

## Relationship Between Workplace Ostracism and Employee Silence: Mediating Effect of Psychological Safety at Private Healthcare Organizations in Lahore (Pakistan)

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### Abstract

*The employees are the backbone of any organization all over the world. The contribution of the employee is remarkable toward the success of the organization, especially in the healthcare sector. Therefore, the success of an organization depends on the employees. However, if the intention of the employees changes toward counterproductive work behavior, then such kind of behavior causes a major problem in an organization. This organizational behavior leads to the failure of the organization. Thus, this study is thriving to highlight these issues in an organization that can be prevented to enhance the productivity of the organization. The study focuses on employee silence and workplace ostracism, with the mediating effect of psychological safety in private healthcare organizations in Lahore, Pakistan. A quantitative method is used to analyze these relationships in the context of healthcare with a 230-sample size. According to the results, psychological safety mediates the relationship between prosocial silence and deviant silence on workplace ostracism. Moreover, there is a significant positive effect of prosocial silence on psychological safety. However, deviant silence has a negative and significant effect on psychological safety, which shows that deviant silence has a negative effect on workplace psychological safety.*

**Keywords:** Workplace Ostracism, Prosocial Silence, Psychological Safety, Healthcare

### Introduction

Employees play a significant role in an organization since employees are the backbone of any organization. The growth and development are equally dependent on the employees. However, if the intention of the employees changes toward counterproductive work behavior, then such behavior causes a major problem in an organization (Fatima, 2016). There are certain types of negative behaviors which influence employee performance and productivity. Workplace ostracism is one of the negative behaviors that is considered to have negative consequences and outcomes that are harmful to any organization (Sahabuddin et al., 2023). It is an unpleasant experience that can have an impact on different kinds of behavioral reactions. If this negative behavior exists in healthcare sectors, then it will be unsafe not only for the organization but for several stakeholders

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of the hospital. Overall, the job in the healthcare sector is stressful because of the heavy workload, unpleasant incidences, short deadlines, and lengthy anti-social working hours (Haldorai et al., 2020).

Besides that, a stressful work environment may affect interpersonal relationships and lead to internal problems, the consequences of workplace ostracism (Valdivia et al., 2019). Although workplace ostracism is prevalent in the healthcare sector, little is known about how it affects the attitudes and behaviors of staff members (Ashraf et al., 2020). In recent years, the concept of workplace ostracism has taken on a considerable measure of relevance (Shafique et al., 2020). Workplace Ostracism is a painful and unpleasant experience (Malik et al., 2021). Organizations have a substantial and universal issue over workplace ostracism, which is thought to be a prevalent workplace phenomenon (Hsieh & Karatepe, 2019).

In addition to that, ostracism harms the behaviors and sentiments of workers who frequently act in self-defeating ways (Haldorai et al., 2020). It leads to poor job performance, decreased organizational commitment, a rise in unproductive workplace conduct, and a higher tendency to leave the company (Khan et al., 2021). In contrast to other interpersonal inhumanities such as lying, bullying, and aggressiveness, workplace ostracism involves an individual's counter-normative acts with uncertain purpose and low intensity that are challenging to recognize (Khan et al., 2021).

Subsequently, workplace ostracism also damages psychological safety; people working together have a similar opinion on whether the environment is psychologically safe (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023). Recent experience is referred to as psychological safety. While trust is an expectation that a person or organization can be depended upon to deliver on its commitments at some future time, safety in psychology refers to expectations concerning immediate interpersonal repercussions (Tsuei et al., 2019). Schein and Bennis (1965) integrated psychological safety into the organizational sciences, but it was only when it was explored that empirical research exploded in this field. Psychological safety permits employees "to feel comfortable at work to develop, learn, contribute, and perform successfully in a fast-changing workplace" (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). The idea of workplace exclusion and employee silence has received much attention recently in the field of organizational psychology.

