

Taking the edge of ostracism – a slow death: from socio-legal perspective

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Abstract

Purpose – First, with real-life examples and current research, this study aims to demonstrate the existence of various forms of ostracism (linguistic, gender, social and workplace). Second, following the “need-threat model,” this research addresses the previously unaddressed topic of coping with, reducing, mitigating or curbing workplace ostracism. Moreover, the researchers also proposed a “multiplying effect model” of ostracism.

Design/methodology/approach – Data was gathered from 199 service sector employees. The NVivo software is used for the thematic analysis of qualitative data(suggestions) gathered using open ended question on how to mitigate/reduce/curb ostracism.

Findings – The results generated were the suggestive measures, which were further categorized under three major themes: individual, society and organizational. The measures to reduce, mitigate and stop the practices of workplace ostracism can be initiated on all these three levels.

Originality/value – This is the only study that addresses the subject of decreasing, alleviating or eliminating workplace ostracism and explains the compounding effect of ostracism by suggesting a multiplying effect model. The study will pique the interest of the government and legislators to propose legal measures to prevent ostracism and achieve sustainable development goals (gender equality and



reduced inequalities. The study's practical, social, theoretical and managerial utility are discussed in the implications section.

Keywords Ostracism, Linguistic, Gender, Social, Legal, Need threat model, Thematic analysis

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Have you ever wondered if an invisible force could cause someone physical and interpersonal harm? Is this not sounding like some fictitious demon character from a Hollywood film who purposefully harms others? This study looks at one of these “demons” of behavioral science, which belong to a family of deviant acts such as bullying, ignorance, being left out, shunned, etc. Where all these immoral acts consist of actions, behavior and verbal and physical abuse, “ostracism,” on the other hand, is a subset with no measures and no behavior. It is an invisible act that cannot be seen but can be felt, causing physical and psychological pain. Ostracism threatens individuals' fundamental need to belong, which makes him/her feel insecure and mentally unwell, and it also impacts their reproductive health (Smith, 1995; Baumeister and Leary, 2017). Studies with functional magnetic resonance assert that ostracism stimulates the same brain area stimulated by physical injury and causes both bodily and interpersonal distress, causing a sense of “social pain” (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2003; MacDonald and Leary, 2005).

Ostracism is a global issue and frequently occurs in all settings, including intimate relationships, classrooms and workplaces. According to a survey of reported cases of ostracism, 75% of respondents had experienced silent treatment, 67% of those in partnerships had inflicted it on a loved one and 70% had inflicted it on their romantic partners (Faulkner *et al.*, 1997). Peers in the workplace and schools frequently experience ostracism (Miceli and Near, 1992; Asher *et al.*, 1998; Coie *et al.*, 1990). Additionally, studies indicate that disputes brought on by workplace exclusion are giving rise to legal disputes (Waddell, 1999). According to a large-scale survey of over 5,000 workers, 13% experienced ostracism in the past six months (Hitlan *et al.*, 2006a). Another study outlining the specific form of rejection they experienced showed that over five years, 18% of employees were transferred to isolated locations, 29% of respondents reported that others left the room when they entered and 66% of employees experienced the silent treatment (Fox and Stallworth, 2005).

In 2007, Williams showed his surprise, claiming academics have not paid much attention to ostracism research and suggesting more investigation is required on ostracism characteristics and impacts. Scholars such as Ferris *et al.* (2008) and Robinson *et al.* (2013) suggested a new phase of ostracism research and advised moving beyond the direct correlation between ostracism and psychological or behavioral outcomes. Further, past ten-year empirical research on ostracism majorly studied ostracism in the context of the workplace and its mediating and moderating impact (Yang and Wei, 2018). Besides this, recent studies have used qualitative methodologies to better understand the theoretical concepts of ostracism. Recently, Kaushal *et al.* (2021) thoroughly evaluated the literature, highlighting significant authors, current trends, domains and advocates for future study in this area. Furthermore, three meta-analytic evaluations (Bedi, 2021; Howard *et al.* (2020); Chatterjee, 2021; Li *et al.*, 2021) identified the most significant linked causes and consequences of workplace ostracism. Like many other countries, ostracism is also an active practice in India. Regrettably, it is still not viewed as criminal conduct like other deviant behaviors like harassment and bullying. Because of this, no codes of conduct or laws prohibit such behavior.

Therefore, in light of this research gap, the purpose of this article is threefold. First, we seek to clarify the constructs of ostracism. The current study confirms the four significant types of ostracism that exist in India (social, linguistic, rational and workplace) using current literature and incidents reported in the news. Second, the widely studied need threat temporal model of ostracism (Williams, 2009) discussed the three stages of the ostracism cycle. The initial, or reflexive, stage of ostracism is the first encounter stage, where people feel hurt and have their four basic needs in danger. Followed by the second stage of ostracism, known as the coping or reflective stage, in which the victim perceives the meaning and purpose of the ostracism they are experiencing. Additionally, the person will strengthen, protect and attempt to minimize the loss in this stage by planning to deal with unfavorable circumstances (the act of ostracism). Although, numerous academics have raised the issue that the narrow focus limits knowledge of how to mitigate the adverse effects of ostracism (Robinson *et al.*, 2013; Kwan *et al.*, 2018; Samma *et al.*, 2020; Unzueta and Binning, 2010; Chatterjee *et al.*, 2021, 2022). It is surprising that no study comprehensively tries to investigate the measures to mitigate/curb/cope/prevent the practical effects of ostracism. Therefore, extending the “Need threat model of ostracism,” this study attempts to discuss the suggestions to cope up with ostracism before moving to third stage of the model. The thematic analysis was conducted performed with NVivo and suggestions to cope were presented under three themes followed by the subthemes. Finally, this study also proposed the multiplying effect model of ostracism where assumption is made that one form of ostracism, either alone or in conjunction with another form of ostracism, may serve as the precursor to a third form of ostracism impacting on the larger scale. In this study, we propose that linguistic and rational ostracism may act as catalysts or causes of social ostracism, which can further result in the phenomenon known as workplace ostracism, and workplace ostracism in reverse can also result in social ostracism.

