

## **Ostracism, Job Stress and Psychological Wellbeing In College and University Teachers**

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The study was carried out to explore the relationship between Ostracism, Job Stress and Psychological Wellbeing among college and university teachers. It was a correlational research. Convenient sampling strategy was used in this research. A sample of 400 college and university teachers was taken (200 from each cadre) with 50% male and 50% female teachers. The Workplace Ostracism Scale by Ferris et al. (2008) for measuring ostracism, the General Work Stress Scale by De Bruin (2006) and Role Conflict and Ambiguity Scale by Rizzo et al. (1970) for measuring job stress and Eudaimonic Workplace Wellbeing Scale by Bartel et al. (2019) were used to measure the psychological well-being. Correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between ostracism, job stress and psychological wellbeing. Findings indicated a significant positive correlation between ostracism and job stress. A significant negative correlation was found between ostracism and psychological wellbeing and job stress and psychological wellbeing. The results of multiple linear regression showed that ostracism and job stress are significant negative predictors of psychological wellbeing. The study has wide implications in contributing in teachers' welfare and enhancing their mental health.

*Keywords.* Ostracism, job stress, psychological wellbeing, teachers

Establishing positive relationships with other fellow humans and to being a part of social groups is a fundamental human need. Humans need to develop a sense of belongingness with others at places where they live and work. Universally, the motivation to build positive and constructive relationships directs every human's actions. Such relationships contribute to one's physical and psychological health (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

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During the last few years, the phenomenon of workplace mistreatment has captured the attention of several researchers in social and organizational settings globally as well as in Pakistan (Bibi et al., 2013; Razzaghian & Ghani, 2014). One frequently practiced instance of such mistreatment is termed as workplace ostracism that has become an emergent issue in the recent research (Robinson, et al. 2013). Williams and Nida (2017), while defining ostracism, state that ostracism is an experience to be ignored and facing social exclusion by one or more individuals. Different forms of ostracism are practiced. Exclusion and keeping one out of what is going on are considered the harshest ways to ostracize others. Treating others in silent ways or not looking at others while talking, shutting them out of conversations are also some ways to exclude others (Ferris, et al., 2008).

One's workplace is a part of one's life where one can manifest himself in a productive way. A pleasant atmosphere in the working relationships at workplace leaves a positive impact on an individual's general performance. If someone is ostracized, or ignored by co-workers, it not only creates distress but also affects his performance negatively. There is vast literature suggesting that social ostracism becomes the cause of long lasting detrimental impacts on an individual's physical and psychological health (Williams & Nida, 2017). Such acts of mistreatment are highly impactful in collectivist cultures where social bonding and relations are valued. Powell et al. (2009) suggest that collectivist cultures emphasize close and cohesive relations in social groups. Exclusion from one's social group to workplace can decrease an employee's performance to a greater extent as cultural and social structure has an important place in addressing social organizational issues (Shamim & Abbasi, 2012).

Long-term ostracism leaves adverse impacts on victims. The interviews of ostracized individuals indicated that the victim experience decrease in motivation and energy to function well and it becomes the source of poor performance at workplace. It can cause suicidal ideation as well. Ostracized individuals reported eating disorders, depression, and helplessness.

The present era of pressurizing work environment, where numerous demands are being placed at the employee, creates a stressful work environment for him. It is a kind of "silent treatment" that takes place when someone is left behind in business meetings or get-togethers of work fellows (Williams & Zardo, 2001). Ferris et al. (2008) proposed that ostracism could be harmful for both physical and mental wellbeing. It reduces job satisfaction and decreases commitment to work. According to Duffy et al. (2002), it reduces pro-organizational behaviors, and decreases commitment.