Previously, studies have only rarely conceptualized or experimentally examined the potential variables that may affect how important psychological safety is compared to other factors. To create a more comprehensive, accurate, and relevant theory of this increasingly significant concept, it is imperative to comprehend the boundary requirements of psychological safety validities inside its nomological network (Newman et al., 2017). Researchers desire to look at the new variable of employee silence in particular contexts of more learning environments as a result of workplace exclusion.

Employees who are silent about problems at work, such as improper or unethical actions that exceed personal, moral, or legal norms, are referred to as organizations (Knoll & Dick, 2013). Although some researchers have claimed that employee silence has several dimensions (Chou & Chang, 2020), the relational defense aspects of silence that are now being studied the most tend to be unsuccessful or disengaged. However, there has yet to be much empirical study on one crucial feature of quiet in the management literature.

According to Hawass (2016), prosocial silence is in which employees refrain from expressing thoughts, information, or opinions about their jobs to advance the interests of others or the organization, motivated by altruism or cooperative objectives. According to Knoll and Van Dick (2013), some workers choose to keep quiet out of a sense of prosocial responsibility to spare their

coworkers' shame and unexpected difficulties. Another type of silence, which Brinsfield (2013) refers to as diffident silence, is added. This type of silence happens when a worker lacks the confidence to speak up.

The unethical and immoral practice of workplace exclusion produces poor working relationships. Employees engage in silence and avoid important thoughts and information in an ostracized workplace, which has negative effects. Deviant silence is the term used when an employee withholds critical information with the purpose of hurting the business, their boss, or a colleague (Khalid & Ahmed, 2016). According to researchers, individuals should not remain silent in professional situations since doing so might affect corporate goals (Nechanska et al., 2020). Silence must increase employee stress, absenteeism, unhappiness, and disengagement, which can harm performance and retention, according to a substantial body of research (Nechanska et al., 2020).

This research analyses the burnout process from a salutogenic viewpoint, Hobfoll's (1989) concept of resource conservation (Jaegers et al., 2019). Previous studies show that for a sample of hotel employees, job engagement served as a significant mediator on the influence of workplace ostracism on service performance (Jaegers et al., 2019). According to Zhao et al. (2013) study work, place ostracism encouraged hotel employees to engage in organizational and interpersonally unproductive job behaviors. Zhao et al. (2016) found that ostracized workers exhibited knowledge-hiding behaviors. Zhu et al. (2017) discovered that job stress and customer orientation progressively moderated the relationship between workplace ostracism and proactive customer service performance in this study of hotel employees. According to research done on hotel employees',—self-esteem acted as a full mediator between workplace ostracism and extra-role performance (Valdivia et al., 2019).

In today's modern workplace, ostracism, a global phenomenon, is unpleasant. The key effects of workplace ostracism and the mechanism behind the association between workplace ostracism and these effects are unexplored. Therefore, this study aims to fill the knowledge gap concerning the relationship between workplace ostracism and employee silence by mediating the effect of psychological safety at private healthcare organizations in Pakistan.

The objective of this study is the following:

- To know the relationship between workplace ostracism and employee silence in private hospitals in Lahore, Pakistan.
- To know the mediating effect of psychological safety on workplace ostracism and employee silence in private hospitals in Lahore, Pakistan.

## Literature Review

Ostracism is a painful experience with or without malicious intention (Chung & Yang, 2017). It is a universal phenomenon in businesses that lowers employee engagement, raises workplace stress, and produces unfavorable job outcomes (Valdivia et al., 2019). Although workers are the foundation of every firm, they play a crucial role in it. Strategic development depends on the employees, but if their intentions shift to engaging in unproductive work behavior, such conduct poses a serious threat to the firm. Ostracism at work is thought to have unfavorable effects and outcomes that are undesirable for any company (Fatima, 2016). The harmful effects of ostracism were widely acknowledged (Malik et al., 2021). Additionally, it results in less employee contact, which tends to lead to employee silence (Gkorezis & Bellou, 2016). Because of ostracism, employees experience many forms of silence at work (Fatima et al., 2017).