1.1 Ostracism in India

India is a multi-ethnic country with diverse sociocultural and religious characteristics and 23 official languages recognized by the Indian constitution. Despite having a Hindu majority, India has a sizable Muslim population. Religious beliefs have a significant influence on people's behavior. Influential people in communities use it to punish those who do not follow the rules. The reason for ostracism can vary from stereotypes and the rigid mentality of individuals to discrimination based on caste, creed and religious punishment for breaking a social norm or form of discipline. In ancient India, communal feelings were expressed in rural society through activities such as women from different families drawing water from a shared well and men from the community passing the same hookah around when they gathered in the evenings. Exclusion from both activities is a punishment known as “Hookah pani band” (Prakash, 2007). Even in this era where we talk about equality and the protection of rights, there is a constant increase in reported incidences of ostracism in India, and even some attempts being taken by the social activist and government, e.g. [1] The government of Odisha passed “The Odisha Prevention of Witch-Hunting Act, 2013.” One of the lawyers who co-drafted the act was from Bhubaneswar named Sashiprava Bindhani. He stated that the social boycott is connected to another abhorrent tradition known as witch-hunting in Odisha, Jharkhand and Assam. The villagers labeled a lady as witch, and she is either expelled from the community or stone her to death after accusing her of causing natural disasters and even health risks. Her family members, particularly her children, were also being pursued [2]. Another victim of social isolation was the family of a young tribal girl in the Koraput district of Odisha. The community in Bhubaneswar in 2017 isolated a girl whom the headmaster of a school had sexually assaulted [3]. Added to this an

intriguing story of social ostracism was published in 2016 and involved 19 fishermen families who had been socially shunned for the previous six years in Gud Kagal village, Uttara Kannada district. They frequently complained to the local police about being prohibited from attending social gatherings and receiving no share of community funds.

Moreover, after several years of struggle and agitation, the Dalits of India still continue to face discrimination [4]. In 2017, an article titled “Yet Another Tale of Social Ostracism” was published in one of India’s leading newspapers, “The Hindu.” An article discussed the social ostracism faced by Dalits in the Thummakundu, Usilampatti and Madurai districts. Almost 150 Dalit households have a good number of graduates, and many of them work in government offices.

In Madurai, most of them work as agricultural and construction laborers, instead of being educated and not depending on Piramalai Kallars (upper caste) for their survival as they once were. Still, other caste objected to their religious practice and prohibited Dalit females from using the “Noorani” during the annual Santhana Mariamman Temple festival day (May 9) [5]. Yet, another case of Dalits facing ostracism has been recorded in Perali village in the Perambalur district. Dalits in these regions can still not ride bicycles on streets where higher caste members live. Those who defy the “ban” suffer criticism and threats. Even though it is a shorter and safer route, Dalit students at the village’s government and higher secondary schools are not allowed to use the streets.

A family from the dawoodi bohra community claimed in 2008 that they were excommunicated for daring to speak about a mosque trust that controlled the property where they operated a shop [6]. The neighborhood shunned the family and no longer received invitations to neighborhood events like weddings. The seniors were forbidden from accessing the neighborhood mosque, and the kids were prohibited from the trust’s religious school. The family was asked to drop the property dispute to end this situation [7]. Moreover, in 2011, a case of ostracism was encountered in Ahmednagar when Manik Hatkar of Paregaon village in the district was ostracized by the Tirumala Samaj Jat Panchayat, a nomadic clan, after his inter-caste marriage. The panchayat also barred ten additional families from socializing with him.

Recent episodes of ostracism encountered in 2020–2021 during the troubling stage of COVID-19, where numerous cases of doctors and other health-care professionals facing social exclusion and prejudice have been revealed. Landlords demand medical personnel caring for COVID-19 patients in hospitals immediately vacate the rented property. There have also been claims of physical assaults against medical practitioners worldwide. Doctors and health-care workers are socially stigmatized, and the pandemic has exacerbated this stigma, making everyone in the sector concerned.

