

RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Workplace Ostracism and Job Performance: The Role of Depressed Mood and Political Skill

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**Abstract:** Ostracism has become a common hurtful phenomenon in the workplace. Researchers and practitioners are interested in identifying the range of consequences for employee attitudes and behaviors caused by workplace ostracism. By drawing on the conservation of resources theory, this paper examines the impact of workplace ostracism on job performance through depressed mood and the moderating effect of employees' political skill in buffering the negative consequences of ostracism on job performance. The results show that the indirect impact of workplace ostracism on job performance through depressed mood becomes weak for individuals with high political skills and vice versa. The present study contributes to the existing stream of knowledge by providing how workplace ostracism transforms into poor performance outcomes by investigating the underpinning mechanism of depressed mood. It also examines an essential but unexplored boundary condition of political skill that detonates the indirect process for the employees with high political skill compared to low.

**Keywords:** workplace ostracism, job performance, political skill, and depressed mood  
**JEL Classification Codes:** M12

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## 1 Introduction

Imagine at the office cafeteria, where you strike up a conversation with a colleague. Assuming you were invited, he passed the information about the upcoming lunch meeting. A few days later, you realize that you were not invited when other coworkers were talking about the memorable time they had at lunch without even noticing that you had joined them or not. You had not thought about it until you had this feeling, but now you wonder if you are being left out at the workplace or just assuming it and worrying about why it is happening to you. So, when you are prone to exclusion, ignorance and being overlooked by other individuals or groups across all social contexts, including the workplace, this experience is labeled as Ostracism (Williams, 1997).

Social psychologists (Howard et al., 2019; Van Beest and Williams, 2006) believe that being ostracized by others at work causes an emotionally painful human experience. Similarly, Management scholars have recognized several adverse outcomes of workplace ostracism, like burnout (Qian et al., 2019), deteriorating psychological well-being (Wu et al., 2012), a higher level of workplace deviance, and a low level of helping behavior (Peng and Zeng, 2017). Ostracism can have exceptionally adverse consequences for individuals' physical and mental well-being, as well as their job performance (Harvey et al., 2018). Several studies show adverse psychological results of ostracism; this motivates scholars to investigate further the employees' reaction to being ostracized at work (Wu et al., 2016). The present research centers on the idea of exploring the range of consequences pertaining to the attitudes and behavior of employees caused by workplace ostracism and the overall deterioration of job performance.

Earlier studies on workplace ostracism have mainly focused on its impact on employees' attitudes and behaviors. However, the research focusing on the effects of ostracism on employees' overall job performance is minimal. Further, the ostracism-job performance studies are mainly viewed through mediating mechanisms of employees' attitudes and behaviors. Studies emphasizing individuals' moods are scarce. Williams (2001) and Ferris et al. (2008) suggested that being ostracized at work causes a threat to four basic needs: control, belonging, self-esteem, and meaningful existence. We believe that the risk to these fundamental needs leads to employees' depressed mood at work, leading to poor job performance. When employees are prone to workplace ostracism, they are vulnerable to intense anxiety (Jiang et al., 2020). They thus may form a depressed mood leading to low performance at a job. Since workplace ostracism is a painful experience that causes depressed mood leading to poor job performance among employees, there must be an underlying mechanism investigating this crucial issue alongwith suggesting the coping mechanism. The present study offers the underlying mechanism to examine the impact of workplace ostracism on job performance through depressed mood. Furthermore, it also suggests the coping mechanism by introducing political skill as a moderator.

Utilizing the conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), the present research examines how and when workplace ostracism leads to employees' poor job performance. The present research discusses the mediating mechanism between workplace ostracism and job performance by proposing a distressed mood as a potential mediator. COR theory states that individuals struggle to obtain, preserve, and protect resources that they consider significant to them in the time of resource loss (Lyu et al., 2016). Therefore, the target's resources are exhausted due to workplace ostracism, as it acts as a workplace stressor (Wu et al., 2012). As ostracism is considered an interpersonal stressor, it may cause

to generate psychological distress among employees (Williams and Zadro, 2001). Work-related stressors (i.e., ostracism) can lead to a depressed mood at work (Heinisch and Jex, 1997). Prior studies have shown that depressed mood at work is strongly correlated with adverse consequences such as low productivity (Lagerveld et al., 2010), intention to leave, and bad physical health (Grandey and Cropanzano, 1997). Therefore, examining the mediating role of depressed mood at work between workplace ostracism and employees' job performance is crucial.