Consulting Cannon's theory (Cannon, 1915) of fight or flight response, when an individual goes through job stress, this fight-or-flight situation arises difficulty in coping with the situation. His physical reactions are accelerated such as rapid heartbeat. As a result, his capability to work decreases. He cannot focus for the completion of a task. If the stress prolongs, many physical and psychological symptoms may arise, including, insomnia, mood swings, irritability, low self-esteem, difficulty in decision-making, concentrating and many more (Arden, 2002). Borg (1990) have described that researchers have studied the effects of stressful situations faced by teachers and how they affect their well-being. Researches provide a data that 78 percent of teachers face negative consequences of stress and they have to deal with the worst health problems due to stressful conditions at their job. Several sources cause distress in teachers and creates the reason for demoralization and intentions for leaving their jobs. Lack of interpersonal support is one of them. Insufficient salaries, confusions in performing roles and conflicts are other salient factors (Gold & Roth, 1993).

### Literature Review

Negative impacts of workplace ostracism on the employees' wellbeing in workplace environment is an important area of research in organizational psychology. During the previous ten years, maltreatment behaviors at workplace have inspired organizational research all over the world including Pakistan (Bibi et al., 2013). Mistreatments that are visible such as bullying, workplace harassment, discrimination and incivility are reported to affect negatively on psychological health and productivity of employees (Fogg, 2008; Perrewe et al., 2015). Besides visible acts the adverse effects of "silent treatment" has also been observed worldwide (Balliet & Ferris, 2013). According to Powell et al. (2009) cultures that promote collectivist approach, tend to produce a greater number of individuals suffering from such mistreatment. As such culture value interpersonal bonding and social contexts a lot. They emphasize close relations with social groups. Ignoring by one's group affects employee's performance largely as social aspects play an important part in functioning well at workplace. Wu et al. (2012) investigated the association between work ostracism and job stress of employees as well as emotional exhaustion and depressed mood during work and the results of this study supported the association between workplace ostracism, and job tension, emotional exhaustion, and depressed mood at work. Workplace ostracism was positively correlated to job stress.

Moreover, the relationship between workplace ostracism and psychological distress was found to be dependent upon levels of employee ingratiation and political skill.

In organizations, workplace ostracism causes a greater level of stress and decreases satisfaction in organization's employees (Hitlan & Noel, 2009; Ferris et al., 2008). Workplace ostracism effect on employee's level of stress, employee's engagement and commitment, because employees think that other employees ignore them so they cannot survive in such environment where the other employees are not giving them value (Chung, 2017). Workplace ostracism increases the stress level of an employee and causes a decrease the capability to perform well on the job. Workplace ostracism declines the possibilities of interaction to other people with the passage of time and this practice consequently affects the psychological health of employee, his attitudes and patterns of work behavior (Ferris et al. 2015; Hitlan & Noel, 2009). Pressman and Cohen (2005) describes that Positive relations with other people strengthens physical and psychological well-being, however, when they face long lasting negativity in interpersonal relationships, it arises psychological problems and poor physical health. In short, an individual's thoughts, emotions, and behavior are strongly affected by other people's reactions and it damages his physical and psychological well-being as well. Williams and Zadro, (2001) describe ostracism as pervasive and leaves immediate and detrimental effects on psychological well-being on the individual being ostracized by damaging his belongingness, self-control, self-esteem, and purposeful existence. Numerous studies have shown that employees who suffered from ostracism at their workplace will experience many kinds of psychological reactions such as aversion reactions, high tension associated with work, emotional exhaustion and maladjustment, mental depression and lower job satisfaction as well (Ferris et al., 2008).

### **Rationale**

Ostracism has been the focus of investigation for long in various social sciences fields and diverse social settings. However, it is still understudied in educational settings. Especially, in the profession of teaching, the working environment dynamics especially social interaction patterns are an important area of study for all stakeholders in education.

In modern era, the social relationship among staff members at a workplace is substantial to study as they spend maximum productive time over there. In educational settings, healthy relationships among

staff members contribute a lot in boosting energy and efficiency for work. The stress at job place aroused by unpleasant working relationships can cause detrimental effects on the wellbeing of teachers. It is well understood that negative behaviors such as ostracism or being excluded by coworkers has a significant role in the working environments. A teacher's performance may suffer due to high levels of ostracism and resulting stress and this may affect students learning as well as the productivity of the organization. That is why, it is very beneficial to study the impacts of ostracism in teaching faculty that can result in job stress and consequently leaves a negative impact on psychological wellbeing of teachers. This study will contribute to the welfare of teaching profession and help maintaining teacher's mental health and psychological wellbeing so that they become a productive part of their organization and society as a whole.