1.2 What measures are available?

Initially, in 1928, the Government of Bombay, after analyzing the issue of social discrimination, authorized the Starte Committee 1928 to investigate the conditions of the depressed community. The committee reported that a “social boycott” is a common practice in the state, and it is the most powerful tool that could have been created to suppress the depressed community. Further, in 1947, while drafting the Constitution of India, BR Ambedkar presented the constituent assembly’s sub-committee on fundamental rights with the strongest articulation of social and economic rights titled “States and minorities.” To obtain the first legal remedy against the corrupt practices of “social boycott,” Ambedkar, heavily referring to “The Burma Anti-Boycott Act, 1922,” drafted a report titled “Protection against Social Boycott” under Clause 3 Article II Section III, in which he defined “Boycott,” and declared it a criminal offence. He instructed the union legislature to pass laws outlining

a punishment. Ambedkar promotes “State Socialism” and “Economic Democracy” in the document “Remedies Against Invasion of Fundamental Rights.” However, Ambedkar’s proposed “social boycott” clauses were not included in India’s 1950 Constitution as the Constituent Assembly did not address the independent category of “social boycott.” The Assembly did, however, hold a lengthy debate on the issue of social discrimination, particularly in light of “Article 15” “Prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth.” Furthermore, the final versions of Articles 15, 17 and 25 of the constitution address Ambedkar’s original demands for a constitution that secured not only individual and community freedom but also independence from the community. Mohammed Mushtaq Ansari, a social activist and practicing lawyer from Odisha’s Sambalpur area, recently started public interest litigation (PIL). He stressed the practice of “social boycott/ostracism” in Odisha. He brought attention to the state institutions’ flagrant inability to cease the cruel practice, with the Orissa High Court taking serious note of the expanding corrupt and immoral activities. According to his report, the state government has partially attempted to stop these unethical practices in Odisha. Further, the Orissa High Court has also directed the state government to take immediate steps under the prevailing law (under the IPC or any other law) to prevent the practice of social boycotts for the time being in force whenever an offence is committed. The citizens should be protected from the menace of such evil practices.

2. Literature review

2.1 Gender ostracism

Growing research on the effects of ostracism focused majorly on individuals physical and mental health and workplace organizational health. However, ostracism is not always directed toward individuals. There are situations that exclude complete group. This feeling can be aversive and have a negative impact on someone’s motivation, sense of belonging and behavior even when they are not personally excluded. The group-based ostracism is when the entire group is ostracized, rejected or excluded. Countries with significant gender disparities within their social groupings may discreetly, yet consistently, fail to recognize the equality of all social groups (men and women). Gender discrimination, according to research, causes distress in women (Matheson *et al.*, 2019; Bilodeau *et al.*, 2020; Chaudhuri *et al.*, 2022a,b). Even though gender differences in psychology have a long and contentious history, they are likely to continue at the same pace in the future (LaFrance *et al.*, 2004). However, studies discussing ostracism based on gender have received little attention in the available literature. However, past literature highlights some critical facts about the link between gender stereotypes and ostracism. Considering William’s (2007) description of ostracism, Stout and Dasgupta (2011) published an article titled “When he does not mean you: Gender-Exclusive language Ostracism.” They discussed the linguistic bias present in everyday speech. They claim that even when referring to men and women collectively, people use pronouns that designate one gender while ignoring the other. This dialect uses gendered terminology (e.g. an ideal student sets goals for himself).

Furthermore, according to the research available, “social identity threat” is also linked to group-based exclusion. Members of negatively stereotyped groups may experience identity threats due to cues in specific social environments (Steele *et al.*, 2002; Galati *et al.*, 2021; Khorana and Kizgin, 2022). Negative situational cues, such as women driving and women in science and math, remind group members of their ingroup’s undervalued status, and they may sense an identity threat, which promotes harmful ingroup stereotypical views (Stout and Dasgupta, 2011; Spencer *et al.*, 1999; Ranjan *et al.*, 2022, 2023). Additionally, role-prescribed ostracism is usually culturally accepted, unintentional and passive. Therefore,

the usually rejected ingroup (women) remains and does not respond to such behaviors and takes no steps to stop such practice to happen in future (Williams and Zadro, 2001).

2.2 Linguistic ostracism

Language is one of the fundamental pillars of society and a communication tool that allows people to express their feelings, thoughts and ideas. Individuals are often excluded (intentionally and unintentionally) based on the language not spoken and not understood by them. Neeley *et al.* (2009) call this feeling of being left out “linguistic ostracism.” It happens when there is no mutual verbal social contract based on a language. Moreover, ostracism based on language precisely reflects “any situation in which two or more people converse in a language that others around them cannot understand” (Dotan-Eliaz *et al.*, 2009).

Furthermore, in the context of a workgroup, the non-purposeful act of conversing in a non-mutually understood language might be perceived as an ostracizing act (Chrobot-Mason *et al.*, 2009; Kulkarni and Sommer, 2015). Language ostracism occurs in a many-to-one setting because it is a group activity in which at least two or more people speak in a language the focal employee does not understand. According to the available literature, language-based exclusion can be intentional or unintentional. The non-purposeful characteristic of linguistic ostracism reflects the situations in which individuals consider that others at work have excluded them from a conversation by discussing in a language that he/she fails to understand (Kulkarni *et al.*, 2015; Ferris *et al.*, 2017; Kulkarni and Sommer, 2015; Robinson *et al.*, 2013; Robinson *et al.*, 2013). According to available studies, it is seen in many scenarios where English-speaking individuals were conversing in Spanish with others. This violated organizational norms and policies and created an uncomfortable and alienated environment for some people in the organization. As a result, one reason for organizations’ “English-only” policies are to avoid feelings of ostracization, exclusion and rejection among their co-workers’ organizational members when their peers and co-workers speak in an unfamiliar language while they are present.