Employees under work-related stress like ostracism are likely to be tensed and have a depressed mood at work (Williams, 1997). In such a distressing situation, employees get little time to build social ties with other coworkers. Resultantly, employees in such a scenario are expected to get unintentionally neglected by others, which results in non-purposeful ostracism. Further, psychologically distressed employees (having job tension, depressed mood, and emotionally exhausted) experience high blood pressure (Schaubroeck and Merritt, 1997), work-family conflict (Grandey et al., 2005), and turnover intention (Harvey et al., 2007). They have self-esteem issues, and such individuals avoid making any effort to remain connected with other coworkers

Though much research has examined workplace ostracism and its consequences, slight consideration has been paid to the boundary conditions that moderate (strengthen or weaken) the relationship between workplace ostracism and work outcomes (Steinbauer et al., 2018). Further, it is also essential to understand the coping strategies through which the negative consequences of workplace ostracism can be reduced (Williams, 2007). This study focuses on political skill as a potential coping strategy to mitigate workplace ostracism's adverse outcomes for several reasons. First, politically skilled employees are more proficient in dealing with work-related stressors (Harvey et al., 2007) and are, therefore, better able to manage depressive situations. Second, political skill acts as a stress-buffering factor because it enhances employees' understanding of their social work environment, which helps them cope effectively (Perrewé et al., 2005).

The present study investigates political skill as a moderator between ostracism and employees' mood. We argue that people with high political skill are less likely to be ostracized than their counterparts. Political skill helps employees develop diverse networks and understand others (Ferris et al., 2005); they are less prone to be ostracized at work. Specifically, the indirect effect of workplace ostracism on job performance through depressed mood is slow for the employee with high political skill than the employee with low political skill.

According to Rai and Agarwal (2018), very little understanding is available on the potential underlying and intervening mechanisms for the consequences of workplace bullying. The present study offers the underlying mechanism and aims to advance the workplace ostracism literature by providing two significant contributions: first, identifying depressed mood at work as a possible mediating mechanism between workplace ostracism and job performance. Second, it investigates how political skills can moderate the relationship between workplace ostracism and depressed mood at work.

## 2 Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

### 2.1 Conservation of Resources Theory

Under COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), cognitions comprise an evolutionary-based built-in and potent bias under which gain of resources is underweight and loss of resources is over-

weighted. In line with this view, the COR theory has been postulated that stress arises i) with central resources vulnerable to loss. ii) with central resources that are lost, or iii) when people are unable to attain resources despite putting in a lot of effort. COR theory explicates more of humans' behavior as it is a motivational theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

It emphasizes that humans have an evolutionary need to gain and protect resources for their existence, as it is also essential to humans' behavioral genetics. Humans need to gain and protect personal strengths and social bonds like other social animals. People employ essential resources to respond to stress and create a pool of sustaining resources to utilize in the future. Moreover, different organizations, people, and families develop the sense that they can meet stressful challenges when they gain and retain social, personal, and material resources.

In organizations, the COR theory is critical for progressing the stress understanding as it is principally the reverse of the stress-appraisal theory of Lazarus and Folkman (1984). The stress-appraisal theory follows the principle that stressful is what is professed as stressful. However, one main limitation of this theory is that one must wait for the event to occur to identify it as stressful. Due to this information, the stress-appraisal theory is regarded as non-predictive or idiographic. Additionally, it is implicitly stated by stress-appraisal theory that stress pertains to the individual perception while the COR theory objectively accentuates the nature of events that are stressful.

Ostracism is an interpersonal stressor that hovers the target's primary social resources (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). The target uses these social resources to overcome social issues in the workplace. Like this, the COR theory proposes that individuals try to develop, uphold, and utilize such resources to cope with community challenges. Employees feel threatened if they can see a loss of these valuable social resources, which leads them to cause depression (Zheng et al., 2016). Ostracism is considered a significant challenge that depletes an individual's resources (Zheng et al., 2016). As individuals' resources can help them daily, deterioration in such resources is likely to generate stress and a depressive mood.

