

THE IMPACT OF WORKPLACE OSTRACISM INDUCED BY CO-WORKER ENVY ON PSYCHOLOGICAL EMPOWERMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

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ABSTRACT

Introduction/Main Objectives: Ostracism is a painful workplace experience that may influence employees' attitudes and behavior. This study aims to analyze how workplace ostracism impacts employees' psychological empowerment and commitment through the co-worker envy mechanism. **Background Problems:** Previous studies mostly focused on ostracism and its effect on employees and organizations, and demonstrated inconsistency concerning the relationship between it and commitment. **Novelty:** The current study fills a gap, namely the inconsistencies of previous studies into the direct effect of workplace ostracism on organizational commitment. **Research Methods:** Data were collected from employees in the information and communication technology sectors in Indonesia. To collect the data, we used a self-report questionnaire to assess the employees' perceived co-worker envy, perceived workplace ostracism, psychological empowerment, and commitment. Out of 499 online survey questionnaires filled out by the respondents, 201 responses met the criteria. Partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was used to test the proposed hypotheses. **Findings/Results:** The result indicates that co-worker envy positively influences workplace ostracism. The resulting workplace ostracism indirectly leads to lower commitment, via employee psychological empowerment as a mediator. **Conclusion:** Taken together, the results of the study give additional and more substantial empirical evidence to the workplace ostracism literature.

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INTRODUCTION

As human beings, employees possess a fundamental need to belong, an impulse to shape and maintain a social relationship (Baumeister, 2012). They need to be part of a group and accepted as group members in their workplaces. Like the concept of the need for relatedness developed by Deci & Ryan (2000), people need to feel connected to, supported by, or cared for by others, including at their workplace. That need is innate rather than learned; therefore, everyone is assumed to have innate needs regardless of their reported desire for the outcomes they expect (Cesare et al., 2021). Employees attempt to develop good interpersonal relationships with co-workers, to meet their basic needs. Social bonds emerging from this sense of belonging may help them manage stress in the workplace. Employees who perceive they are supported and not alone are often more effective at coping with difficulties. In contrast, individuals will be more anxious, frustrated, passive, lonely, uncomfortable, and worthless when they feel alone and do not have social support (Williams & Sommer, 1997).

Ostracism often occurs inside and outside the workplace (Scott et al., 2015; Williams, 2001; Williams & Sommer, 1997). Workplace ostracism, which is the feeling of being excluded by others, significantly influences employees and organizations (Ferris et al., 2008). From the target perspective, being excluded is hurtful, regardless of the motives behind the ostracism. A study by (Eisenberger et al., 2003) revealed that brain activation patterns, when socially excluded, are the same as when physically hurt, proving that ostracism causes social pain. The previous literature shows that an individual who is ostracized in his or her workplace feels stress or heartbreak, which often threatens his or her basic needs as a human, such as a sense of belonging in a social group, self-esteem, control, and meaningfulness (Williams, 2009). As a form of

unpleasant social interaction, workplace ostracism is often interpreted as an aversive contextual factor that triggers the interpretation that the organization does not accept a person and that there is a distance between the ostracized person and the organization. Moreover, (Jahanzeb & Newell, 2020) found that workplace ostracism can hinder the ostracized person's promotional voices, since the ostracized individual undervalues his/her adequacy as an organizational member.

Previous studies have attempted to explore workplace ostracism's impact on employees and organizations. A meta-analysis showed that workplace ostracism leads to individuals' emotional exhaustion, job tension, depression, negative emotions, and low favorable self-perceptions (Howard & Cogswell, 2020). Besides harming individuals, prior research also found that workplace ostracism greatly harms the organization. It leads to anti-performance behavior (Duffy et al., 2002), high employee turnover (Howard et al., 2020; O'Reilly et al., 2015), low work effort (Anjum et al., 2019), and reduced organizational citizenship behavior (Ferris et al., 2008). A lack of previous research addresses how co-workers' ostracism occurs and its effect on the target's attitudinal outcomes in the workplace (Chang et al., 2019; Lyu & Zhu, 2019). Most of the researchers call for further research, to understand how ostracism affects employees, organizations, and occupational relationships (Wu et al., 2015). Co-workers may influence a workplace's atmosphere, either negatively or positively (Schneider, 1987). Co-workers' positive social support may result in a comfortable workplace, whereas the absence of support from them may result in competition and discomfort, leading to negative perceptions and outcomes (Singh et al., 2019). Hence, it is necessary to investigate what causes individuals to feel ostracized by their co-workers and what influence