A study also showed that people are sometimes fired from their jobs for speaking Spanish as punishment (Garcia v. Gloor, 1980; Fuchs, 2008; Contreras, 2013). According to Giles and Johnson’s 1987 “Ethnolinguistic Identity Theory,” language is a critical pillar in shaping society’s identity (social identity). To put it another way states that a person’s social identity is heavily influenced by language (Bordia and Bordia, 2015). Furthermore, an increasing number of organizational researchers have focused on language diversity as an essential factor in interpersonal disputes and exclusion in social and workplace settings (Hitlan *et al.*, 2006a, 2006b, 2007; Alessio *et al.*, 2022; Sheshadri *et al.*, 2023). Further research in this field looked into the deleterious influence of language ostracism on an individual’s emotions and cognition (Hitlan, *et al.*, 2016).

2.3 Social boycott/ostracism

Social ostracism, often referred to as a “social boycott,” is the collective act of society refusing to include and involve an individual in any social or professional connections. Ostracism, also called a “social boycott,” is when a group refuses to have any social or professional connections with a particular person. Social ostracism also consists of the group pressuring the individual to leave the community independently. Williams, in 1994, characterized social ostracism as a strategy to influence other people’s behavior and a feeling of being ignored by others when one is present. When we consider the negative consequences of social exclusion, it is an unpleasant experience. Surprisingly, whether caused by a close relationship, a distant or disliked person, or even inanimate objects, the pain of social exclusion is the same (Williams *et al.*, 2000; Gonsalkorale and Williams, 2007;

Zadro *et al.*, 2006). Strong evidence from the literature shows that exclusion hurts people in many ways. It undermines people's sense of identity, control and self-worth; boosts aggression; lessens pro-social behavior; worsens self-regulation; and increases aggression (Zadro *et al.*, 2006; Twenge *et al.*, 2001; Twenge *et al.*, 2007; Baumeister *et al.*, 2006). Social ostracization can interfere with our sense of self and responsibility to one another and the community if belongingness is the central concept and prerequisite for being called human. Ostracism may be perceived as a separation from our humanity.

2.4 Workplace ostracism

According to research by Robinson and Schabram (2017), organizational literature has documented workplace ostracism since the 1970s. Although, initially, workplace ostracism was not considered an independent construct and was often confused with many other related constructs such as antisocial behavior, counterproductive work behavior, organizational misbehavior, workplace bullying, social undermining, antisocial behavior, workplace deviance, dysfunctional behavior or aggression (Giacalone and Greenberg, 1997; Sackett and DeVore, 2002; Vardi and Weiner, 1996; Fox and Stallworth, 2005; Salin, 2001; Duffy *et al.*, 2002; Giacalone and Greenberg, 1997; Griffin, Kelly and Collins, 1998; Dhara *et al.*, 2022; Ghosh *et al.*, 2022; Bennett and Robinson, 2000; Sheshadri, 2020a, 2020b; Neuman and Baron, 1998). It was in 2001 when Williams (2001) reported that the less extreme forms of behavior, such as treating coworkers silently or avoiding eye contact with them, are the forms of ostracism most commonly reported in organizations. Following this, Ferris *et al.* (2008) studied ostracism in the workplace and declared it a full-fledged, separate construct. He defined it as a more subtle form of deviant behavior than plant-floor forms of deviance like theft and sabotage. According to him, ostracism is a bad and painful experience when coworkers exclude, isolate and reject someone at work. Further, Ferris *et al.* (2008) stated that ostracism is a social mistreatment and silent treatment that threatens an individual's basic needs. He further pushed ostracism research forward by constructing the first and only available scale that could measure ostracism at work. Following that, many empirical studies on ostracism were conducted worldwide. The causes and effects of workplace ostracism have been thoroughly discussed in the literature. Ostracism causes emotional exhaustion, physical pain, a lack of personal well-being, poor sleep, anger, depression, mental anguish and a need for frustration (Leary *et al.*, 2006; Ferris *et al.*, 2008; Chen and Li, 2019; Wu *et al.*, 2012; Wu *et al.*, 2012; Sheshadri, 2021; Smith and Williams, 2004; Stroud *et al.*, 2000; MacDonald and Leary, 2005; Thrassou *et al.*, 2022; Vrontis *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, it negatively affects an employee's attitude and behavior in the workplace, including job satisfaction, citizenship behavior and productivity (Gkorezis and Bellou, 2016). Ostracism experiences may be more unpleasant and have a more harmful effect than other adverse workplace behaviors, such as violence and harassment (O'Reilly and Robinson, 2009; Demetris *et al.*, 2022a,b; Williams and Zadro, 2001; O'Reilly *et al.*, 2011).

2.5 Suggestions in literature to mitigate workplace ostracism

We cannot deny that management sciences and social psychology have conducted substantial research on workplace ostracism in the past ten years. However, no study has thoroughly explored the tactics for preventing, alleviating and eliminating ostracism in all its forms (linguistic, gender, social and workplace). Numerous researchers have offered numerous strategies to mitigate the negative organizational backdrop of workplace ostracism. This study attempted to compile all of the recommendations discovered in the literature into Table 1 to understand the already suggested measures to mitigate, prevent, reduce or curb the impact of one form of ostracism (workplace).