## 2.2 Workplace Ostracism

Ostracism is a pervasive occurrence and it is being exercised by social species and humans pertaining to all age groups and cultures all over the history. William and Zadro (2001) elucidate that the actions of ostracism/exclusion involve extreme kinds, for example, expulsion from the groups and imprisonment in solitary; to relatively slighter forms, which includes treating others with a silent behavior, unanswered love, ignoring, snubbing, and complete rejection (Hitlan et al., 2006). Similarly, responses to ostracism also vary, i.e., from behaving pro-socially more than required (Williams, 2007) to increased aggressive behavior (Leary et al., 2003). A series of laboratory studies have supported this statement showing that only five minutes of ostracism reduce self-esteem, sense of belonging, meaningful existence and control compared to socially included subjects (Williams, 2007).

Ostracism is considered one of the deviant behaviors in the workplace. Based on past organizational and social-psychological studies, Hitlan et al. (2006) describe workplace ostracism as 'the denial, ignoring or exclusion of a person by another person that act as a hindrance in employee's capability to develop/maintain interpersonal relations, success in performance or repute at the workplace.' Workplace ostracism is a behavior that indirectly undermines and harms the organization and the employees. As per this conception,

undermining behavior may also be direct (e.g., verbally treating others as less worth) or withholding behaviors (e.g., not providing critical information to a colleague). The most recent definition of workplace ostracism is by Robinson et al. (2013) 'Workplace ostracism occurs when an employee or group of employees does not connect with another members of the organization when it is communally suitable to do so.'

Considerable research studies reveal that ostracism has a significant impact on how persons deal and are dealt by others (Williams, 2007). Unfortunately, less consideration has been given to workplace ostracism in organizations despite its importance. To this point, scholars are encouraged to study more on this subject to well comprehend in what way workplace ostracism occurs (Ferris et al., 2008).

### 2.3 Depressed Mood at Work

The depressed mood at work is a negative feeling that employees experience in depression. Prati et al. (2009) examined two types of strain: the physical strain and the psychological strain in the form of depressed mood at work, which can be referred to as feeling downhearted or blue work. Physical strain can be transient, but the psychological strain is long-lasting and leads to depression. Depression often affects numerous aspects of life, including work (Lerner and Henke, 2008). A recent study shows that depression increases by facing a stressful work environment alone (Wu et al., 2012).

Depressed mood is different from emotional exhaustion, which involves prolonged physical and emotional depletion (Cropanzano et al., 2003, p. 160). Emotional exhaustion is a component of burnout that involves being strained due to the exhaustion of one's physical and emotional resources (Halbesleben and Bowler, 2005), while depression is defined as a state of low mood (Salmans, 1995). Depressed mood is different from psychiatric disorder. It can be an outcome of life events and impair the employee's performance (Lerner et al., 2010). Lagerveld et al. (2010) conducted a research and found that depressed mood at work is linked with adverse outcomes of work for example less participation of work (for instance, sick leave) and functioning of work (for instance, loss of productivity).

### 2.4 Workplace Ostracism and Depressed Mood at Work

Previous studies advocate that being ignored at work results in lesser chance for interacting socially and ultimately leads to interpersonal stressors, that might cause psychological and physical distress (Heaphy and Dutton, 2008). As mentioned above, ostracism hurts four fundamental human needs that are needed for self-esteem, a sense of belonging, a need to control, and meaningful existence (Williams, 1997, 2007). All these basic needs are considered critical employee resources. In addition, when their colleagues ignore organizational members, they may consider themselves as outgroup members (Williams et al., 2000). This feeling reduces their sense of belongingness and group identification, and thus the state of distress arises (Choi, 2019).

According to COR theory, one of the crucial resources is social support that helps employees diminish their feeling of burnout (Halbesleben and Bowler, 2005). Similarly, social support safeguards organizational workers against bad traumatic experiences. As workplace ostracism indicates a absence of social support, employees undergoing ostracism are not much able to deal with stressful work experiences (Bakker et al., 2005). Ostracism

generally results in negative affective states leading to stressful experiences, eventually mitigating an individual's resources (Kwan et al., 2018).