this has on themselves and their organization (Scott et al., 2013; Scott & Duffy, 2015; Wu et al., 2011).

The present study responds to calls by previous researchers (Scott et al., 2013; Scott & Duffy, 2015; Wu et al., 2011) to examine the workplace ostracism phenomenon from the “victim” perspective. The present research employs the social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) to define the potential causes of ostracism; the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) was also applied to depict the effects of ostracism as experienced by employees individually. As a result of upward social comparison, envy potentially harms interpersonal relationships in the workplace. Envy emerges when an individual feels that others possess better qualities, achievements, and possessions than he or she does (Parrott & Smith, 1993). In a pilot study conducted by (Scott & Duffy, 2015), envy was found to be strongly related to co-worker ostracism. Such a result encourages the present study to analyze further and strengthen the evidence of the relationship between envy and ostracism from the victims’ (i.e., ostracized individuals) perspectives using the social comparison theory.

The present study also attempts to examine the effect of co-worker ostracism on the ostracized individual using the conservation of resources theory. In line with the theory, workplace ostracism drains the resources necessary for motivating individuals (Hobfoll, 1989). Acceptance and support from co-workers are valuable resources in the workplace. Being ostracized by co-workers makes individuals suffer from stress and they usually exhibit adverse outcomes, such as decreasing work engagement and lowered performance (Leung et al., 2011), as well as exhibiting withdrawal cognition (Zheng et al., 2016), in response to the threats and in an attempt to keep their remaining valued resources.

In addition to negatively influencing the behavior of ostracized employees, as previously described, workplace ostracism influences work attitudes such as organizational commitment (Ferris et al., 2008; O’Reilly et al., 2015). This condition makes perfect sense considering the feeling of being left out of the social life at work, which makes individuals who experience it reduce their commitment and even have the intention of leaving, and they tend to choose to quit the organization where they work if the opportunity arises (O’Reilly et al., 2015). This low organizational commitment can harm the organization, considering that the individuals tend not to be motivated to engage in positive behavior and provide beneficial reciprocity for the organization or the people in it (Guay et al., 2016). Given the potential adverse effect of workplace ostracism on organizational effectiveness (by potentially reducing employee commitment), organizations and managers must be concerned about this phenomenon and make an effort to reduce and prevent it.

Accordingly, this study also explores how workplace ostracism impacts organizational commitment, where previous research has shown inconsistent results. The impact of ostracism on Organizational commitment must be considered, as the employee's commitment to the organization is an essential factor for organizational success (Islami & Nahartyo, 2019). The study by Zheng et al. (2016) showed that workplace ostracism does not significantly influence affective commitment, whereas other studies found that workplace ostracism negatively affects affective commitment (Ferris et al., 2008; O’Reilly et al., 2015). The present study intends to fill the gap by including psychological empowerment as a mediating variable in the relationship between co-worker ostracism and commitment. Prior research showed that empowered employees will reciprocate with a higher level of commitment to

the organization, because they feel capable and this will influence their job and organization more meaningfully (Avolio et al., 2004). Due to being ostracized, individuals lack support from their co-workers and perceive low self-esteem (Williams, 2001). This condition may cause them to perceive low levels of psychological empowerment and impact their commitment to the organization.