Authors	Intervention type	Party intervening	Suggestion to mitigate/reduce/curb workplace ostracism
Haldorai <i>et al.</i> (2019), Jahanzeb <i>et al.</i> (2019), Huertas-Valdivia <i>et al.</i> (2019), Qian <i>et al.</i> (2019), Ryan and Deci (2000), Williams (2001), Baumeister and Leary (2017), Molet <i>et al.</i> (2013), Poon and Chen (2016), Hobfoll, 2001), De Clercq <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Cognitive-based intervention	• Individual al • Friends	1. Intrinsic motivation 2. Mindfulness 3. Psychological empowerment 4. Self-determination 5. Future time orientation 6. People who are marginalized must be encouraged to reconsider and reframe their social connections 7. Self-efficacy
Anjum <i>et al.</i> (2020), Reio and Ghosh (2009), Pearson and Porath (2005), Ferris <i>et al.</i> (2007), Letter <i>et al.</i> (2012), Day (2011)	Organization-based intervention	• Sector manager s • Immediate supervisor • Administrative staff • HRD profession al/practitioner • Policy makers and practitioners	1. Model their own behavior to help their employees engage positively • Answer their phone calls pleasantly • Greeting them with smiling face 2. Work structures, policies, procedures interfering with the culture of positive interactions must be banned 3. Comprehensive policy on professional codes of conduct, work habits and communication 3. Training programs to improve 4. Interpersonal communication, inclusiveness, and workplace relationships 5. Creating a supportive environment with a special focus on positive emotions and adaptation-related learning experiences, launching diversity 6. Awareness training programs (and developing the social and political skills of employees 7. An intervention called “CREW” – civility, respect and engagement in the work force – has been found very effective in this regard
Fiset and Boies (2018), Babalola <i>et al.</i> (2017), Christensen-Salem <i>et al.</i> (2021), Kanwal <i>et al.</i> (2019), Ali <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Leader–member exchange	• Leaders and leadership styles	Ethical leadership and transformational leadership, spiritual leadership

Source: Authors’ own creation

Table 1.
Available suggested
measures to mitigate
ostracism

Similarly, the authors of this study also made efforts to lessen ostracism in the workplace, but we worked on the issue more comprehensively. We, therefore, propose that other types of unit-level ostracism are the root cause of social ostracism, which is further the cause of workplace ostracism. The effects of ostracism at the unit level (linguistic and gender) multiply and result in ostracism at a larger scale (social and workplace) with greater intensity. Therefore, the authors proposed the “multiplying effect of ostracism” model in this study.

Additionally, this study offered recommendations to stop the practice of ostracism on all three levels. It is possible that social ostracism will not exist if it is mitigated or prevented at the linguistic and gender levels. If social ostracism does not live, then there will undoubtedly be no ostracism in the workplace.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

In response to a request for participation in a study looking at measures to mitigate workplace ostracism, 199 workers in the service sector responded. The participants in this study were chosen using purposeful sampling. According to [Elo et al. \(2014\)](#), purposive sampling is acceptable for qualitative research where the researcher seeks to get information from individuals who have the most knowledge about the relevant research topic. Furthermore, there is no generally acknowledged sample size for qualitative investigations because the ideal sample depends on the goal of the study, research questions and data richness ([Elo et al., 2014](#)). Out of total participants, 96 were males and 88 were females, with the average age of 45.3 years.

3.2 Materials

The online survey consisted of a questionnaire with an open-ended response format to find out what steps might be taken to lessen the ostracism that employees in the service sector experience. Information about ostracism in the service sectors like beauty and wellness, hospitality, health care, airlines, etc. was collected by an open-ended response format question that could reveal the viewpoints of the respondents about ways to lessen and remove exclusionary behavior. This question was “What measures will you suggest to curb/mitigate/prevent/stop/cope up with the practice of social exclusion and social rejection in workplaces. (Language, Race, Gender, Background can be the base of exclusion/, rejection)?” There was no word limit for the answers.

3.3 Procedure

Online survey link was sent to the target group through emails and messages. The weekly reminder was sent as the time progressed. The survey hardly took 15 min to complete.

3.4 Ethical considerations

Ethical norms were taken into consideration. Prior to the interviews began, the participants were informed that the data would only be used for research, and that the questionnaire data had been anonymized.

Additionally, they were made aware of the objectives of the study, how the data would be shared, how their personal information would be kept private and that they could opt out at any time. To prevent them from having to withhold any information when sharing their story, participants were made aware of the purpose of the study. The confidentiality of the data was ensured. Additionally, disclosing their identity was entirely voluntary.

3.5 Strategy of analysis

The information gathered from the open-ended survey questions was analyzed qualitatively. Data were categorized, and a thematic analysis was performed using the computer program NVivo 12 plus (Parker, 2005). The responses were categorized and examined in stages according to themes. To find themes, the authors first performed the analysis on their own. Following that, talks about the findings were had, and there was theme integration. When compared, the themes picked out by each researcher were similar.

4. Analysis

Three themes emerged from the analysis of the participant responses. These themes offered recommendations for reducing social exclusion and rejection at the individual, organizational and societal levels.

4.1 Theme 1: approaches at individual level

Regarding theme 1, data revealed some of the approaches that employees use on individual level to reduce the adverse effects of exclusionary behavior that they face.

