

The Aftermath of Ostracism at the Workplace - A Moderated Mediation Approach

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More exploration and examination about the circumstances that force individuals to behave unethically in an organisation is needed, as an unethical culture in an organisation discourages organisational innovation. Therefore, the present study aims to examine the relationship between employee expediency and workplace ostracism, which will allow the researchers to gain more insight into its practical implications. The research will draw upon the affective event theory (AET) to examine the hypothesised relationship between workplace ostracism and employee expediency, using the mediating effect of emotional exhaustion and the moderating role of moral identity. In order to test these hypotheses, 272 responses were analysed via PROCESS macro. Findings show that when employees face ostracism at their workplace, the feeling of social rejection develops into a situation in which they show affective response, which may trigger employee expediency even in the presence of moral identity. Hence, this study proves that workplace ostracism develops such feelings in employees, which makes them indulge in unethical behaviour.

Key words: *Employee Expediency, Workplace Ostracism, Emotional Exhaustion, Moral Identity,*

BACKGROUND

The preliminary systematic study of unethical behaviour originated in the 1980s, from which is often referred as *organisational behavioural ethics* or as *organisational ethics*, some of these are: (a) ethical climate (Mayer, Kuenzi & Greenbaum, 2009); (b) ethical leadership (Brown & Trevino, 2006); and (c) code of conduct (Weaver & Trevino, 1999). In line with this discussion, meta-analysis by Kish-Gephart, Harrison and Trevino (2010), suggests that these factors have

failed to explain the variance in unethical behaviour in individuals. In the literature, researchers have identified various types of work events that affect employees' work behaviours (Greenbaum, Mawritz, Bonner, Webster & Kim 2018; Kish-Gephart et al. 2010; Kish-Gephart, Neuber & Trevino, 2006). Thus, the research suggests that many people like to model their behaviour on the frame of ethics (behaving in a morally acceptable manner) (Trevino, Weaver & Reynolds, 2006).

Brown and Mitchell (2010) outline that follower behaviour is greatly influenced by the leader's behaviours. After an extensive review of the literature on unethical behaviour, Greenbaum et al. (2018) also proposed that expediency behaviour exhibited by supervisors can be role-modelled by employees, because observation can be one of the key tools for behavioural learning. Employees try to absorb socially acceptable and appropriate behaviour by observing their surroundings. This can be done by registering the behaviour of a significant other (role-model). If the credible role model exhibits certain behaviours, the observer will frequently adopt these behaviours. In line with the above discussion, Greenbaum et al. (2018) linked the role modelling notion with supervisor expediency and contended that the engagement of supervisors in expedient behaviour will make employees model these expedient behaviours. Supervisor expediency initiates an internalisation process that seizes the ethical understanding in the shape of unethical tolerance and ultimately breeds employee expediency.

It is suggested by Greenbaum et al. (2018), that future researchers should concentrate on identifying the factors that lead to employee expediency that could ultimately damage the organisation. The researcher in the current study is taking workplace ostracism and emotional exhaustion as the factors that may constitute employee expediency. As discussed by Kish-Gephart et al. (2010), there are certain circumstances and aspects of ethical dilemmas that may provoke unethical choices.

In previous literature, workplace ostracism has been studied with various other behaviours such as organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) (Wu, Liu, Kwan & Lee, 2016), incivility (Ferris, Chen & Lim, 2017) and pro-social behaviour (Balliet & Ferris, 2012). After exploring the vast literature available, the researcher has identified a scarcity of studies on the association between employee expediency and workplace ostracism. Moreover, it is also evident from the literature that emotional exhaustion can lead to unethical or deviant behaviour, but its effect on employee expediency has never been studied. The literature shows that emotional exhaustion can result from stressful work demands at the workplace (Lee & Ashforth, 1996). Emotionally exhausted employees consume their psychological, cognitive and emotional resources in order to complete stressful work demands (Hobfoll & Freedy, 1993). The literature identifies that emotional exhaustion is positively related to interpersonal deviance and counterproductive work behaviours (Mulki, Jaramillo, & Locander, 2006; van Jaarsveld, Walker, & Skarlicki, 2010). Along with this, unfavourable situations such as workplace ostracism, along with cognitive and emotional demands, create a high level of exhaustion and burnout symptoms in