This study offers several theoretical contributions. First, the social comparison theory and the conservation of resources theory were applied to explain the causes and effects of ostracism, to fill the gap, given that studies on the phenomenon are still scarce (Wu et al., 2015). Second, as explained previously, using the psychological empowerment variable as a mediator of ostracism and commitment may address the inconsistencies in the previous studies. Lastly, this study was conducted in Indonesia. Indonesian society is characterized by its collectivist values (Hofstede Insights, 2021). Previous studies have shown that people from highly collectivist cultures are more likely to be sensitive to being excluded at work (Anjum et al., 2021). It could be that ostracism is eventually a solution when individuals don't like someone or are envious of them, considering that individuals in this society tend to be less upfront about how they feel. The phenomena related to workplace ostracism are fascinating to research in Indonesian culture.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Social comparison theory

Leon Festinger first introduced the social comparison theory in 1954. It refers to a social psychological phenomenon where an individual looks at other individuals, to make a self-evaluation and psychosocial adaptation (Festinger, 1954). (Wood, 1996) defines it as a process of thinking about information about other individuals that is related to one's self. According to Festinger

(1954), individuals hold a fundamental impulse to evaluate their abilities and opinions. Due to the absence of objective physical standards, individuals tend to compare themselves to others similar to them, to judge their social situations. By doing so, individuals can obtain the necessary information to evaluate, enhance, verify, and improve themselves. In general, there are three types of social comparison: parallel social comparison (comparing with equal people), downward social comparison (comparing with more inferior people), and upward social comparison (comparing with more superior people) (Wang et al., 2020). Each of these types of comparison has different impacts on individuals who make a social comparison (Festinger, 1954). The social comparison may lead to various kinds of emotions, such as envy, dissatisfaction, regret (Boles & Messick, 1995), resentment, and frustration (Feather, 2008), as well as positive emotions, such as pride (van Osch et al., 2018).

A workplace provides its employees with frequent opportunities to compare themselves to others (Brown et al., 2007). Employees compete for resources and rewards from the organization, such as salary increases, promotions, and training opportunities, among other rewards (Sun et al., 2020). The competition among employees catalyzes them to socially compare their co-workers (Duffy & Shaw, 2000). Wood (1996) proposes three main social comparison processes: acquiring, thinking about, and reacting to social information. In other words, after acquiring and thinking about information, an emotional reaction and behavior emerge from such a social comparison. For instance, a well-performing, proactive employee may trigger upward social comparison, making him, or her, the target of envy among his or her co-workers (Sun et al., 2020). This theory explains why envy, resulting from upward social comparison, can lead to

feeling ostracized from the envied person's perspective (Mao et al., 2020).

2. Conservation of resources theory

The conservation of resources (COR) theory was first proposed by Hobfoll (1989), holding that people attempt to maintain, protect, and build resources. Following this theory, anything that threatens individuals serves as the potential or actual loss of their valuable resources (Hobfoll, 1989). This theory believes that stress occurs when: (1) a risk of net loss of resources exists, (2) the actual loss of resources, and (3) individuals fail to obtain resources equal to their investment (Hobfoll et al., 1990). Resources, in this case, involve objects (car, house, food), conditions (feeling accepted and supported by the surroundings, good job security, good marriage), personal characteristics (social aplomb, mastery), or energy (money, knowledge, time). These are deemed valuable by the individual or function as a means to achieve worthwhile things for individuals (Hobfoll, 1989).

Within the context of an organization, resources can refer to physical, emotional, and cognitive assets that employees use to deal with stressful events or achieve personal and occupational goals (Bedi, 2021). Some of the examples of resources include support from co-workers or supervisors, organizational belief, self-efficacy, and performance feedback, among others (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Environmental conditions frequently threaten or lead to depleted resources, such as threatened status, position, financial stability, loss of significant others, belief, and self-esteem (Hobfoll, 1989). Feeling ostracized by others results in a feeling of not belonging, lower self-esteem, less control, and a sense of invisibility (Williams, 2009). Hence, based on the COR theory, workplace ostracism leads to resource depletion. In the present study, the conservation of resources theory helps explain the

consequences of workplace ostracism that are experienced by the victims.