On the part of *victims of ostracism*, increasing one's skill and exceling in their work so that others would want them to be in their teams is one way. They would also try to communicate and initiate talks with others on their part as well because ostracism, being a type of incivility, is ambiguous in nature. Thus, sometimes individuals are perceived as introverts and full of attitude, and hence, others stay away from them.

At the same time, practice yoga, meditation, doing self-care and enjoying one's own company also help the victim to reduce the effects of ostracism.

One of the participants wrote:

When I was ostracized and left alone, it disturbed my mental peace. At first, I questioned myself if I was at fault but later, I used meditation and self-care to overcome from the situation and find my own happiness.

Another participant who was excluded stated:

I upgraded my capabilities and learned new skills which only few others have to show others that I am also something. As a result, to use those skills in their tasks others started to come to me asking for help.

On the part of *witness of ostracism*, they should be aware that they too can someday experience exclusionary behavior. They should therefore consider it their obligation to ensure that others feel comfortable, talk to them, take charge to avoid engaging in such behavior and do not permit others to do so in your presence. Make complaints to one in the power to take decisions.

One of the participants stated:

I felt really bad looking at one person always sitting alone and nobody making him part of their group. I, somewhere felt that I could also be in his place and thus went to him and gave him a hand of friendship.

Some other wrote: "Once a colleague of mine who was black was getting ostracized. I immediately talked to others in my team to not behave in such a way with him."

4.2 Theme 2: approaches at organizational level

Regarding theme 2, data revealed some of the methods used by organizations to stop or minimize the negative consequences of exclusionary conduct that employees encounter.

At functional levels, to promote interactions with everyone in the organization, implement activities like job rotation, peer-to-peer monitoring programs, teamwork, inclusive tasks, employee engagement and civility training. Activities like birthday celebrations, celebrating achievements, annual picnics, etc. could be used to involve everyone and make them feel connected. A participant wrote: “*I feel managers could do job rotation, so that we can talk to new set of people related to that job and become a part of their informal group.*” Another participant stated:

When I first joined my job, I felt left out as everyone had their own set of friends. But when in the very next month during my birthday celebration organized by team leader, I got involved with others in started to get along with them.

At policy level, implementing rules like “zero tolerance” for such behavior, penalty and demotion to “doer” could be beneficial. There should be a proper grievance committee to handle such matters, and any form of favoritism should be discouraged as it increases the risk of exclusion. A stringent enforcement of gender equality policies is also necessary to prevent exclusionary behavior based on sex. Above all, organizations must make it abundantly apparent in their regulations that ostracizing someone based on their caste, religion, color or any other factor is wrong and will result in severe punishment. One participant quoted:

The earlier organization I worked in had a clear zero tolerance policy for ostracizing anybody on the basis of anything be it sex, religion or anything and hence in my whole time there I never experienced or witnessed somebody being excluded on such basis. But my current organization do not have such policies and hence I see people getting involved in things like partying together in lunch time and leaving one person alone.

4.3 Theme 3: approaches at societal level

Regarding theme 3, data also revealed some of the methods that society as whole can use to curb and stop ostracism.

At community level, all people have a fundamental right to equality, which must be upheld. Education about not excluding anyone should be given to children at home by parents, and in school, by teachers from very beginning only. It is important to conduct awareness campaigns regarding the detrimental effects of social exclusion, including those on mental health.

A person stated:

When I was a child my parents always taught me to be cordial and friendly with their friend’s children when they used to come to our place or else, we would be scolded. From their it was instilled in me that I should be cordial to new employees that join our team.

At government level, proper laws and regulations, including penalty for such conduct, must be framed. Statutory regulatory body must be framed to look into such matters. Additionally, political leaders need to preach about people’s coexistence and cooperation and reform their political ideas.

A participant during interview said:

“[. . .] only when government will take it seriously and make some strict laws against it, nothing will change.”

Another one told:

“if our leaders be it in organizations or even political leaders will talk about coexistence and co-operation even with the rivals the people will follow them.”

5. Results

5.1 Themes and sub-themes

This study sheds light on the strategies for reducing workplace ostracism. Three major levels of approach were reported by the respondents and presented in Table 2.

The first theme was individual level. Because ostracism robs people of their social connections, they resort to various self-help measures to avoid being shunned by their organizations. Individuals can either be victims themselves who attempt to use various means to reintegrate into the group, or they can be witnesses to ostracism who take action to stop it from happening to others. The fundamental strategy could be communication, such as making small conversation or being honest about your concerns about ostracism. Other methods include practicing self-care, such as yoga and meditation, to let go of the negative impacts of exclusion. The person who is not the victim but is nonetheless impacted by such behavior can make the victim feel comfortable and speak to them or even protest and report the behavior to the authorities.