Being ignored by other organizational members drops perceived relational value and hovers an individual's self-esteem (Peng and Zeng, 2017). Similarly, the feeling of being ostracized sends signals to the one who is experiencing it that one is not considered a valued member of the organization (Robinson et al., 2013). Thus, it takes down one's perceived relational value. Reduced relational value threatens an individual's self-esteem (Leary et al., 2003). As self-esteem is a vital resource to tackle unwanted situations, lower self-esteem enhances employees' depressed mood. Based on these arguments, we can hypothesize that;

*H1.* Workplace ostracism positively relates to depressed mood at work.

## 2.5 Depressed Mood at Work and Job Performance

Janssen and Yperen (2004) define employees' job performance as activities that are essential and demanded by the employee's job description and consequently controlled, assessed, and rewarded by the organization. Job performance is the employees' ability to do their work (Borman and Motowidlo, 1993). There is a central role of employees in any organization's success, and their performance has a significant impact on organizational performance (Collis and Montgomery, 1995). Performance is also vital for the individual; low performance and failing to achieve the objectives may lead to dissatisfaction or personal failure (Sonnentag and Frese, 2001).

Depression becomes evidence for several health-related issues and a growing economic burden on organizations, employees, families, and corporations worldwide. World Health Organization reports suggest that depression is a significant factor contributing to worldwide disability (WHO, 1980). Further, it may also cause suicide, a top ten reason for death universally. Acknowledging depression is a growing issue; it pushes researchers to discover its potential causes and impacts.

Depressed employees demonstrate more on-the-job functional confines, absenteeism, and early retirement than their non-depressed colleagues (Lerner and Henke, 2008). Lerner et al. (2011) found that employees' job performance is negatively affected by the state of depression and similar work stressors. Drawing on COR theory, the unsupportive social environment reduces productivity and functional loss because it becomes problematic for a depressed employee to face work-related pressure (Lerner et al., 2011). Studies on job stressors showed that the depression of employees is directly linked with their low performance (Lerner and Henke, 2008). In similar lines, McTernan et al. (2013) argued that the link between depressed mood and loss of employees' productivity is evident. The feeling of depression causes an employee to feel emotionally low and less energetic (Ghaemi and Vöhringer, 2011), which is a symptom of his low job performance. Based on these arguments, we can hypothesize that;

*H2.* Depressed mood at work negatively relates to employees' job performance.

## 2.6 Mediating Role of Depressed Mood at Work

According to COR theory, ostracism generally results in a loss of social resources in losing cooperation from their peers (Zheng et al., 2016). Employees' lack of resources to man-

age their routine tasks gives rise to emotional exhaustion (Lee and Ashforth, 1996), which hampers their productivity. Human beings need to maintain quality relationships to improve their socio-emotional resources and bolster their physical and psychological well-being (Heaphy and Dutton, 2008). These socio-emotional resources are critically important to work smoothly. As ostracism breaks one's social connection and threatens his resources (Zheng et al., 2016), one might not be able to perform his job effectively. Similarly, an employee's need for social sharing cannot be fulfilled in the presence of ostracism, leading to a state of emotional exhaustion (Anasori et al., 2021).

The arousal of depressed mood from ostracism is mainly due to two reasons. First, being ostracized generates a harmful and painful emotional experience. These negative experiences cause strain and distress (Karimikia and Singh, 2019). Empirical studies show that stress in a depressed mood diminishes employee performance at work. Second, working in a stressful environment enhances employee distress. Both experimental and survey-based studies show that employees under ostracism show depressed mood (Ferris et al., 2008), which impairs employee work outcomes like reduced participation and low functioning (Lagerveld et al., 2010). The above arguments support the notion that ostracism leads to declined employees' job performance through the arousal of depressed mood in them, and we hypothesize that:

*H3.* Depressed mood at work mediates the relationship between workplace ostracism and job performance.