### **Hypotheses**

- 1 There will be a significant positive relationship between ostracism and job stress (role ambiguity, role conflict).
- 2 There will be a significant negative relationship between ostracism and psychological wellbeing.
- 3 There will be a significant negative relationship between job stress and psychological wellbeing.
- 4 Psychological wellbeing will be negatively predicted by ostracism and job stress.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

A sample ( $N = 400$ ) of college and university teachers from Lahore district was included in this study. 200 college and 200 university teachers were taken from public sector institutes. 50 % male and 50 % female teachers were included in each cadre. Faculty members of public sector colleges and institutes who have minimum one year of teaching experience in current organization were included. Heads of departments/institutes physically handicapped and faculty members living in hostels were excluded.

Table 1: *Frequency Distribution of the Sample in Terms of Demographic Variables (N = 400)*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>(%)</b>
Cadre		
University	200	50
College	200	50
Gender		
Men	200	50
Women	200	50
Age		
21-30	67	16.8
31-40	172	43
41-50	103	25.8
51-60	58	14.5
Qualification		
Masters	115	28.7
MS/MPhil	195	48.8
Ph.D.	88	22
Post Doc	2	5
Designation		
Lecturer	155	38.8
Assistant Professor	146	36.5
Associate Professor	94	23.5
Professor	5	1.3
Marital status		
Single	92	23
Married	299	74.8
Separated/divorced	8	2
widowed	1	3
Family system		
Nuclear	208	52
Joint	192	48
Discipline		
Sciences	122	30.5
Social Sciences	169	42.3
Languages	109	27.3
Job duration		
1-5	68	17
6-10	84	21
11-15	117	29.3
16-20	58	14.5
Above 20	73	18.3
Number of colleagues		
1-5	35	8.8
6-10	90	22.50
11-15	132	33
Above 15	143	35.8

## Measures

### *Demographic Form*

Demographic sheet was developed by the researcher on the basis of previous researches. By sorting out detailed literature following demographics such as age, gender, qualification, discipline designation, marital status, family income, and family system, job experience in current position and organization, job duration, number of dependents, number of colleagues were included.

### *Work Ostracism Scale*

For measuring ostracism, Work Ostracism Scale (WOS) was used. This scale was developed by Ferris et al. (2008). It is a 10 item scale. It generates responses on a 7 point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never), 2 (once in a while), 3 (sometimes), 4 (fairly often), 5 (often), 6 (constantly), 7 (always). Few items in the scale include "Others ignored you at work", "Others left the area when you entered", "your greetings have gone unanswered at work by others" and "others shut you out of the conversation" and "others avoided you at work". During scale development, four samples were tested. The coefficient alpha reliability estimates were .89, .93, .96 and .94 for samples 1 to 4 respectively. Taken as a whole, the scale proved to have sufficient reliability i.e. .93 (Ferris et al., 2008).

### *General Work Stress Scale*

Job stress was measured by using General Work Stress Scale, developed by De Bruin (2006). The scale consists of 9 items on five-point Likert scale with 1 (never), 2 (rarely), 3 (sometimes), 4 (often) and 5 (always). Some of the items included in the scale are, "does work make you so stressed that you wish you had a different job?", "Do you get so stressed at work that you want to quit?", "Do you worry about having to wake up and go to work in the morning?". Two groups were included in the study. The reliability of the obtained scores, as estimated by Cronbach's alpha coefficient, for Group 1 and Group 2 were 0.89 and 0.88, respectively.

### *Role Conflict and Ambiguity Scale*

To measure job stress, role conflict and ambiguity scale was also used. This scale was developed by Rizzo et al (1970). It consists of 17 items measuring role conflict, role ambiguity and work overload. A 6-point Likert scale was used to measure role conflict and ambiguity.

