workplace and productivity. Ostracism has a negative effect on productivity since it drains all employees emotionally. The stigma they encounter at work contributes to their lack of motivation, which is equally detrimental. We may further extend the principles of the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping Theory, and we also have a better idea of when emotionally exhausted and unmotivated ostracized employees are likely to feel these things.

In addition, managers can provide employees with training on conflict management skills to lower the probability of workplace ostracism. Moreover, encouraging teamwork by leaders enables employees to create shared visions and build trustful relationships (Ayub *et al.*, 2021). Accordingly, equipping employees with practical conflict management skills could help them fight the negative consequences of ostracism.

Furthermore, a proactive workplace would address issues before they lead to people losing interest and motivation for their job. According to Zadro *et al.* (2006), when people perceive ostracism, they tend to see other things in a negative light, which can lead to a vicious cycle. Furthermore, companies should train their managers and leaders on workplace ostracism, its detrimental effects on individuals, and strategies to prevent and manage it. These training programs should teach conflict resolution, communication, and openness. Management will have the tools to improve the workplace. Set up anti-bullying rules, diversity and inclusion programs, and employee feedback to create a respectful and inclusive workplace. These strategies can reduce workplace ostracism by making people feel valued and appreciated. Encourage employees to interact and provide feedback to help identify and resolve ostracism issues. Regular team meetings, polling, and open-door practices allow employees to voice issues without fear of repercussions. Inform more individuals about workplace ostracism, how it hurts, and how crucial it is to establish inclusive workplaces. Public education, media attention, and advocacy can highlight how workplace ostracism damages society.

In such a setting, an early warning system for detecting ostracism can help reduce the occurrence and severity of the problem. Managers should investigate workplace ostracism cases to determine who is doing the ostracizing and why. Targets and their direct supervisors can also collaborate to restock the affected persons' organizational resources (such as professional development training) so they can better handle ostracism or become more accepted. Not only may these characteristics of an organization encourage workers to rely on one another, but they can also boost teamwork and individual contributions to the workplace. Meanwhile, the goal of cooperative interdependence among employees is more likely to reduce workplace ostracism. This suggests that organizations should foster employee cooperation and set clear objectives for them to accomplish. Furthermore, increasing task complexity enhances knowledge sharing among employees, reducing ostracism. Leaders can support ostracized employees by implementing intervention strategies and providing coaching, which can motivate them, lower their negative feelings, and prevent their counterproductive behavior (Zhu *et al.*, 2017).

Policymakers, corporate leaders, and workers should collaborate to find and use effective workplace ostracism solutions. This could include regulations, industry rules, and company best practices that promote a positive work environment. Fund a study on how workplace ostracism affects mental health, family relationships, and society. Establishing social initiatives and other strategies can help mitigate the larger effects of shunned individuals.

### *4.3 Limitations and future research*

The study has a variety of limitations caused by several factors. In the first place, the research used a non-probability sampling method, and the predicted sample size was too low to draw

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any firm conclusions. The study's results may not be generalizable because the sample only included Jordanian manufacturing workers with an average age of 34. Secondly, the research work demonstrates an impressive significance to our understanding of professional ostracism; however, it is limited in its scope because the researchers relied solely on self-report instruments for their measurements. In addition, conducting the study across different companies has resulted in constraints such as limited time and high cost. The research study employed a cross-sectional survey that measures the relationships between variables at a point in time. The cross-sectional analysis suggests compiling a report on past behavior, allegedly connected to the researcher's internal state. Hence, longitudinal or panel data could allow future studies to delve further into this topic.

Due to contextual and cultural biases, the study's one-country approach limits generalization. However, we overcame the limitations by taking various precautions, such as interpreting the results in accordance with relevant and approved current studies. This study should be considered an important step in future research studies that extend the use of various dimensions of variables. Future studies can use these variables to identify differences among various groups, taking into account the findings of the present study. Future studies should expand on the factors that contribute to the reduction or elimination of ostracism and delve deeper into the circumstances that can mitigate its negative effects in the workplace. Hansen (2016) proposes investigating various coping strategies within the work environment and organizational culture, such as behavioral versus cognitive, approach-based versus avoidance-based, problem-focused, emotion-focused, or appraisal-focused, and adaptive versus maladaptive strategies.