## 2.7 Moderating Role of Political Skill

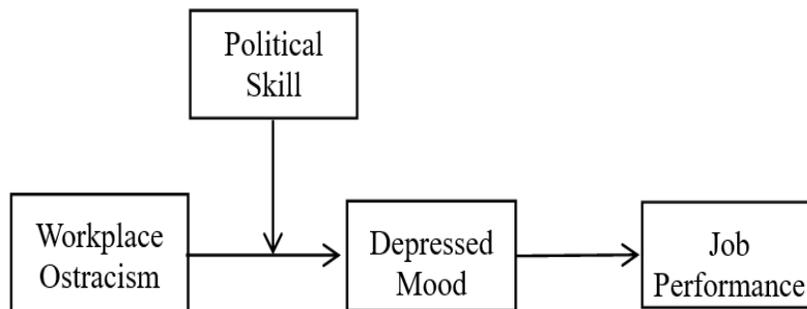
Scholars have shown great interest in organizational politics for years. Nevertheless, very little is known about the essential capabilities to exercise politics at work effectively. Political skill is "the capability to understand others well at work and employ such information to influence others to act in ways that augment one's personal and/or organizational aims" (Ferris et al., 2005, as cited in Wu et al., 2012). Political skill is one of the significant individual traits that develops the competency to deal with the workplace stressors like ostracism in order to improve the job performance (Chaman et al., 2021). Ferris and his colleagues view political skill as an interpersonal approach, which helps individuals have an enhanced social understanding and the ability to communicate better. It is distinguished by the ability to adjust behaviors in diverse situational needs. People who practice political skill tend to behave in a amiable and appealing style that instigates trust, confidence, and genuineness. People who have better political skills are instrumental in interpersonal relations and better understand others' motivations (Ferris et al., 2007).

Ferris et al. (2005) introduced four critical dimensions of political skill: social astuteness, networking ability, interpersonal influence, and apparent sincerity. These dimensions can be used as potential resources when dealing with social affairs. Organizational individuals' expert in interpersonal influence and good social astute is more flexible in their attitudes and thus better mold their behaviors according to the situation (Ferris et al., 2005; Turnley and Bolino, 2001). When ignored at work, such people know well how to make an alternative social connection to avoid any distressful condition. Further, developing and utilizing social networks is the key strength of politically skilled employees (Ferris et al., 2005). This network-building ability supports these individuals to garnish good relationships at the workplace (Zheng et al., 2016). This context helps them to mitigate the neg-

ative consequences of ostracism towards them. Finally, politically skilled employees are good managers of managing others' responses by displaying their honesty and integrity (Ferris et al., 2005) and can effectively handle their colleagues' adverse reactions without indulging in stress.

According to COR theory, ostracized employees lack resources, which badly affects their performance. To maintain/improve performance and overcome the loss of social connections they face due to their psychologically distressing condition, they need to be politically skilled. It has been empirically supported that people with many inter-organizational and intra-organizational social connections have better performance evaluations. They have better compensation and benefits and have a higher probability of promotion than people with fewer connections (Ferris et al., 2007). Interpersonal relationships and social interactions are essential for better performance and job success (Ferris et al., 2000). Good interpersonal relations improve people's psychological well-being and give benefits like quickly recovering from harmful incidents, enhanced creativeness, and performing in a better way. This ability is referred to as political skill (Perrewe et al., 2005). Based on the above arguments, we can hypothesize that;

**H4.** Political skill moderates the indirect impact of workplace ostracism on job performance through depressed mood at work in such a way that the relationship will be weaker for employees with high political skills than with low political skills.



**Figure 1: Hypothesized Moderated Mediation Model**

### 3 Methodology and Analysis

Source of data collection was employees of two large commercial banks in Pakistan. Fifteen branches for each bank were selected randomly. A list of the permanent employees from these branches was prepared with the branch and operation managers' help. Survey questionnaires were assigned a specific code for each employee before distribution. Two different data sources (i.e., employees and branch managers) were utilized to decrease common method bias (Chang et al., 2020; Podsakoff et al., 2012). Employees provided information regarding workplace ostracism, depressed mood, and political skill. At the same time, their branch managers completed the information about their job performance.

Employees completed the survey questionnaires in the presence of trained data collectors. The questionnaires were provided in a sealed envelope and asked to put the completed questionnaire in the box placed in the branch manager's office to maintain respondents' anonymity. Out of 300 distributed questionnaires, 233 completed, matched, and useable surveys from both sources were returned, showing a response rate of 77.7%. The final sample consisted of 65% males; about 50% were married. The respondents' mean age was 30.7 years, mean formal education was about 15 years, bank tenure was 3.2 years, and the average experience was about five years. As public dealing and social interaction were central to the respondents' job specifications, the sample is suitable for testing our study model.