Schein and Bennis (1965) integrated psychological safety into the organizational sciences, but it was not observed until recently that empirical research exploded in this field. Psychological safety, according to the research, enables workers "to feel safe at work to develop, learn, contribute, and perform well in a fast-changing environment" (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Psychological security is at both the individual and group analysis levels. Even though this assumption has not been extensively validated, researchers often assume psychological safety is comparable across different levels of analysis (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023).

Employee silence at work has been determined to be detrimental to the organization's interests; thus, scholars are now looking at what motivates individuals to be quiet in the workplace. Prosaically, silence is described as withholding work-related thoughts, information, or thoughts to help other individuals or the organization based on altruism or cooperative reasons (Brinsfield, 2013). Prosaically, silence is emphasized as a proactive behavior that the organization does not require. It also entails keeping facts from others to spare a coworker, supervisor, or the company from shame and unplanned difficulties (Knoll & Dick, 2013).

According to Dyne et al. (2003), employee silence has three dimensions: acquiescent silence, defensive silence, and prosocial silence. Acquiescent silence is to keep the information with the employee based on resignation; defensive silence is to keep the information due to negative outcome or punishment, while prosocial silence is to keep confidential silence for the sake of the company and its norms. Moreover, Fatima et al. (2017) added another dimension to the construct of employee silence, which is deviant silence, which refers to keeping silent to escape negative results due to low confidence and lack of surety of facts. In the current study, we have used prosocial silence and deviant silence to examine the relationship with workplace ostracism.

### **Theoretical Underpinning**

In organizational psychology and behavioral research over the past three decades, the conservation of resources concept has been one of the most strongly discussed concepts (Hobfoll et al., 2018). The conservation resource concept, a stress theory, talks about people's motivations for acquiring and preserving essential resources (Sarwar et al., 2020). It emphasizes the ability a person has overall to meet their basic requirements is what is meant by the phrase resource (Wang et al., 2014).

According to the conservation of resource concept, a variety of additional resources are reliable and may help reduce the negative consequences of resource loss that could result in an employee performing below par at work (Sarwar et al., 2020). Theoretically, individuals are driven to establish, develop, and protect their resources, such as items, work, esteem, money-related assets, and many others, in the setting of nature (Hobfoll, 2001). Depending on their background and circumstances, people's perceptions of the value of resources vary (Halbesleben et al., 2014).

The conservation of resource theory offers a perceptive viewpoint to evaluate the impact of workplace exclusion. Ostracism at work affects resources needed to help people in the workplace (Leung et al., 2011). The resource could come from oneself or the environment and include things like social resources, motivational resources (like goal orientation), cognitive resources (like experiences), and physical well-being (e.g., from supervisors) (Gao et al., 2013).

According to the conservation of resource concept, the idea of ostracism can be explained as the isolating or ignoring of a person by a group of people (Gao et al., 2013). Due to ostracism, the colleagues do not accept the opinions and informative ideas of the individual. So, employees do not share their ideas and information with management, and they hold information with them intentionally. In prosocial silence, the employee decides to be silent consciously, but Pinder and

Harlos (2001) showed that in acquiescent silence, the employee is less aware of his decision to withhold information. Furthermore, as compared to defensive silence, prosocial silence has benefits for the organization regardless of escape from any negative outcome (Dyne et al., 2003). It also refers to keeping the information secure/protected from the colleague, manager, in-charge, organization, and others. The leaking of information may create a problem for coworkers (Knoll & Dick, 2013).