3. Workplace ostracism

Ostracism can occur in any organization and may be experienced by anyone, affecting individuals or organizations (Williams, 2007). It is defined as the extent to which an individual feels that he or she is ignored or excluded by others in his/her workplace (Ferris et al., 2008). (Robinson et al., 2013) define it as "events when an individual or group omits to take actions that engage another organizational member when it is socially appropriate to do so." Based on the two previously stated definitions, it is worth noting that ostracism is viewed as both a perception and a behavior (Howard et al., 2020). Previous studies have used perceptual definitions to depict the concept of ostracism from the victim's perspective, while some other studies have utilized behavioral definitions to explain the idea of ostracism from the perpetrator's perspective (Jahanzeb & Fatima, 2018; Quade et al., 2019; Yang & Wei, 2018). The present study applies the ostracism concept from the victim's perspective, where the victims feel excluded by their co-workers. In other words, the present study examines the antecedents and consequences of felt ostracism using social comparison and conservation of resources' frameworks.

4. Social comparison theory, co-worker envy, and workplace ostracism

As stated previously, the social comparison theory is used as a basis to explain the causes of why an individual feels ostracized, particularly by his or her co-workers. In the social comparison theory, upward social comparison serves as the basis of envy (Festinger, 1954; Wang et al., 2020). Envy refers to a negative emotion that involves discontent and occurs in social comparisons, where an individual is in a lower

position (inferior) than others (Feather & Sherman, 2002). An individual can turn into the target of his/her co-workers' envy when his or her co-workers feel that the targeted individual possesses higher qualities, greater achievement, and more possessions, and those co-workers wish to have those qualities or wish that particular individual to lose them (Parrott & Smith, 1993).

From the envious co-workers' perspective, they tend to keep a distance from those who make them feel inferior or even hurt individuals they deem more superior (Kim & Glomb, 2010). Envious people believe that ostracism is less harmful and cannot be easily detected; thus, ostracizing others is seen as an easy and discreet way to mistreat others without fear of violating the rules (Björkqvist et al., 1994). In other words, the perpetrator will not be considered a mean person, compared to those who explicitly show hostility. The perpetrator can easily conceal his or her actions by saying that such a poor relationship is a result of being busy at work, which means he or she does not have the time to respond to the ostracized individuals. Based on the previous explanation, it could be concluded that ostracizing an individual (target of envy) is a "safe way" to address co-workers' inferiority. (Mao et al., 2020) and (Breidenthal et al., 2020) confirmed this notion that the envious person is likely to ostracize or exclude the focal employee, in order to narrow the gap between them. Therefore, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H1: Co-worker envy positively affects workplace ostracism.

5. Consequences of workplace ostracism

From the envied person's perspective, feelings of being excluded by their co-workers will be responded to through changes in attitude and behavior. Although ostracism seems less harmful, it may significantly impact ostracized individuals

since it potentially damages their wellbeing (Ferris et al., 2008). According to the COR theory, an individual experiences stress when there is a risk of losing resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Such resources can be physical (e.g., a house or food), conditional (e.g., the feeling of being accepted and supported by one's surroundings), and energy (time or knowledge). Referring to the theory, an ostracized individual tends to experience stress due to a lack of acceptance and support from co-workers in his or her organization (Hobfoll, 1989; Williams, 2001). Human beings, as social creatures, need to be accepted in their group. Consequently, being ostracized by co-workers is painful and uncomfortable (Wu et al., 2011).

Feeling a lack of belonging when ostracized by others can lower self-esteem, which can lower a sense of meaningfulness and feelings of efficacy (Williams, 2009). In other words, ostracism negatively affects an employee's psychological empowerment, considering that self-esteem affects one's level of psychological empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995). Psychological empowerment is a motivational variable defined as an increased intrinsic task motivation manifested in a set of four cognitions reflecting an individual's orientation to the work role: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact (Spreitzer, 1995; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). An employee that is psychologically empowered tends to have a positive contribution to the organization since they are more engaged in their job (Rantika & Yustina, 2017) and commit to the organization (Chiang & Jang, 2008). Since ostracism is often associated with punishment and implies that an individual has made a mistake or exhibited unexpected behavior (Williams, 2001), an ostracized individual may feel that they lack the competence or skills to

demonstrate good performance (low psychological empowerment). Therefore, it is expected that:

H2: Workplace ostracism negatively affects psychological empowerment.