Items in the scale include “I feel secure about how much authority I have.” “I have to do things that should be done differently.” Three items for work overload were responded at a 7-point Likert scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. A sample item is, “I have too much work to do, to do everything well”. The internal consistency (Cronbach’s coefficient) of the Role Conflict scale was 0.85. For the Role Ambiguity scale the Cronbach coefficients were 0.78 and 0.82 in Sample 1 and 2 respectively with ( $M = 4.71$ ,  $S.D. = 0.71$ ) for sample 1 and ( $M = 4.84$ ,  $S.D. = 0.78$ ) for sample 2. Cronbach’s alpha of the Role Overload scale was 0.64 in Sample 1 and 0.68 in Sample 2.

### ***Eudaimonic Workplace Wellbeing Scale***

Psychological wellbeing was measured by Eudaimonic Workplace Wellbeing Scale. This scale was developed by [Bartels et al. \(2019\)](#). The scale consists of 8 items. A 5- point Likert Scale indicating the strength of wellbeing from 1 (strongly disagree,) to 5 (strongly agree) was used. The scale has two dimensions of workplace wellbeing: interpersonal and intrapersonal wellbeing. There are four items presented in each dimension. Interpersonal wellbeing scale includes items “I feel close to the people in my work environment”. Intrapersonal wellbeing scale includes “I am emotionally energized at work” and “I am able to fully develop as a person at my work” Results show a strong internal reliability ( $r = .91$  and  $r = .86$ ) for each dimension, interpersonal and intrapersonal respectively and the full scale possess strong reliability ( $r = .89$ ).

### **Procedure**

Initially, permission was taken from the authors to use measurement tools in the study. A demographic sheet was prepared according to inclusion and exclusion criteria to gather information from the participants. Permission for data collection was taken from authorities of different colleges and universities. Participants were approached by the researcher through convenient sampling. A written informed consent was taken from the participants. Aims and objectives of the study were briefed to them, and they were assured about the confidentiality of the information taken. Standardized scales of Workplace Ostracism, General Work Stress Scale, Role Conflict and Ambiguity Scale and Eudaimonic Workplace Wellbeing Scale were administered to the participants. Participants took 30 to 40 minutes to complete the scales. Queries of the participants were also addressed. Researcher thanked all the participants and the end of data collection. A quantitative and descriptive analysis was done. The data were analyzed through SPSS.

## Results

Reliability analysis was employed to measure the reliability of instrument used in the study. In order to study the relationship between variables Pearson Product Moment Correlations and for prediction Multiple Linear Regression Analysis was done.

Table 2: *Descriptive Statistics for the Scales Used in the Study (N = 400)*

Measures	k	a	M(SD)	Range	
				Actual	Potential
Work Ostracism Scale	10	.89	19.47(8.62)	10-64	10-70
General Work Stress Scale	9	.87	19.62(7.18)	9-38	9-45
Role Conflict and Ambiguity Scale	17	.73	54.19(10.03)	21-92	17-105
Role ambiguity	6	.86	14.45(5.39)	6-36	6-36
Role conflict	8	.77	27.59(6.94)	8-44	8-48
Work overload	3	.28	12.15(3.04)	3-21	3-21
Edaimonic Workplace Wellbeing Scale	8	.85	29.41(5.10)	13-40	8-40
Interpersonal wellbeing	4	.84	14.22(3.01)	6-20	4-20
Intrapersonal wellbeing	4	.77	15.19(2.78)	6-20	4-20

Note. M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, a = Reliability Coefficient.

Table 2 shows number of items, mean, standard deviation, alpha reliability and range of WOS, GWSS, RCAS and EWWS. Overall reliability of WOS was very good i.e., .89. Reliability of GWSS was also very good i.e. .87. Reliabilities of RCAS was good i.e., .73. Reliability of EWWS was also good showing .83.