According to the conservation of resource theory, people need to put in greater effort to both recover destroyed resources and protect against further ones (Halbesleben et al., 2014). In the conversation of resource theory, to overcome the unpleasant feelings brought on by workplace ostracism, ostracized individuals will probably have to expend more of their emotional energy (Mahfooz et al., 2017). According to the conversation of resource concept (Hobfoll, 2001), when people perceive they are losing resources, they may get anxious and want to acquire, hold onto, and defend valued resources (Lyu et al., 2016). Ostracism in the workplace can significantly reduce a person's ability to satisfy obligations and live up to professional expectations (Lyu et al., 2016). Prosocial according to the theory, employees who are driven by prosocial factors are more likely to be responsible in giving benefits and to strive for the welfare of their companies and coworkers. Additionally, they are committed and thorough in their job (Piff & Robinson, 2017). As a result, we propose that prosocial quiet, a prosocial habit, encourages organizational commitment and behaviors that are beneficial to academic performance at work. An organization is said to benefit from prosocial silence (Griese & Buhs, 2014).

The silence due to deviant behavior may cause negative outcomes in the workplace. When an employee does not give important work-related information to the manager or colleague intentionally, it will be known as deviant silence (Anwar et al., 2020). As Affinito et al. (2020) reported, the employee claims a certain amount from Deutsche Bank for long-term deviant and bullying behavior. It causes silence against the bullying behavior of the concerned employees.

The theory in the current study suggests that individuals are more likely to experience negative treatment from coworkers or supervisors for breaching workplace norms when they exhibit psychological symptoms, such as concealing important information from their professional surroundings and deviant silence (Faldetta, 2021). According to the theory, employee deviant silence, a type of deviant conduct in which a person withholds vital information to damage the offender or the company, is one method that coworkers could respond to (Brinsfield, 2013).

The alarming source of removing satisfaction and comfort from the workplace is workplace ostracism. The ostracism affects the psychological needs of the employees (A. Fatima, 2016). According to a psychologist, ostracism negatively affects the psychological state of employees. According to another study, there is a positive relationship between workplace ostracism and psychological distress (Khan & Shah, 2023). When employees are separated or eliminated from the group, they feel alone. It is the need of humans to maintain social relations with others to share emotional and causal feelings with others. It also affects the individual's physical health as well as psychological health. A study has been conducted on nurses showed that workplace ostracism has a significant effect on nurses' silence toward patient safety (Shafique et al., 2020).

### **Hypothesis**

H1: Prosocial silence has a significant relation with workplace ostracism.

H2: Deviant silence has a significant relation with workplace ostracism.

H3: Psychological safety has a significant relation with workplace ostracism.

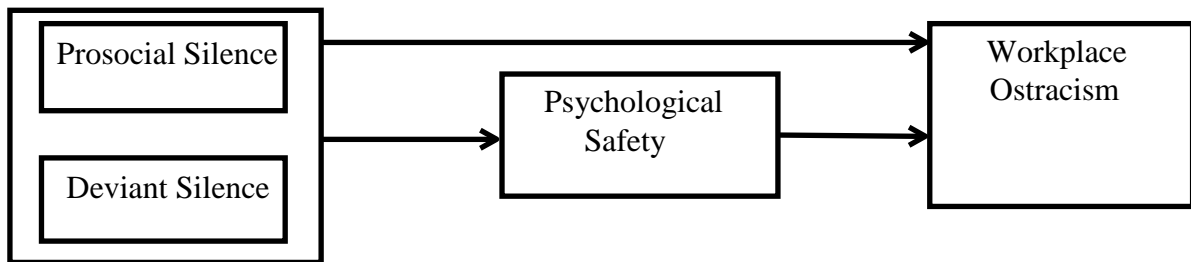
H4: Psychological safety mediates the relationship between workplace ostracism and prosocial silence.

H5: Psychological safety mediates the relationship between workplace ostracism and deviant silence.

H6: Psychological safety has a significant relation with prosocially silence.

H7: Psychological safety has a significant relation with deviant silence.

**Figure 1: Theoretical Framework**



## Methodology

This study used a quantitative research method to examine the relationship between prosocial silence and deviant silence with workplace ostracism in the private healthcare system. In this study, primary data is used to collect information from the employees of the private hospitals.