Workplace ostracism may be a stressor that depletes the psychological and social resources an individual needs in his or her career within an organization (Zhu et al., 2017). Employees' attitudes may be influenced by stress caused by feeling ostracized (Ferris et al., 2008; Scott et al., 2015). When the demands for teamwork increase, the need to communicate with co-workers also increases (Sundstrom et al., 2000). This condition may result in an ostracized person feeling discomfort in his or her workplace and a poor perception of the workplace and organization. An ostracizee also responds to ostracism with job withdrawal, such as turnover intention and job search behavior (Chang et al., 2019; Ferris et al., 2008; Howard & Cogswell, 2020; Renn et al., 2013; Wu et al., 2011) . Such a condition potentially lowers their commitment to the organization. Previous research also confirmed that workplace ostracism reduces the level of an ostracized employee's affective commitment (Ferris et al., 2008; O'Reilly et al., 2015). Therefore, it is expected that:

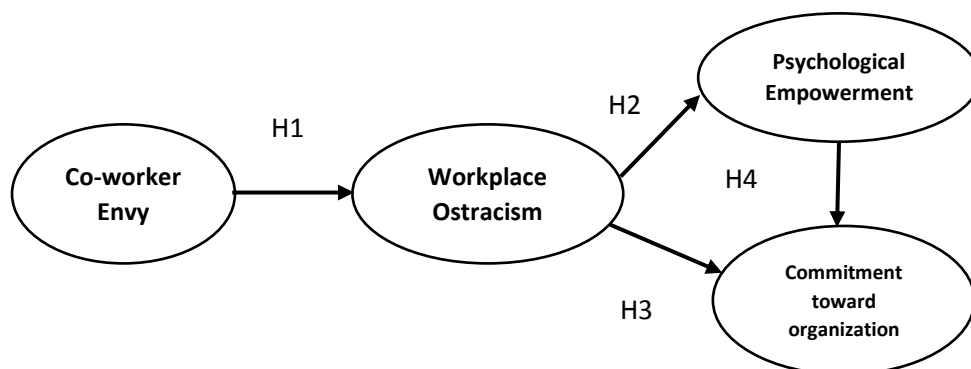
H3: Workplace ostracism negatively affects commitment.

6. Psychological empowerment as a mediator

Based on the research gap explained above, the present study examines the indirect effect of workplace ostracism on commitment through psychological empowerment. This was done because previous studies on the direct impact of workplace ostracism have yielded inconsistent results. The use of psychological empowerment as a mediating variable was based on previous studies that have proven that it positively affects commitment (Bordin et al., 2006; Chiang & Jang, 2008; Spreitzer, 1995). When an individual feels excluded by his or her co-workers, it may result in a shortage of resources (Hobfoll, 1989; Williams, 2001) and self-esteem (Bedi, 2021; Williams, 2001; Wu et al., 2011), thus, workplace ostracism potentially lowers psychological empowerment, which in turn, lowers his or her organizational commitment. Therefore, it is expected that:

H4: Psychological empowerment mediates the effect of workplace ostracism on commitment.