individuals (Chen & Cunradi, 2008; Halbesleben & Bowler, 2007). Previous literature identifies emotional exhaustion as affecting cognitive and emotional resources and creating difficulty for the individual in fulfilling interpersonal demands, who then displays deviant behaviour such as employee expediency (Greenbaum et al, 2018; Van der Linden, Keijser, Eling & Van Schaijk, 2005). Emotionally exhausted employees have low energy and experience chronic fatigue (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016), which makes them unable to differentiate between their ethical priorities, thus employees feel comfortable using unethical manoeuvres to complete their job and exhibit expediency behaviour (Greenbaum et al. 2018).

Previous literature also shows that individuals hold some sets of beliefs or self-concepts that are pertinent to ethical behaviour, that is, one's moral identity (Sanders, Wisse, Yperen & us, 2018). Shao, Aquino and Freeman (2008) identified that moral identity has a significant positive bond with employee positive behaviour like that of pro-social behaviour, and a negative association with unethical behaviour. Decelles, Margolis, DeRue and Ceranic (2012) identified that individuals with strong moral identity as being less prone to self-serving behaviours than individuals with poor moral identities, who are frequently engaged in self-serving behaviours (Trevino, Nieuwenboer & Gephart, 2014).

Motivation of the Study

After the occurrence of multiple corporate scandals, organisational stakeholders have shown concern about unethical behaviours in the workplace. Recently, Greenbaum et al. (2018) identified employee expediency and recognised the need to explore this behaviour to control unethical actions, because unethical culture in an organisation discourages organisational innovation. Therefore, the present study aims to examine the relationship between employee expediency and workplace ostracism, which will allow the researchers to gain more insight into its practical implications.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Background:

This study utilises AET (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), which suggests that associations within employees' internal influences, and their responses to happenings that occur in their workplace, will affect their performance, job satisfaction and organisational commitment. According to Weiss and Cropanzano (1996), AET converges at arrangements, reasons and costs of affective experiences, and employee attitudes and behaviours will be influenced by these experiences. The literature also suggests that the affect level varies with time and that these fluctuations can be predicted. The primary literature on emotions unanimously agrees that events make changes in emotional states, but that personalities and opinions on how positive and negative events are interpreted may differ (Raza et al., 2020; Weiss & Beal, 2005). Based on this theory, in this

study the researcher suggests that workplace ostracism is an event, that will develop an emotional reaction in the form of emotional exhaustion and will shape individual behaviour. The individuals who face ostracism and feel emotionally exhausted will start to exhibit employee expediency behaviour at work. Moreover, moral identity can act as moderator for the relationship between workplace ostracism and emotional exhaustion, factors that are key to individual personality that can predict employee reaction to such an event at work (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996).

Workplace Ostracism and Emotional Exhaustion:

Robinson, Reilly and Wang (2012, p.4) define workplace ostracism as, “when an individual or group omit to take action that engage[s] another organisational member when it is socially appropriate to do so.” They referred to ostracism as an *act of omission* that restricts social interaction, and also argue that ostracism is not easy to identify, compared to other negative constructs at the workplace. The above mentioned definition takes in social exclusion, social ignoring, social rejection (including shunning), along with all other behaviours that incorporate the elision of appropriate actions. There are several studies that discuss the antecedents (Robinson, Reilly & Wang, 2012) and outcomes (Chung, 2018; Panagiotis, Gkorezis, Victoria & Bellou, 2016; & Wu et al. 2016) of workplace ostracism.