The random sampling technique has been used to collect the data from these private healthcare hospitals. There are approximately 47 private hospitals in Lahore. Only private hospitals, except for trust and teaching hospitals, have been taken for this research to meet the objective of the research. The reason for taking private hospitals is that private hospitals are more alert in their progress than the public sector. These hospitals invest in the training and development of their employees to create a professional environment in their organization. The employee has been focused on private hospitals rather than public hospitals.

The unit of analysis of this study is individual. Two hundred fifty questionnaires were distributed to the respondents to collect the information, out of which 230 were received. The response rate of this sample was 92%, which is considered an effective response rate.

The measurement model was adapted from the form of earlier studies for accuracy in data collection. The questionnaire was translated into English as it is the language of instruction in Pakistani healthcare institutions. The surveys used a 5-point Likert scale, with one denoting "strongly disagree" and five denoting "strongly agree."

The measure of workplace ostracism, which was developed by Ferris et al. (2008), has 13 items. For prosocial silence, a 5-item scale has been used, which was developed by Dyne et al. (2003). The scale of Deviant Silence was developed by Brinsfield (2013) and has five items in this measure. The mediating variable, which is psychological safety, has six items developed by Edmondson (1999).

## Data Analysis

The data will be analyzed using SPSS 20.0. All the responses that are received in numerical form are coded in SPSS. On the demographic question, a frequency distribution test was used. For testifying the reliability, Cronbach's alpha test was used. Regression analysis is applied to testify to the relationship between an independent dependent variable and the mediation effect of research

constructs (Bolin, 2014).

**Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Participants**

Demographics	Group	Respondents in Groups	Percentages %
Gender	Male	139	60.4
	Female	91	39.6
<b>Total</b>		<b>230</b>	<b>100</b>
Qualification	Metric	10	4.3
	Intermediate	36	15.7
	Graduation	99	43.0
	Master	71	30.9
	Above Master	14	6.1
<b>Total</b>		<b>230</b>	<b>100</b>
Age	20-29	162	70.4
	30-39	48	20.9
	49-49	11	4.8
	50-59	9	3.9
<b>Total</b>		<b>230</b>	<b>100</b>
Experience	1-5	142	61.7
	6-10	63	27.4
	11-15	25	10.9
<b>Total</b>		<b>230</b>	<b>100</b>
Income	15000-25000	90	39.1
	26000-35000	79	34.3
	36000-45000	32	13.9
	46000-55000	29	12.6
<b>Total</b>		<b>230</b>	<b>100</b>

The table 1 presents the demographics of the respondents. In the education group there were above master 14, graduations 99, intermediate 36 and metric 61 respondents in the data. The gender group shows that there are 139 males and 99 are female. The participants age group was as 162 participants in age group of 20-29, 48 participants was in 30-39, 11 participants was in 40-49 and 9 participants in 50-59 participants. Similarly, there are different groups of different incomes participated in this study.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Qualification	230	3.1870	.92269
Age	230	1.4217	.75949
Income	230	2.0000	1.01946
Experience	230	1.4913	.68510

Above table 2 shows the descriptive statistics with higher mean of the 3.187 and higher standard deviation with 1.01 in the descriptive.

**Table 3: Reliability of Measurement**

Constructs	Valid ( N )	Items	Cronbach's alpha
Prosocial Silence	230	05	0.80
Deviant Silence	230	05	0.77
Psychological Safety	230	07	0.89
Workplace Ostracism	230	13	0.79

The above table presents the reliability of the constructs. The values of the reliability are from 0.77 to 0.89 that show the data is highly consistent and reliable. The value of the reliability is more than 0.70 that considered an effective reliability for the study.

### Regression Analysis

**Table 4: Linear Regression**

Independent variable	Dependent variable (Workplace Ostracism)				
	R <sup>2</sup>	F-value	Unstandardized beta	T-value	p-value
Prosocial Silence	0.360	128.410	0.600	-13.00	0.000
Deviant Silence	0.019	4.390	0.147	2.095	0.037

The table 4 showed regression analysis it is used to see the effect of the employee silence on workplace ostracism. According to the results there is a negative significant effect of prosocial silence on workplace ostracism ( $b=0.60$ ,  $p=0.000$ ) but deviant silence has a positive effect on workplace ostracism ( $b=0.147$ ,  $p=0.037$ ) which shows that prosocial silence has negative effect on the workplace ostracism.