### 3.1 Measures

#### 3.1.1 Workplace Ostracism

Workplace Ostracism was measured using a 10-item scale developed by Ferris et al. (2008). Responses range from 1 (never) to 7 (always). The sample item includes "Others ignore me at work."

#### 3.1.2 Depressed mood

Depressed mood was measured through the 10-item scale developed by Quinn and Shepard (1974). Response options ranged from 1 (never) to 7 (always). The sample item is "I feel downhearted and sad." The scale used to measure depressed mood is significantly different from the emotional exhaustion scale. The latter captures the individuals' emotionally overburdened feelings (see, for example, Wu et al., 2012; Barling and Macintyre, 1993).

#### 3.1.3 Political skill

Political skill was measured by Ferris et al. (2005) 18 item political skill inventory. Response options range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), and the sample item is "I am able to communicate easily and effectively with others."

#### 3.1.4 Job Performance

Job Performance was measured using the 5-items scale (Janssen and Yperen, 2004). Response options range from 1 (always) to 7 (never). This supervisor rated scale for job performance, which is more reliable than self-rated job performance scales. The scale's sample item is "This worker completes the duties specified in his/her job description."

## 4 Results

Descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, and Pearson correlations of all variables, are presented in Table 1. The Cronbach's alphas of all study variables presented in diagonal are acceptable. As in hypothesized direction, the independent variable workplace ostracism showed significant and positive correlation with dependent variable, job performance ( $r = 0.34$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and mediating variable, depressed mood at work ( $r = 0.44$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

**Table 1: Mean, Standard Deviation and Correlation among Variables**

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender	-							
2. Age	-.145*	-						
3. Tenure	-0.107	.659**	-					
4. Education	0.066	0.106	-0.037	-				
5. Workplace Ostracism	0.02	0.025	0.031	-0.066	-0.85			
6. Depressed Mood	-0.033	0.118	0.104	0.043	.440**	-0.88		
7. Job Performance	-0.024	0.046	0.056	0.084	.343**	-.348**	-0.9	
8. Political Skill	-.159*	-0.071	0.002	-0.004	0.058	0.029	0.001	-0.84
Mean	1.08	30.59	3.2	15.15	2.72	3.75	2.94	5.63
SD	0.27	7.2	2.58	1.25	0.91	1.03	0.7	0.8

Notes. *n*=233 employees; \* *p*<0.05; \*\**p*< 0.01.

### 4.1 Hypotheses Testing

We used multiple regression analysis suggested by Cohen et al. (2003) for testing the direct hypothesis, i.e., hypotheses 1 and 2. For testing our hypothesis 3, the mediation mechanism, we used model 4 of PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013). Finally, the moderated mediation (hypotheses 4) was tested by PROCESS macro applying model 7.

Table 2 shows a positive and significant path between workplace ostracism and distressed mood ( $\beta = .74, p < .05$ ) and supports our hypothesis 1, i.e., workplace ostracism is positively related to depressed mood at work. This table also shows a negative and significant relationship between depressed mood and job performance ( $\beta = -.30, p < .05$ ) and supports our hypothesis 2, i.e., the depressed mood at work negatively relates to job performance. To test hypothesis 3, which is the mediation of depressed mood between workplace ostracism and job performance, we applied Model 4 of PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013). The bootstrap results at a 95% confidence interval do not contain zero between LLCI and ULCI (-.32 and -.16 respectively), revealing significant mediation of depressed mood between workplace ostracism and job performance ( $\beta = -.22, p < .05$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 3 is supported.

**Table 2: Results of Direct, Mediation and Moderated Mediation Model**

Paths	Effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Workplace Ostracism→Depressed Mood (H1)	0.74	0.06	0.61	0.87
Depressed Mood→Job Performance (H2)	-0.3	0.04	-0.38	-0.22
Workplace Ostracism→Depressed Mood→Job Performance (H3)	-0.22	0.04	-0.31	-0.16
Workplace Ostracism X Political Skill→Depressed Mood → Job Performance (H4)	-0.03	0.02	-0.08	0

Finally, we tested the moderated mediation hypothesis by applying model 7 of PROCESS

macro. Hypothesis 4 states that political skill moderates workplace ostracism's indirect impact on job performance through depressed mood at work. The relationship will be weaker for employees with high political skills than low political skills. The moderated mediation index (Table 2) does not contain zero between lower LLCI and ULLI. It suggests a significant moderation effect of political skill in the indirect relationship between workplace ostracism and job performance through a depressed mood. The negative impact shows that political skill weakens the negative relationship between workplace ostracism and depressed mood.