According to Quade, Greenbaum and Petrenko (2016), employees having unethical intentions were more likely to be ostracised in the workplace, because unethical actions can impact the group harmony and actors may intend to ignore such deviant individuals, and ostracism may occur as a corrective action in the mentioned situation. Such individuals who do not comply with the moral norms will suffer from stress and animosity in their interpersonal relationships, which may cause social rejection (Quade et al. 2016) and bring about emotional damage to individuals (Jahanzeb & Fatima, 2017). Workplace ostracism is positively linked with depression (Ferris, Brown, Berry & Lian, 2008) and also positively associated with perceived stress. Negative self-perceptions and emotions can be generated due to the exclusion or ignoring by organisational members towards individuals (Chung, 2018), which may lead to emotional exhaustion.

These unfavourable situations, along with cognitive and emotional demands, create a high level of exhaustion and burnout symptoms (Chen & Cunradi, 2008; Halbesleben & Bowler, 2007). Emotional exhaustion is defined by Wright and Cropanzano (1998, p. 486) as a “feeling of being emotionally overextended and exhausted by one’s work”. It has been observed that workplace ostracism is a painful experience (Robinson, Reilly & Wang, 2012) for the victim. As argued by Jahanzeb and Fatima (2017), ostracised employees experience negative emotions such as depression or anxiety, while trying to suppress negative emotions and the quest to display a positive attitude results in emotional exhaustion (Halbesleben & Bowler, 2007; Brotheridge & Lee, 2002). Previous research also demonstrates the positive relationship with

interpersonal dysfunction at the workplace (such as counterproductive work behaviour) (Greenbaum, Quade, Mawritz, Kim & Crosby, 2014). Here, the researcher suggests that individuals being ignored and rejected leads to a low emotional stability which emotionally exhausts employees, and from this developed the following hypothesis.

H1: Workplace ostracism positively influences employee emotional exhaustion.

Emotional Exhaustion and Employee Expediency:

This study tries to statistically analyse whether emotional exhaustion can be the predictor of expediency behaviour in an individual. Recently, Greenbaum et al. (2018) studied the behaviour of employees who use unethical ways to get the job done, such as by cutting corners, manipulating performance numbers, ignoring company protocols or enforcing rules only when they received benefit, and referred to such behaviour as employee expediency. Expediency behaviour can be exhibited by both supervisors (supervisor expediency) and employees (employee expediency) (Greenbaum et al. 2018), and they define it as the “use of unethical practices to expedite work for self-serving purposes.” As suggested by various research, employees, when facing emotional exhaustion, try to cope by pulling themselves out of that intimidating situation (Greenbaum et al. 2014; Chi & Liang, 2013; Cole, Bernerth, Walter, & Holt, 2010; Wright & Cropanzano, 1998). This employee withdrawal attitude can be observed in the form of job negligence, which refers to cutting corners, ignoring company protocols and manipulating performance numbers, etc. (Greenbaum et al. 2018, 536).

Through empirical analysis, previous research suggests that emotional exhaustion is one reason why employees’ cognitive and emotional resources are compromised, which then makes it difficult for an individual to fulfil the interpersonal work demands and ultimately manifests deviant behaviours such as employee expediency (Van der Linden et al. 2005; Greenbaum et al, 2018). Emotionally exhausted employees have low energy and experience chronic fatigue (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016), which makes them unable to differentiate between their ethical priorities, thus employees feel comfortable using unethical manoeuvres to complete their job and exhibit expediency behaviour (Greenbaum et al. 2018). Thus, the researcher postulates the following hypothesis:

H2: Emotional exhaustion positively influences employee expediency.

Workplace Ostracism and Employee Expediency:

Ostracism in the workplace is a kind of interpersonal mistreatment that can result in negative employee attitudes towards work (Chung 2018; Ferris et al. 2008). Because of these attitudinal changes, workplace ostracism negatively affects organisational effectiveness (Zu, Liu, Kwan & Lee, 2016). Workplace ostracism is reflected as a submissive arrangement of workplace

aggression (Zhao, Peng, & Sheard 2013; Koay, 2018; Abubakar, Yazdian, & Behraves 2018). When employees feel ostracised in the workplace, they may opt for unethical ways to accomplish tasks and make themselves a valuable member of the group and organisation, as prior studies indicate that unethical behaviours in the workplace are tolerable when the job performance of those individuals is high (Quade et al. 2016). Empirical evidence indicates workplace ostracism is a mistreatment of an individual at the interpersonal level in an organisation, and this type of mistreatment will eventually mould the perception of individuals towards the organisation, thus impacting employees' citizenship behaviour and organisational identification (Wu et al. 2016), and employees may then consider it appropriate to use unethical ways at work. Keeping with the above-mentioned discussion, the researcher assumes that an ostracised individual may show expedient behaviour.