The second theme was at an organizational level. Acts of ostracism have a negative influence on not only individuals but also the organization as a whole. It frequently results in a bad organizational culture and diminishes the company's overall reputation. Therefore, organizations also use some methods to lessen these negative impacts. Organizations can do civility training at the functional level for all employees, including superiors and subordinates. Job rotation,

Theme	Sub-theme	Description
Theme 1: Individual level	Victim	Increase his/her skillset Meditation, yoga, self-care Self-management and self-motivation Practice being alone Be extrovert Communicate
	Witness	Be optimist and open minded Make victim comfortable and talk to them Take charge and responsibility Complain
Theme 2: Organizational level	Functional	Job rotation Peer-to-peer monitoring programs Teamwork and inclusive task Employee engagement Civility training Activities like birthday celebration Celebrating achievements, annual picnics, etc
	Policy	Zero tolerance Penalty and demotion Grievance committee Gender equality Rules and regulations
Theme 3: Society level	Community	Right to equality Education at home and at school Awareness campaigns
	Government	Laws and regulations Statutory regulatory body Grievance committee Reforming political ideas about coexistence and cooperation

Source: Authors' own creation

Table 2.
Themes and sub-themes presenting measures to prevent/curb/mitigate/reduce workplace ostracism

teamwork, employee engagement and other strategies could be used to include everyone in organizational discussions and provide them the opportunity to engage in conversations. Organizations should also frame policies such as “zero tolerance” toward exclusionary behaviors, policy for gender equality to stop the exclusion of someone on the ground of their sex and policy of fine and demotion to discourage such behavior.

Finally, the third theme was societal level. Organizations are miniature of society. Exclusionary conduct in the workplace translates to exclusionary conduct in society. As a result, the community and government of the country should also take some steps to limit, ameliorate and end the practice of social exclusion and social rejection in workplaces. In this regard, various awareness campaigns could be organized. Government must create legislation to combat ostracism along the same lines as bullying and harassment, influential figures or leaders could promote the concept of coexistence and not excluding others, etc.

5.2 Proposed model: “multiplying effect of ostracism”

Organizations have come to derive their workforce from mixed gender (male and female), culture, rationality and linguistic backgrounds. In such a diversified work environment, employees prefer working with a team of individuals with similar characteristics. As a result, employees form informal groups based on their language and gender. People who do not belong to or identify with any group in the organization feel left out and shunned. Individuals enjoy working in teams with people they already know, so these informal ingroups impact the formation of official teams in organizations.

Furthermore, these ingroups formed within organizations affect individuals’ social behavior and can cause social ostracism or social boycott ([Dotan-Eliaz et al., 2009](#); [Hitlan et al., 2006a, 2006b](#)). Additionally, social ostracism can cause complex interpersonal interactions and relational dynamics within the organization, which along with critical organizational factors, further cause ostracism in the workplace. Therefore, based on the cause-and-effect relationship, the authors of this study suggested a multiplying effect model, where language and gender ostracism are unit-level ostracism, and their impact is limited to their victim. However, both forms of ostracism, alone or in combination, can cause social ostracism. Further, ostracism is an active practice in society. In that case, it will penetrate the workplace, giving birth to workplace ostracism, and from the workplace, it can sometimes again penetrate society, and the process can keep going in this manner. The concern is that social and workplace ostracism is multiplied effects of unit-level ostracism (linguistic and gender) and consist of more intensity. This model ([Figure 1](#)) can be further tested empirically.

6. Limitations and future research directions

This study, like every other study, has a few limitations. This review and model propose that one type of ostracism effect multiplies and can be the source of a different kind of ostracism on a greater scale. Although the study’s authors proposed the model based on examples and accessible literature, the model has yet to be tested and remains undiscovered. As a result, future researchers can empirically test the proposed model.

Furthermore, in reviewing the literature, the authors of this study discovered that most ostracism research is focused on workplace ostracism. Other forms of ostracism, such as linguistic, gender and social ostracism, have yet to be investigated, and more empirical studies are required to be conducted on other forms of ostracism. The authors of this study attempted to explore workplace ostracism in depth. However, they did not investigate how to prevent it at the unit level (linguistic and gender). As a result, similar research can be conducted in the future to find the best methods to combat ostracism in general and linguistic ostracism in particular.