The results of the conditional indirect effect shown in Table 3 at different political skill values also support moderated mediation as the indirect impact was more (.13) at high political skill compared to that of the indirect effect (.07) at the low political skill. The results support hypothesis 4.

**Table 3: Results of Strength of Moderated Mediation**

Moderator	Level	Job Performance			
		Conditional Indirect effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Political Skill	<i>High</i>	0.13	0.04	0.06	0.23
	<i>Low</i>	0.07	0.03	0.03	0.16

## 5 Discussion

The current study employs COR theory to find the relationship between workplace ostracism, depressed mood at work, and job performance. The study explains the mediating role of depressed mood at work between workplace ostracism and job performance and identifies political skill's moderating role in the mediation model. Findings of this study reveal support for the hypotheses concerning the direct relationship between workplace ostracism and depressed mood at work and between depressed mood and job performance. Further, the study findings guide us to understand better how workplace ostracism impacts performance. The mediating model gives insight into how depressed mood generated through ostracism leads to poor job performance.

In addition to the negative relationship between workplace ostracism and job performance, as reported in previous studies (De Clercq et al., 2019), our findings suggest that the relationship is mediated by distressed mood and moderated by the political skill of the employees. The moderation of political skill showed that employees with strong political skills could better manage workplace ostracism's adverse effects. High political skills can buffer workplace ostracism's negative consequences on employees' job performance by reducing depressed mood strength. On the other hand, employees with low political skills are more prone to workplace ostracism's adverse consequences, eventually demolishing their job performance. The study results are in line with preceding studies (e.g., Wu et al., 2012), showing that political skill has a moderating role in the relationship between workplace ostracism and depressed mood so that higher political skill, weakens the negative relationship between workplace ostracism and employees' distressed mood at work. Similarly, our findings align with Zhao et al. (2013), which supports that political skill coupled

with proactive personality leads to the weakest relationship between workplace ostracism and deviant work behaviour.

This research contributes towards mounting literature on workplace ostracism and political skill. Foremost, we have determined the underpinning mechanism of depressed mood between workplace ostracism and job performance. It adds to the current literature by explaining how ostracism at work translates into negative job performance by developing a state of distress among employees. Our findings provide evidence that ostracized people are most vulnerable to be targeted for distress, which ultimately negatively impacts the employees' performance. Secondly, ostracism's pragmatic effect has been overlooked in prior research; only the psychological effects have been discussed. This study demonstrates the practical effect of ostracism in poor performance by determining factors that lead to poor performance.

Although political skill is a well-articulated concept and has drawn significant interest from scholars for years, its moderating role between workplace ostracism and job performance has been studied scarcely. This study determines that politically skilled employees can counteract workplace ostracism on depressed mood and manage to perform well, even being ignored by coworkers.

## 5.1 Theoretical Implications

Overall, the current research has a contribution towards existing knowledge by investigating how the distressed mood abridges the distal relationship between workplace ostracism and job performance. The results are congruent with prior studies in which the negative relationship between workplace ostracism and employee outcomes is mediated by emotional exhaustion, a closely related but distinct concept (Jiang et al., 2020). Further, current research findings advance the existing body of knowledge by examining political skill as a moderator of the relationship between workplace ostracism and distressed mood at work. By applying the Ferris et al. (2005) logic that employees which are politically skilled can better develop and use social networks, we suggest political skill as a coping strategy to mitigate the adverse effects (i.e., depressed mood) of being ostracized. By understanding this critical boundary condition, we can better explain the translation of ostracism into job performance via the change in mood state.

## 5.2 Practical Implications

The study establishes the positive relationship between workplace ostracism and depressed mood and depressed mood and job performance in the light of COR theory. It allows the researchers to direct their attention to the antecedents of workplace ostracism and discover new prospects for improved employees' job performance.