A few experimental studies reveal that there is the surge in prosocial behaviour when employees experience workplace ostracism (Derfler Rozin, Pillutla & Thau, 2010; Williams & Sommer, 1997), thus to create a positive image at the workplace and to save face, employees may indulge in ethical or unethical arrangements to complete their assignments. Employees may also expedite their work activities because as suggested in AET, the type of work event or work environment may have various impacts on individuals, which may create negative or positive affective reactions (Arina et al., 2020; Glasø, Vie, Holmdal & Einarsen, 2010). The researcher therefore assumes that workplace ostracism is a work event that influences employee behaviour, who in turn exhibits employee expediency.

According to AET, affective reactions either positive or negative are displayed by individuals who experience hassles and uplifting events at the workplace, which may lead to behaviours and work attitudes developing due to their effect. Weiss and Cropanzano (1996) argued that workplace events are the key cause of emotional responses that influence attitudes at the workplace, including those of job satisfaction, trust and commitment (Glaso, Holmdal & Einarsen, 2010). When individuals face ostracism at their workplace, the feeling of social rejection (Blackhart, Nelson, Knowles & Baumeister, 2009) develops a situation in which individuals show affective response, which may trigger employee expediency. Hence, the researcher postulates the following hypothesis:

H3: *Workplace ostracism positively influences employee expediency*

Emotional Exhaustion as Mediator:

To make the theoretical model more comprehensive, the researcher also adumbrates that emotional exhaustion serves as the mechanism through which workplace ostracism is related to employee expediency. Workplace ostracism restricts the social interaction of an individual and discourages them from developing meaningful and lasting relationships, as it involves isolating and ignoring employees (Jahanzeb & Fatima, 2017) which develops emotional stress

and creates emotional exhaustion in employees (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016). This emotional exhaustion may lead to employee deviant behaviour, which may lead to employee expediency (Greenbaum et al. 2018). Furthermore, ostracism in the workplace is an interpersonal stressor that affects the psychological, cognitive and emotional resources of an individual (Williams, 2007). This ultimately affects employees' control and sense of belonging. Extended research has shown that stressful work demands are the key causative factor of emotional exhaustion and is related to a number of unfavourable outcomes, like employee unethical tolerance (Lee & Ashforth, 1996) and employee expediency (Greenbaum et al. 2018).

Various literature discusses unethical behaviours and argues that these behaviours are for the benefit of the individual (Kish-Gephart et al. 2010; Reynolds, 2006; Sonenshein, 2007; Thau, Derfler-Rozin, Pitesa, Mitchell & Pillutla, 2015; Trevona, Nieuwenboer & Kish Gephart, 2014; Treviño & Youngblood, 1990). Employees get involved in unethical behaviour and display low work engagement (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016), which leads to low motivation toward completing work, so they try to complete tasks by finding shortcuts and ignoring organisational policies (Greenbaum et al. 2018) to improve their image among group members.