Figure 1. Conceptual model



METHOD

1. Sample and procedure

The participants in this study were employees in the information and communication technology sectors in Indonesia. A self-report questionnaire was deployed to assess the employees' perceived co-worker envy, perceived co-worker ostracism, psychological empowerment, and commitment. Snowball sampling was applied by recruiting some of the key personnel of the companies. Through email, the online questionnaire was distributed to these key personnel. Each of the key personnel then distributed the online questionnaire to their colleagues, who were asked to share the questionnaire with others until the required amount of data was met. We used the inverse square root method to estimate the minimum sample size. In this study, we expected the minimum path coefficient to be significant between 0.11 and 0.20; so the recommended minimum sample size based on (Hair et al., 2021) would be 155. Of the 499 questionnaires collected from the respondents, 201 were complete and could be analyzed further (the response rate was 41.08%). Regarding the demographic information collected during the survey, 77.56% of the respondents were male. 18.05% of the respondents were below 25 years old, 27.32% were 26 to 30 years old, 26.36% were 31 to 35 years old, 18.54% were 36 to 40 years old, and 9.76% of them were above 40 years old. Regarding their education, 55.61% of the respondents held a bachelor's degree, 23.37% were high-school graduates, 13.17% held a diploma, and 5.85% had a master's degree. Concerning their job tenure, 6.34% of the respondents reported having worked for less than one year, 28.29% of them reported working for 1 to 3 years, 12.20% reported they had worked for 4 to 5 years, and 53.17% reported working for more than six years.

2. Measures

The present study used a self-report questionnaire to assess co-worker envy, workplace ostracism, psychological empowerment, and commitment to their organization using a 5-point Likert scale ("strongly disagree" to "agree"), which was distributed online. Co-worker envy was assessed using three items developed by (Vecchio, 2005) to find out the extent to which an individual felt that his or her co-workers envied him or her. One of the items was, "Because of my success at work, I am sometimes resented by co-workers." Then, workplace ostracism was measured using 10 items developed by Ferris et al. (2008) to examine the extent to which an individual felt ostracized or ignored by co-workers. For this, one of the items was, "Others ignore you at work." The commitment toward the organization was then measured by using six items adopted from (Allen & Meyer, 1990) affective components of commitment to capture the extent to which an individual wanted to stay at an organization. For this purpose, one of the items was, "I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career in this organization." Psychological empowerment was measured using 12 items adopted from (Spreitzer, 1995) in order to find out the extent to which an individual was actively involved in his or her work. Thus, one of the items was "I am confident about my ability to do my job."

RESULT

Table 1 displays the mean, standard deviation, and inter-variable correlation. The result of the analysis provided evidence for the formulated hypotheses. Co-worker envy was positively associated with workplace ostracism ($r = 0.52, p < 0.01$); workplace ostracism was negatively associated with the psychological environment ($r = -0.19, p < 0.01$); the psychological environment was positively associated with commitment toward the organization ($r = 0.52, p < 0.01$).

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and correlations

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Co-worker Envy	Workplace Ostracism	Psychological Empowerment
Co-worker Envy	2.62	0.80			
Workplace Ostracism	2.11	0.61	0.52**		
Psychological Empowerment	3.79	0.49	-0.01	-0.19**	
Commitment	3.09	0.41	0.00	0.05	0.27**

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Notes: Total sample size = 205.

Partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was applied to test the hypotheses by using SmartPLS 3.3.2. PLS-SEM was applied because it can address a number of dependent and independent variables simultaneously. There are two steps to making a PLS-SEM analysis. The first is evaluating the measurement model through the validity and reliability tests of the constructs. Then, the second step is evaluating the structural model to examine the direct and indirect effects of the developed model.

1. Measurement model

Validity and reliability tests were conducted for each construct to evaluate the measurement model. To assess the constructs' validity, the convergent validity and discriminant validity were examined. A construct is deemed to have convergent validity if its loading factor is greater than 0.5 (Hair et al., 2010). Besides, it is recommended that the average variance extracted be greater than 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 2 shows that all the constructs' factor loadings and AVE met the recommended criteria to indicate convergent validity.

Meanwhile, discriminant validity was evaluated based on Fornell and Larcker's criterion. A construct is deemed to pass the discriminant validity test if the square root of each

construct's AVE has a greater value than the correlations with other latent constructs. Based on Table 3, all the constructs had discriminant validity because the square root of each construct's AVE was of a greater value than the correlations with the other latent constructs.

Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability are used to examine the reliability of an instrument. It is deemed reliable if the score is above 0.70. Further, (Hair et al., 2006) argue that a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of above 0.60 is acceptable. As shown in Table 2, the values of Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability met the criteria. Thus, the instrument was considered reliable.