Table 3: *Correlation Analysis of Study Variables (N = 400)*

Variables	Ost.	Job St.	RCA	RA	RC	WOL	PWB	IPW	IAPW
Ost.	-	.637**	.46**	.44**	.22**	.21**	-.60**	-.56**	-.48**
Job St.		-	.51**	.43**	.24**	.35**	-.51**	-.48**	-.40**
RCA			-	.54**	.77**	.56**	-.43**	.44**	-.34**
RA				-	-.02	.08	-.56**	.52**	-.48**
RC					-	.31**	-.12**	.17**	-.06

Continued...

Variables	Ost.	Job St.	RCA	RA	RC	WOL	PWB	IPW	IAPW
WOL						-	-.13**	-.12*	-.12*
PWB							-	.88**	.86**
IPW								-	.56**
IAPW									-

Note. WOS = Work Ostracism Scale, GWSS = General Work Stress Scale, RCAS = Role Conflict and Ambiguity Scale, RA = Role Ambiguity, RC = Role Conflict, WOL = Work Overload, EWWS = Eudaimonic Workplace Wellbeing Scale, IPW = Interpersonal Wellbeing, IAPW = Intrapersonal Wellbeing.

\* $p > 0.5$ , \*\* $p > .01$ .

The results in Table 3 showed a significant moderate positive correlation between work ostracism and job stress ( $r = .637, p < .01$ ) indicating that participants facing higher ostracism tend to face higher job stress. Further, the results revealed a significant moderate and positive relationship between work ostracism and role conflict and ambiguity ( $r = .46, p < .01$ ) also revealing a significant moderate positive correlation with role ambiguity. Work ostracism showed a significant moderate negative relationship with psychological wellbeing of participants indicating that participants low in ostracism have higher levels of psychological wellbeing ( $r = -.60, p < .01$ ). Job stress showed a significant moderate positive correlation with role conflict and ambiguity ( $r = .51, p < .01$ ) and its subscales. Further, the results revealed a significant moderate negative correlation between job stress and overall psychological being ( $r = -.51, p < .01$ ) along with interpersonal ( $r = -.48, p < .01$ ) and intrapersonal wellbeing as well ( $r = -.40, p < .01$ ).

Table 4: *Ostracism, Job Stress, Role Conflict and Ambiguity as Predictors of Psychological Wellbeing (N = 400)*

Variables	Psychological wellbeing				
	B	SE	$\beta$	t	p
Ostracism	-.26	.03	-.42	-8.38***	.00
Job Stress	-.11	.03	-.15	-2.90**	.00
Role Conflict and Ambiguity	-.08	.02	-.16	-3.55***	.00
$R^2$	.40				
F	91.28				

Note.  $\beta$  = standardized coefficient, \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

In Table 4 the results revealed that all three variables i.e. ostracism, job stress and role conflict and ambiguity were a significant negative predictors of psychological wellbeing. The value of  $R^2$

indicated that 40% change in psychological wellbeing can be accounted for by the effect of ostracism, job stress and role conflict and ambiguity.

### Discussion

The current research focused on examining the relationship between ostracism, job stress and psychological wellbeing among college and university teachers. The results of the study revealed a significant positive relationship between ostracism and job stress. It implies that when an employee faces ostracism (being excluded) at workplace, it increases the levels of job stress. Several research findings are in line with these results, for example, [Haq \(2014\)](#) and [Sarwar et al. \(2019\)](#) pointed out ostracism being the source of job stress. In organizations, workplace ostracism causes a higher level of stress and lower level of satisfaction in employees ([Ferris et al., 2008](#); [Hitlan & Noel, 2009](#)). Conservation of Resource (COR) theory by [Hobfoll \(1989, 2001\)](#) postulates that individuals strive to achieve, retain and preserve those things they centrally value for them. This theory proposes that stress occurs when central resources are at risk to be lost or they are at risk to be lost. COR states that individuals need social, informational along with physical resources to function well on their job and avoid stress at job place. Individuals try to conserve their existing resources if they are affected. Consequently, they experience decrease in performance. Social relations are an important source of wellbeing when the employees have fewer resources ([Hobfoll, 1989](#)). Researchers identify many causes of stress at job place. Similarly, [Strank \(2005\)](#), talks about the more common occupational stressors that include violence at work, generally linked with bullying and the nature of dealing with other members. Social context theory of wellbeing proposed by [Keyes \(1998\)](#) describes that a good and well-lived life is linked with a socially healthy context. This theory relates the positive mental health with social challenges and criteria. According to [Keyes \(1998\)](#), an individual living in a specific social structure and his position being a part of a community is affected by the challenges of adjustment faced by him that consequently, affect his wellbeing.