When employees are facing emotional exhaustion, they have sub-optimal psychological operations (Leiter & Maslach, 2005) so they are unable to completely engage with their task (Schaufeli & Taris, 2005). Previously, most of the studies are drawn on the conservation of resource (COR) model (Abubakar, Yazdian, & Behravesch 2018; Cropanzano, Rupp & Byrne, 2003; Dust, Resick, Maargolis, Mawritz & Greenbaum, 2018; Hobfoll, 1988, 1989, 1998; Halbesleben & Bowler, 2007; Koay, 2018), through which the performance-related implication of emotional exhaustion is elucidated. As suggested by the COR model, emotionally exhausted employees face exhaustion of their psychological resources, and in order to manage stress and strain created due to the depletion of such resources, employees seek to safeguard their resources by choosing when and how to react to external stimuli (Dust et al. 2018). Such employees limit the energy they put into their work assignments (Cropanzano, Rupp & Byrne, 2003; Halbesleben & Bowler, 2007) and become cautious about utilising their exiguous resource and not willing to observe and decode the ethical cues from their surroundings. Likewise, emotionally exhausted employees disengage from ethical signs they receive from their surroundings and very thoughtfully utilise their limited resources on very central work tasks (Dust et al. 2018). Thus, drawing on AET, the researcher suggests that ethically disengaged employees due to emotional disturbance will exhibit unethical work behaviour, hence try to complete their task and duties by expediting themselves (Greenbaum et al. 2018).

Prior studies not only investigated the direct effect of workplace ostracism but also establish few mediation variables such as person-organisation fit, interpersonal conflict, organisational identification and self-esteem, which assist in developing a relationship between workplace ostracism and other behavioural upshots (Chung, 2018). Gaudine and Thorne (2001), Yousaf and Hadi (2020), Raza et al., (2020), Latif et al., (2019), Mahmood et al., (2019), Hadi and

Ahmed (2018), Kiani and Hadi (2017), and Waheed et al., (2017) contend that emotions, negative or positive, are critical to ethical decision making. People react emotionally to a work event and ultimately their behaviours are driven on the bases of the affect (Trevino et al. 2014). Therefore, the researcher suggests that emotional exhaustion will be that affective reaction which develops the bridge between employee expediency and workplace ostracism.

H4: Emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between workplace ostracism and employee expediency

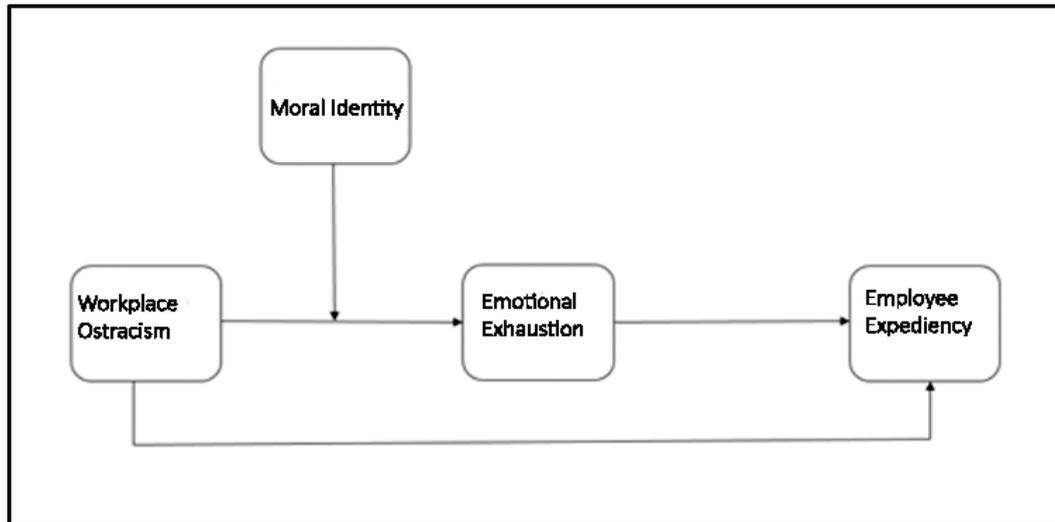
Moral Identity as Moderator:

In this study, the author places emphasis on an individual's moral identity. As defined by Aquino and Reed (2002), moral identity is a "set of morally relevant personality traits—such as being caring, honest, kind, and friendly—that are valued by individuals". The researcher expects it to act as a moderator between workplace ostracism and emotional exhaustion. A person having strong moral identity develops a high level of moral awareness, because such an individual emphasises more on reasoning and on their moral actions (DeCelle et al. 2012). Moreover, the identities that are salient to the individuals have great impact on the thoughts and emotions of the individual (Aquino, Reed, Thau & Freeman, 2007), and a person with a high moral identity rarely disengages from moral protocols in the circumstances where he or she can easily do so. (Detert, Trevino & Sweitzer, 2008; Hertz & Krettenauer, 2016). In addition to this, individuals who are high in moral identity not only show care for the members of their in-group, but are also focused on the interests of the out-group members (Aquino et al. 2007). Furthermore, the moral identity of individuals is also associated with their beliefs, behaviours and attitudes (Forehand, Deshpande & Reed, 2002), specifically when these are highly connected to the individual's own self.

In this study, the researcher is proposing that the moral identity of an individual will impact the level of emotional exhaustion. Literature shows that self-regulatory mechanisms such as moral identity have more impact on thoughts and emotions when they are readily available in memory (Aquino et al. 2007). Hence, a high moral identity will reduce the impact of ostracism on the affective reaction, that is, emotional exhaustion, because the researchers have viewed moral identity as a source of moral motivation that helps the individual maintain self-consistency (Aquino, Freeman, Reed, Lim, & Felps, 2009; Blasi, 1984; Kavussanu, Willoughby & Ring, 2012). Empirical studies reveal that individuals experiencing strong moral identity will have more compassion, admiration and inspiration (Aquino, McFerran, & Laven, 2011) and are more sensitive to positive and negative social behaviours, reacting to those with strong affective reaction (Kavussanu et al. 2012). Moreover, theoretical evidence explains that personality factors can predict the employee's reaction to the event at work (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Here the researcher assumes that individuals with high moral identity will

affect the emotional outcome of a negative work event that is workplace ostracism. Hence, the researcher postulates the following hypothesis.

H5: The positive relationship between workplace ostracism and emotional exhaustion is moderated by moral identity, such that the positive relationship is weaker for high moral identity as opposed to low.



Figure, 1; Research Model

METHODOLOGY:

The current study is based on the philosophy of positivism; because the present research is real and independent, therefore scientific methods using measurable and observable facts constitute the knowledge. Moreover, this study is based on a deductive approach, the research strategy being used is survey questionnaires. This strategy enables to gather large amounts of data in less time span. The researcher is detached and neutral in the process with minimal influence on the research data. The time horizon for the current study is cross sectional. The population of the current study consists of contractual and full-time working employees in different health organisations. Data collection was multi source (supervisor and self-reported) and data was collected from employees working in the health sector in the twin cities (Islamabad and Rawalpindi) because ostracism is a phenomenon that can be experienced by any individual regardless of their hierarchical level. Non-probability, convenient sampling was used due to non-availability of sampling frame.

Research Instrument:

Workplace ostracism: Workplace ostracism was measured on a ten - item scale developed by Ferris et al. (2008).

Emotional Exhaustion: Emotional Exhaustion was gauged on a seven-item scale by Maslach and Jackson (1981).

Employee Expediency: Employee expediency was measured using a four-item scale created by Greenbaum et al. (2018). Supervisors evaluated the employee expediency behaviour of their subordinates.

Moral Identity: Moral identity was measured using the revised twenty- item scale by Black and Reynolds (2016). They argue that the previously used scale only measured the centrality of moral identity. This revised scale not only assesses the importance individuals offer to their moral principles but also how they act according to the moral standards they set.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION:

Table 1

Descriptive

	Range	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Gender	Male	123	45.2	45.2	45.2
	Female	149	54.8	54.8	100.0
	Total	272	100	100	
Age	26-30	94	34.6	34.6	34.6
	31-35	118	43.4	43.4	77.9
	36-40	33	12.1	12.1	90.1
	40>	27	9.9	9.9	100
	Total	272	100	100	
Organisation	Public	138	50.7	50.7	50.7
	Private	134	49.3	49.3	100.0
	Total	272	100.0	100.0	

Table 2:

Correlation Analysis between the variables

	1	2	3	4
1. Workplace Ostracism	1			
2. Employee Expediency	.394**	1		
3. Emotional Exhaustion	.339**	.342**	1	
4. Moral Identity	-.402**	-.497**	-.278**	1

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

The correlation analysis (table 2) explains the direction of relationship (either negative or positive) among the variables. In the current study, the correlation analysis shows that all variables are correlated, and a majority are positively correlated as hypothesised. Table 2 depicts that workplace ostracism is positively correlated with employee expediency and

emotional exhaustion with values of .394** and .339**, respectively. Employee expediency and emotional exhaustion are also positively correlated with a value of .342**. However, moral identity experiences a negative correlation with workplace ostracism, employee expediency and emotional exhaustion by showing values of -.402**, -.497** and -.278**, respectively, and all values are significant.

Table 3:
Mediation effect of emotional exhaustion

	β	SE	T	P	LLCI 95%	ULCI 95%
Workplace ostracism → Employee Expediency	.371	.079	4.682	.000	.2150	.5278
Workplace ostracism → Emotional Exhaustion	.432	.085	5.090	.000	.2650	.6002
Emotional Exhaustion → Employee Expediency	.217	.062	3.496	.000	.0947	.3396
Indirect Effect of X on Y	.093	.032	2.906	.000	.0413	.1674

Notes: Bootstrap sample size 5000. LL=Lower Limit; CI= Confidence Interval, UL=Upper Limit,

In Step 1 of the mediation model, the regression of workplace ostracism on employee expediency, ignoring the mediator, was significant, $\beta = .371$, $p = .000$. Step 2 shows that the regression of workplace ostracism on the mediator (emotional exhaustion) was also significant, $\beta = .432$, $p = <.000$. Step 3 of the mediation process shows the impact of the mediator (emotional exhaustion) controlling workplace ostracism, and on employee expediency it was significant, $\beta = .217$, $p = <.000$. Step 4 of the analysis reveals the indirect effect of workplace ostracism on employee expediency with the value of 0.093, which lies between 0.0413 and 0.1674 without the presence of zero in 95% confidence interval.

Moreover, the variance accounted for (VAF) value of 20% depicts emotional exhaustion as partially mediating the relationship between workplace ostracism and employee expediency. According to Hair, Hult, Ringle and Sarstedt (2014), the VAF value can be calculated by dividing the indirect effect by the total effect: here the VAF value of less than 20% means no mediations exists, a value between 20% and 80 % means partial mediation exists, and a value more than 80% means full mediation exists (Hair et al. 2014; Hadi, Abdullah & Sentosa, 2016). Hence this helps us to conclude that H4 is supported.

Table 4:
Moderated analysis of moral identity

Paths	β	SE	T	p	LLCI 95%	ULCI 95%
Workplace Ostracism → Emotional Exhaustion	.265	.889	.2987	.765	-1.488	2.019
Moral Identity → Emotional Exhaustion	-.303	.379	-.8005	.424	-1.051	.4443
Moderation MI (Interaction)	.019	.211	.0907	.927	-.3970	.4353

Notes: Bootstrap sample size 5000. LL=Lower Limit; CI= Confidence Interval, UL=Upper Limit, Focal predictor: Emotional Exhaustion, Moderator: Moral Identity. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 4 represents the values depicting the moderating role of moral identity between workplace ostracism and emotional exhaustion. During the moderating regression analysis, the interaction term was introduced to the moderated regression analysis, which is not significant ($\beta = .019$, $p = .927$). Thus, the results show that moral identity does not moderate the relationship between workplace ostracism and emotional exhaustion. Hence, H5 is not supported.