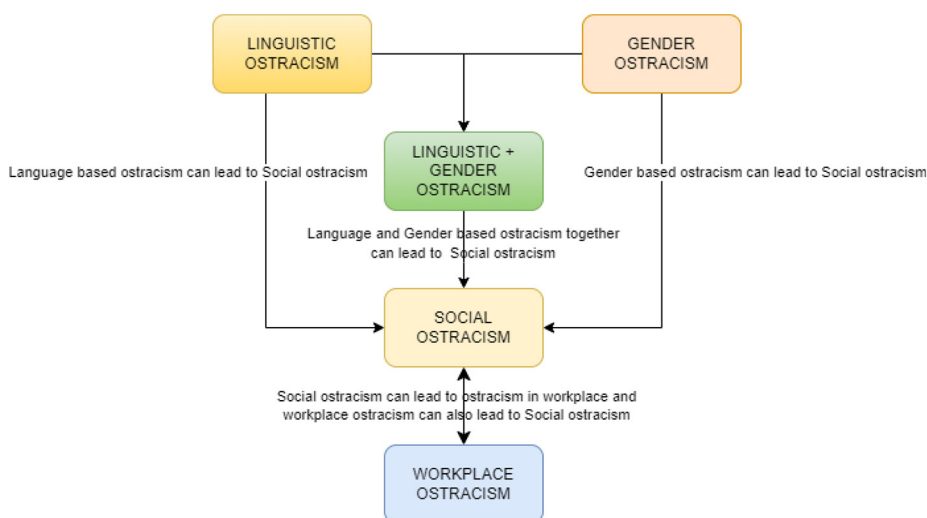


Figure 1.
Multiplying effect of
the ostracism model

Source: Authors' own creation

7. Implications of the study

7.1 Practical implications

People, managers, policymakers and the government will learn how to stop, decrease, curb and ameliorate exclusionary behavior. To show that everyone can actively take action to avoid such behavior in our society and workplaces, the proposals were divided into three categories (individual, organizational and social). Even the person experiencing ostracism, as opposed to being the victim, can fight to stop such unproductive behavior by boosting their sense of worth and putting in remarkable effort in projects, careers and other areas. This inspires other marginalized people and helps to stop harmful behaviors like “social loafing” and “mob mentality.” The research argues that the witness to the ostracism experience can be a proactive fighter against the victim’s emotions of exclusion by giving the victim some comfort and showing support. The victim may receive encouragement and bravery from the witness to continue grabbing for straws. The report also makes specific recommendations to managers, leaders and admirable organizational heads to stop the practice of ostracism at the functional and policy levels. To actively legislate such activities, the community and the government can create laws and policies.

7.2 Social implications

The presence of four different types of ostracism was identified in this study using literature support and varied examples of events (linguistic, gender, social and workplace). The examples presented will assist future scholars in identifying the features of these covert behaviors that go unnoticed in the community. This would boost social and community workers to raise their voices and create knowledge against such habits, which might cause gradual death. Furthermore, this study will undoubtedly draw the attention of the government and legislators to propose legal measures to prevent such exercises on various levels.

Additionally, the United Nations General Assembly established 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, intending to achieve them by 2030. The goals serve as a roadmap for

everyone to construct a better, more sustainable future. All these 17 SDGs are interrelated; they recognize that actions taken in one area can affect outcomes in others, and that sustainable development must strike a balance between social, economic and environmental issues. Even though the SDGs are in their fifth year of implementation, many countries, including Bangladesh, India and Nepal, still need to work on fulfilling the targets, partly due to a lack of engagement with poor people. Consequently, the research is useful in achieving SDG 5: gender equality and SDG 10: reducing inequalities by advocating measures to reduce social exclusion, boycotting and rejection.

7.3 Theoretical implications

First and foremost, the study expands on Williams' 2009 need-threat model of ostracism. The model clarifies the victim's three reaction stages (reflexive, reflective and resignation). This study strengthens the reflection stage, also known as the coping stage. The study also includes thoughts and guidelines for understanding exclusion by developing a coping strategy. Organizations can also use techniques like yoga, meditation and self-care classes to help people become more self-aware and confident in their skills.

The study's authors also proposed a model based on previous research and assumptions, hypothesizing that linguistic and gender exclusion may act as catalysts or causes for social exclusion, which may lead to the phenomenon known as workplace ostracism. Therefore, to prevent or lessen workplace ostracism, it is important to stop such behaviors at the source, i.e. one must stop ostracism at the linguistic and gender levels.

7.4 Managerial implications

Managers, practitioners and policymakers will benefit from the suggestions made in this study about how to prevent, limit, moderate and deal with ostracism and other silently harmful work behaviors like incivility. According to the research we have so far, ostracism and rudeness are similar in how they work (Ferris *et al.*, 2017). These things break the organizational rules about "teamwork" and "mutual trust." Ideas like "Peer-to-Peer Monitoring Programs," "Team and Inclusive Tasks" and "Civility Training" will help stop these kinds of things from happening at work.

8. Conclusion

Previous research has found that social ostracism promotes "social grief." Whatever the reason for the exclusion, it is a terrifying and agonizing experience. Ostracism studies has expanded from six publications in 2014 to 34 articles in 2019 (Kaushal *et al.*, 2021). Doing this review and expanding on the literature could shed more light on the concept of ostracism. Unlike many other studies, we attempted to distinguish four categories of ostracism (linguistic, gender, social and workplace). The authors of this study also attempted to address the issue that is brought up the most: how to lessen the negative impacts of ostracism. By describing coping mechanisms for uncomfortable encounters and feelings of exclusion, this study contributes to the literature on Williams' "Need-threat model of ostracism." Furthermore, the study's authors suggested a paradigm in which linguistic and gender ostracism can contribute separately and collectively to social ostracism. Additionally, the model suggests that workplace ostracism can considerably be caused by social exclusion, and the reverse is also true.

Notes

1. www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/odisha-continues-its-long-fight-against-witch-hunting/article37140808.ece

2. www.indiatimes.com/news/india/odisha-village-boycotts-family-of-a-girl-who-became-pregnant-after-being-raped-by-teacher-332114.html
3. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bengaluru/community-members-bury-hatchet-end-social-boycott-of-19-families/articleshow/53105189.cms>
4. www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Madurai/Yet-another-tale-of-social-ostracism/article12889112.ece
5. www.thehindu.com/news/national/tamil-nadu/in-perali-village-dalits-cant-cycle-in-upper-caste-areas/article2421543.ece
6. www.hindustantimes.com/mumbai/the-decades-long-argument-over-excommunication/story-_O338r5MkIbr0jSUCIwjAUO.html
7. <https://theleaflet.in/orissa-high-courts-ruling-against-caste-religion-based-socioeconomic-ostracism-is-a-step-in-the-right-direction/>

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