In practical terms, the study suggests two ways for employees' performance for practitioners and managers. Firstly, to improve the condition of psychologically distressed employees (i.e., by not overburdening the employees and making the work environment healthy and friendly), reduce workplace ostracism and eventually improve the employees' performance. By confirming the underpinning mechanism of depressed mood, this study can help managers understand prevailing ostracism at work through their workers' depressed mood. Managers need to create a culture that will decrease distress and enhance self-esteem and confidence. The employees and managers should be trained to develop a

culture that discourages workplace ostracism. In preliminary sessions, management can advise the employees that the effects of ostracism at the workplace are much more damaging than imagined and propose that they can solve any such trouble via discussion.

Another way to improve job performance is to promote the employees' political skill tactics, effective behavioral strategies. Organizations and managers who want to diminish workplace ostracism's harms must recruit politically skilled employees and/or systematically promote political skill through training, counseling, and mentoring. Specifically, interventions targeted at making employees socially astute, building a flexible attitude to change according to a situation. These interventions should enhance their ability to bank on alternative social networks to tackle distressful conditions while facing workplace rejection and motivate them to improve their ethical behaviors, honesty, and integrity. As a reinforcement strategy, performance appraisal criteria may also include the dimensions of political skill.

### 5.3 Limitations and Future Directions

A few limitations of the study must also be noted; firstly, the researcher was constrained about the length of the questionnaire, so other possible antecedents of workplace ostracism were not included in this study. Also, people can be sensitive to ostracism effects, and it depends on personality variables that are not included in this study. Moreover, individuals may simultaneously use different behavior strategies to moderate the relationship between workplace ostracism and job performance, such as ingratiation, personal appeal, rational persuasion, and surface confidence. Therefore, it is essential to integrate other personality and behavioral tactics variables to examine how far depressed mood, workplace ostracism, and political skill account for work performance. Further, we call on future research to examine whether political skills may be used as a coping strategy for other work-related stressors (i.e. work overload, role ambiguity, and role conflict). Heinisch and Jex (1997) suggested that negative affectivity moderated the relationship between workplace stressors and depressed mood.

Secondly, ostracism cannot be distinguished in the research, although these were discussed in the literature review. More than one type of ostracism can be experienced by people (e.g., purposeful or non-purposeful) that influences their coping skills. We assume that coworkers non-purposefully/unintentionally ostracize psychologically distressed individuals (because of their low confidence and different personality) without any motive. Still, it can be the other way around. Ostracism can be intentional at times, but it is not included in this study.

Thirdly, the designations of the respondents are taken as a control variable in the study. Still, it is seen in results that workers at lower levels experience more ostracism than those at a higher position. Also, ostracism from supervisors is more severe than from other colleagues or subordinates, so it may more adversely affect the employee's performance. Therefore, power difference also affects ostracism at the workplace.

Fourth, our findings' generalizability is another limitation since bank employees' data in Pakistan has been used. Even though banks provide an ideal condition to check hypothesized statements, the findings might not generalize to multinational organizations because of cultural differences. Employees at multinational companies are trained differently and usually approach things differently. Therefore, it is advised to replicate this study in various organizational and cultural settings.

Finally, our study only examines a single mediator, depressed mood, between workplace ostracism and employees' job performance. Future studies may advance our understanding by examining closely related variables (i.e., job tension, burnout) as mediators in the current relationship. This can be further enriched by examining multi-mediators in a single study.

Future studies may also utilize other individual differences among employees, such as emotional intelligence, conscientiousness, and psychological resilience, as potential boundary conditions for studying the process. Likewise, organizational practices like socialization tactics (Qadeer et al., 2020), team-building approaches, and performance management systems may be interesting. At the group level, leadership styles, followership (Shehzadi et al., 2017), and group dynamics can also be investigated as potential boundary conditions

## 5.4 Conclusion

Understanding the mechanism between workplace ostracism and job performance is complex yet very important, theoretically and practically. Distressed mood and political skill can explain the intervening process and a boundary condition, respectively. This paper demonstrates that employees who are ignored at work have chances of being depressed, leading to poor job performance. Moreover, political skill is one of the critical individual differences that can moderate workplace ostracism-job performance, such that it can mitigate the negative consequences of ostracism. We are optimistic that this study will facilitate future research on the issues of workplace ostracism, its antecedents, mediating mechanisms, boundary conditions, and various employee behaviors.

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