**Table 5: Linear Regression**

Independent variable	Dependent variable ( psychological safety)				
	R <sup>2</sup>	F-value	Unstandardized beta	T-value	p-value
Prosocial Silence	0.775	343.448	1.106	-5.186	0.000
Deviant Silence	0.454	59.183	0.650	7.693	0.000

The table 5 showed relationship of the prosocial silence and deviant silence on psychological safety. According to the results there is a positive significant effect of prosocial silence on psychological safety ( $b=1.106$ ,  $p=0.000$ ) but deviant silence has a negative and significant effect on psychological safety ( $b=0.650$ ,  $p=0.037$ ) which shows that deviant silence has negative effect on the workplace psychological safety. So, our first two hypotheses have been accepted as there is a significant relationship found between prosocial silence and deviant silence on workplace ostracism.



**Table 6: Mediation Analysis with Workplace Ostracism**

	Unstandardized co-efficient		Standardized efficient	co- t	Sig
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Prosocial Silence	0.971	0.185	0.44	5.239	0.000
Psychological Safety	0.336	0.130	0.24	2.589	0.010

### Meditation Analysis

Table 6 represents that the direct effects of prosocial silence and psychological safety on workplace ostracism. There is significant relationship of prosocial silence and psychological safety which shows that there is partially mediation between the relationship of prosocial silence and workplace ostracism by the psychological safety. Psychological safety has a significant relationship with workplace ostracism. Table 6 shows that the effect of deviant silence on workplace ostracism so testing the mediation is good. Psychological safety partially mediates between the deviant silence on workplace ostracism as both independent variables remained significant when they are put in the same regression Deviant silence ( $b=0.391$   $p=0.02$  Psychological safety ( $b=0.965$   $p=0.000$ ) as it is clear from table 7 Psychological safety partially mediates between prosocial silence on ostracism. So, the hypothesis H4 and H5 also has been accepted as there is found the partial mediation in above model.

**Table 7: Mediation Analysis with psychological safety**

	Unstandardized co-efficient		Standardized co-efficient	T	Sig
	B	Std .Error	Beta		
Deviant Silence	0.391	0.138	0.142	12.873	0.022
Psychological Safety	0.965	0.96	0.615	10.013	0.000

### Conclusion

According to the result, it is clear that psychological safety mediates the relationship between prosocial silence and deviant silence on workplace ostracism. Deviant silence has a positive relationship with workplace ostracism, which shows that one negative behavior leads to another negative behavior. According to Brinsfield (2012), deviant silence is more harmful than other types of silence in the workplace.

The awareness of employee silence is increasing day by day in organizations (Deniz et al., 2013). Often, employees have many ideas and information regarding an organization. This idea may be beneficial for the organization, but sometimes, the employee holds that idea and information due to fear or intention to keep the information with them (Leung et al., 2011). Another study also supports the conclusion which was conducted on nurses in public hospitals. According to this study, employee silence has a significant effect on workplace ostracism (Shafique et al., 2020).

This study also showed that employee silence faces issues of psychological safety that lead to workplace ostracism (Gkorezis et al., 2016). Another author presented the finding that if

employees have good relations, then they do not adopt prosocial silence. A study conducted by Wu et al. (2012) was also consistent with this study that workplace ostracism positively affected psychological distress, which means it has a negatively significant effect on physiological safety.

### Practical Implications

The findings of this study will be beneficial for healthcare professionals and practitioners because it will guide them to make certain reforms in their institutions to avoid such behavior. This study also highlighted that workplace ostracism has several antecedents, for example, employee silence, that can help the healthcare administrator resolve these issues proactively.

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