Further, the results reflected that ostracism had a significant negative correlation with psychological wellbeing. According to [Ferris et al. \(2008\)](#), facing ostracism at workplace has a detrimental impact on an employee's wellbeing because it proves to be an unpleasant and negative experience. Similarly, [Pressman and Cohen \(2005\)](#) describe that Positive relations with other people strengthens physical and

psychological well-being, however, when they face long lasting negativity in interpersonal relationships, it arises psychological problems and poor physical health. Williams and Zadro (2001) describe ostracism as pervasive and leaves immediate and detrimental effects on psychological well-being on the individual being ostracized by damaging his belongingness, self-control, self-esteem, and purposeful existence.

Moreover, job stress was correlated significantly and negatively with both aspects of eudaimonic workplace wellbeing i.e. interpersonal and intrapersonal wellbeing. Studies have pointed out that physical and mental health can be adversely affected by job-related factors. Excessive workload, time restrictions, and unpleasant interpersonal relationship stresses can badly affect an individual's mental health (Masoudi & Mousavi, 2003). Canon's theory (1915) of fight or flight responses describes the same phenomenon as the individual who experiences stress at workplace, often finds it more difficult to cope with the situation. Similarly, Seley's model of stress explains job stress as negatively affecting physical and psychological wellbeing. If the individual remains unsuccessful in combating the stressful situation, this leads to wear and tear and bodily illness and his vulnerability to stress increases for further (Strank, 2005).

Since Pakistani culture is a collectivist culture. People here, value interpersonal relations in every setting. At job places, besides their job tasks, they place great importance to their workplace relationships. Being ostracized or ignored at workplace is a major threat to their wellbeing. In the Pakistani context, this research contributes a lot in educational settings as some previous studies have explored the relationship between ostracism and organizations related constructs such as, emotional exhaustion, job stress and job performance in state universities (Fatima et al., 2019; Sarwar et al., 2019). Present study adds to support previous findings. In addition, this study examines ostracism at college level as well where several departments work under limited independence with centralized administration set up and the nature of job tasks also includes multidisciplinary collaborative work. Further, it has also explored the differences in ostracism and job stress between college and university cadre. Specifically, this research addresses the problems in psychological wellbeing of college and university teachers keeping in view the rising interest in positive psychology constructs relevant to organizational setup that is still understudied in Pakistani context.

## Conclusion

It is concluded from the findings of the present study that ostracism and job stress (role conflict and ambiguity) affect negatively on psychological wellbeing including eudaimonic workplace wellbeing of college and university teachers. Additionally, ostracism and job stress are significant predictors of psychological wellbeing.

## Limitations and Suggestions

Analyzing the research variables in private sector institutions and comparing the results can lead us to potentially interesting findings. Qualitative data should also be gathered to collect in-depth knowledge about impacts of ostracism.

## Implications

The current study implies that there is a need for trainings and positive social interaction exercises for teachers both in colleges and universities in order to reduce ostracism as it leads to job stress and poor psychological wellbeing. During recruitment and trainings held by higher education department, the employers should focus on those personality traits and practices that are not conducive to ostracism. This study also contributes by giving a view of the demographic characteristics of those who are ostracized more often. Those at lower job status should be monitored and provided with a conducive environment to free them of ostracism. The heads/principals/chairpersons should use tactics, tricks and strategies to reduce and manage the ostracism in order to maintain a healthy work environment. This study will contribute to the welfare of teaching profession and help maintaining teacher's mental health and psychological wellbeing so that they become a productive part of their organization and society as a whole.

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