Discussion:

The result indicates that workplace ostracism is positively linked with emotional exhaustion. This study shows that along with depression and anxiety, emotional exhaustion is also a key emotional experience that an ostracised individual experiences at the workplace, because in order to suppress negative emotions and display a positive attitude, individuals experience emotional exhaustion (Brotheridge & Lee, 2002; Halbesleben & Bowler, 2007). Results reveal that emotional exhaustion also represents the positive relationship with employee expediency. As suggested by various research, employees when facing emotional exhaustion try to cope with it by hauling themselves out of that hostile situation (Chi & Liang, 2013; Cole, Bernerth, Wright & Cropanzano, 1998; Greenbaum et al. 2014; Walter, & Holt, 2010). Job neglect can be observed at the workplace as employee withdrawal attitude, demonstrated by cutting corners, ignoring company protocols and manipulating performance numbers, etc. (Greenbaum et al. 2018), which are the main characteristics of employee expediency. Hence, this study is able to empirically identify that emotional exhaustion is one of the reasons behind employee expediency. As AET states, there is a connection between an individual's emotions and behaviours. When individuals face ostracism at their workplace, the feeling of social rejection (Blackhart et al. 2009) develops a situation in which individuals show affective response, which may trigger employee expediency. Hence, this study proves that workplace ostracism develops such feelings in individuals, causing them to indulge in unethical behaviour, which is employee



expediency. Literature shows that workplace ostracism restricts the social interaction of an individual and discourages them from developing meaningful and lasting relationships, as it involves isolating and ignoring employees (Jahanzeb & Fatima, 2017) which develops emotional stress and creates emotional exhaustion in employees (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016), this emotional exhaustion may lead to employee deviant behaviour, which may lead to employee expediency (Greenbaum et al. 2018). The result does not accept the moderating effect of moral identity. This could be because Pakistan is considered a power distance country (Bashir, Jianqiao, Abrar & Ghazanfar, 2012) and the literature shows that power distance affects reactions to perceptions of injustice (Lee, Pillutla & Law, 2000). As such the individual's reaction to a work event (workplace ostracism) sometimes may not be of moral concern, thus affecting the moral reactions of individuals. Other than hierarchical power structures, Winkler (2005) emphasised that unethical behaviours arise due to ambiguity in staff regarding organisational priorities, which may create confusion between the moral values of individuals and accepted behaviour at workplace. Moreover, personalities change with age (Krettenauer, Tobias, Murua & Jia, 2016), thus we can say the age factor of the selected sample does not identify with the moral values, thus not effecting the emotional reaction.

CONCLUSION:

The results of this study demonstrate that the workplace ostracism acts as an antecedent for the employee expediency with emotional exhaustion as a mediator. Findings of the study are strengthened by the AET, which assumes that work events trigger emotional reactions which ultimately cause certain behaviours in employees. The results signify that when ostracism (purposeful or non-purposeful) occurs at a workplace, the individuals who are affected get hurt and feel the pain of being rejected, which causes emotional exhaustion.

The results also depict that emotional exhaustion is positively related with employee expediency. This adds to the literature as this was not studied before. Study shows that due to exhaustion employees expedite their work to complete it quickly, as they are no longer emotionally associated with it because of the presence of ostracism. The mediating role of emotional exhaustion also refers that employees who face ostracism get emotionally exhausted and showed expediency. However, results show that partial mediation exists between workplace ostracism and employee expediency.

Limitation:

The researcher has faced few limitations regarding this study. Firstly, this study is cross sectional due to time constraints, which prevents the researcher from exploring the change effects over time (for example by measuring emotional exhaustion at different points of time, the researcher will be able to determine how emotional exhaustion levels may change over time). Secondly, the hypotheses were tested among individuals working in the health sector of



the service industry, future researchers may replicate this study with other sectors in the industry to identify the trends.

Implication:

This study will allow the practitioners and managers to identify the ostracised and expedited individuals, and develop strategic policies and training programs to avoid such situations at the public and private hospitals and clinics. Organisations are greatly influenced by unethical practices because if doctors, nurses or other medical staff indulge in unethical behaviour this not only affects the organisation but will also have negative impact on patients, which can be life threatening. While understanding this, it is critical to identify how people think about ethical dilemmas (Trevino et al. 2014), and to develop policies and training programs that will equip employees with ethical understanding and encourage them to strive for high ethical standards.



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