Organizational leaders have a crucial role to play in the establishment of a positive set of relationships among employees. Hence, there is a need to also study the role of rewarding employees and providing incentives as factors that influence ostracism and negative behavioral patterns among employees (Mok and De Cremer, 2016). Additionally, the researchers can use self-esteem as a moderator variable to evaluate the differences between employees with high self-esteem and those with low self-esteem. Future studies can delve deeper into the constructs of job satisfaction, productivity, and emotional exhaustion caused by ostracism. Research can establish how managers and other organizational leaders can assist in the prevention of negative productivity in workplaces due to ostracism (Hofmann *et al.*, 2017).

Future studies should focus on organizational practices, including onboarding programs and organizational socialization. These practices help individuals adapt to a social context that can help their colleagues perceive unity and cohesion among members of the organization (Meng *et al.*, 2017). The positive effects of organizational socialization include social integration and the ability to form bonds between colleagues, which can help increase motivation and productivity (Schaubroeck *et al.*, 2016). Given the prevalence of ostracism in today's workplaces, we must conduct further studies to fully assess and understand its impacts. Finally, future research should test workplace stress as a mediator; other mediators can include emotional weariness, job burnout, a toxic workplace environment, workers' well-being, and job satisfaction.

### *4.4 Conclusions*

This study contributes to the transactional theory of stress and coping by investigating the relationship between workplace ostracism and decreased job productivity through the mediation of emotional exhaustion and a lack of motivation. The implemented investigation aimed to fill a gap in the literature between ostracism and job productivity by analyzing the mediation effect of a lack of motivation and emotional exhaustion. The study provides a theoretical foundation on which companies can base their understanding of the concept of

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ostracism and its relationship to productivity through increased emotional exhaustion and a lack of motivation. Moreover, the study analyzes the approaches used to address the challenge, testing the effectiveness of the identified factors and establishing their efficacy. Finally, the study discusses workplace ostracism's consequences for individuals, businesses, and society, as well as preventive approaches.



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## Appendix

| Construct | Item code |
|---|---|
| *Ostracism* | |
| 1. "Others ignore me at work" | OS1 |
| 2. "Others left the area when I enter there" | OS2 |
| 3. "Your greetings have gone unanswered at work" | OS3 |
| 4. "I involuntarily sat alone in a crowded lunch room at work" | OS4 |
| 5. "Others avoided me at work" | OS5 |
| 6. "I noticed others would not look at me at work" | OS6 |
| 7. "Others at work shut me out of the conversation" | OS7 |
| 8. "Others refused to talk to me at work" | OS8 |
| 9. "Others at work treated me as if I weren't there" | OS9 |
| 10. "Others at work did not invite me or ask from me if I wanted anything when they went out fora coffee break" | OS10 |
| *Emotional Exhaustion* | |
| 11. "I feel emotionally drained from my work" | EE1 |
| 12. "I feel used up at the end of the workday" | EE2 |
| 13. "I feel tired when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job" | EE3 |
| 14. "Working all day is really a strain for me" | EE4 |
| 15. "I feel burned out from my work" | EE5 |
| *Loss of Motivation* | |
| 16. "I really feel that I'm wasting my time at work" | LM1 |
| 17. "I don't think this work is worth putting efforts into" | LM2 |
| 18. "I don't know why I'm doing this job, it's pointless work" | LM3 |
| *Productivity* | |
| 19. "I use to complete my assignments on time" | EP1 |
| 20. "I can find creative solutions to my work-related problems" | EP2 |
| 21. "I feel a sense of pride in doing my job" | EP3 |
| 22. "The production target of my company is achievable for me" | EP4 |
| 23. "I do my work without wastage of raw materials" | EP5 |
| 24. "I prefer to work without gossiping with others" | EP6 |

**Table A1.** Scale used for measurement of variables

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