2. Structural model

After evaluating the measurement model, a structural model analysis was undertaken to test the proposed hypotheses. This analysis was done by testing the hypothesized direct and indirect effects. Before testing the hypothesis, we conducted a full collinearity assessment (Kock, 2015) to investigate whether common method bias (CMB) affected our proposed model. The model would be considered free of CMB if the variance inflation factor (VIF) values were equal to or lower than 3.3 (Kock, 2015). Our findings showed that the values ranged from 1.066 to 1.326 (Table 4), indicating no CMB.

Table 2. Measurement model results

Construct	Item	Factor Loading	Cronbach Alpha	CR	AVE
Co-worker Envy	CE1	0.890	0.870	0.920	0.793
	CE2	0.898			
	CE3	0.884			
Workplace Ostracism	WO1	0.806	0.955	0.961	0.689
	WO2	0.868			
	WO3	0.797			
	WO4	0.772			
	WO5	0.823			
	WO6	0.837			
	WO7	0.832			
	WO8	0.881			
	WO9	0.880			
	WO10	0.829			
	WO12	0.800			
	Psychological Empowerment	PE3			
PE4		0.792			
PE5		0.812			
PE6		0.736			
PE7		0.740			
PE10		0.686			
PE11		0.669			
Commitment	OC1	0.861	0.690	0.825	0.614
	OC2	0.691			
	OC6	0.789			

Table 3.Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	Commitment	Co-worker Envy	Workplace Ostracism	Psychological Empowerment
Commitment	0.783			
Co-worker Envy	-0.022	0.891		
Workplace Ostracism	-0.085	0.520	0.830	
Psychological Empowerment	0.499	-0.016	-0.227	0.722

Table 4. Results of the full collinearity assessment

Construct	VIF
Co-worker Envy	1.362
Workplace Ostracism	1.366
Psychological Empowerment	1.017
Commitment	1.027

The following is the result of the PLS-SEM analysis:

Figure 2. Path coefficient value and p-value

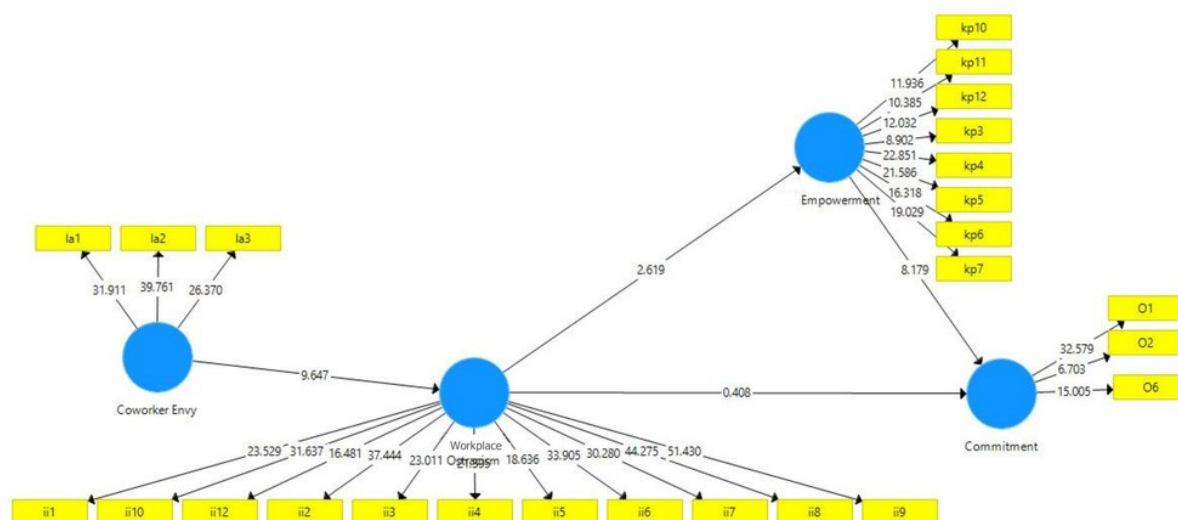


Table 5. Hypothesis testing results

Inter-variable Correlation	Standard deviation	t-statistic (t)	Path Coefficient	P-Value	Description
Direct Effect					
Co-worker Envy → Workplace Ostracism	0.054	9.647	0.520	0.000	H1 accepted
Workplace Ostracism → Psychological Empowerment	0.087	2.619	-0.227	0.009	H2 accepted
Workplace Ostracism → Commitment	0.074	0.408	-0.030	0.684	H3 not accepted
Psychological Empowerment → Commitment	0.062	8.179	0.506	0.000	Significant
Indirect Effect					
Workplace Ostracism → Psychological Empowerment → Commitment	0.046	2.484	-0.115	0.013	H4 accepted

Hypothesis 1 expects that co-worker envy positively affects workplace ostracism. The analysis result (Table 4) showed that co-worker envy positively and significantly affected workplace ostracism ($\beta = 0.520$, $p\text{-value} < 0.01$). In other words, H1 is supported. Hypotheses 2 and 3 examine the consequences of workplace ostracism. The result of the analysis showed that workplace ostracism negatively and significantly affected psychological empowerment ($\beta = -0.227$, $p\text{-value} < 0.01$). The test result also showed that workplace ostracism negatively, but not significantly, affected commitment toward the organization ($\beta = -0.030$, $p\text{-value} > 0.01$). Thus, H2 is supported while H3 is not.

The output indirect effect shown in Table 4 was used to examine the mediation effect test. The analysis result revealed that psychological empowerment significantly mediated the effect of workplace ostracism on commitment toward the organization (indirect effect = -0.115 , $p\text{-value} < 0.01$). In other words, H4 is supported. Since the direct effect of workplace ostracism on commitment was not significant, while that of psychological empowerment on commitment was, the indirect effect of workplace ostracism on commitment via psychological empowerment was fully mediated.

DISCUSSION

The present study attempted to clarify how co-worker ostracism can occur and how the target feels the consequences of this negative experience. The study presented several interesting pieces of evidence using the social comparison theory, the conservation of resources theory, and the results of previous studies. First, the test result showed that co-worker envy positively and significantly affects workplace ostracism. The social comparison theory supports this finding, where co-workers tend to distance

themselves from envied employees to reduce the discomfort of envious feelings (Tesser, 1988). In other words, envy keeps co-workers away from individuals that make them feel inferior; they increase their social distance by ignoring or avoiding the envied person. Increasing physical distance may not be viable for co-workers when they perceive envious feelings (Robinson et al., 2013b). This result also supports the results of studies by (Yina Mao et al., 2020) and (Breidenthal et al., 2020), which found that the envy that emerges from upward social comparison leads to workplace ostracism. As predicted, this creates a hostile atmosphere by ostracizing the target to restore the inferiority felt by envious people. Ostracism is relatively subtle and deniable (Williams, 2001), making it an effective form of avoidance when someone is consumed with burning envy and wants to avoid open conflict. In other words, because of its subtlety, ostracism is a way to express dislike for someone without having to confront that person directly (Scott et al., 2013), which reduces one's own risk of displaying more overt deviant behavior (Robinson et al., 2013c).

Second, the study's results have proven that workplace ostracism negatively affects the ostracized individual's psychological empowerment. Workplace ostracism signals that individuals are not accepted in their social environment within the organization, even implying a social death in the workplace (Ferris et al., 2008). This situation makes ostracized individuals lose their sense of having a meaningful existence, belongingness, control, and self-esteem (Mao et al., 2017; Williams, 2007). (Spreitzer, 1995) stated that self-esteem affects the individual's psychological empowerment level. The finding of this research provides evidence that when feeling excluded by co-workers, an individual maintains poor self-

esteem, thereby reducing the level of psychological empowerment.

Third, the present study showed that workplace ostracism does not influence commitment directly. This result aligns with (Zheng et al., 2016), in which employee commitment does not necessarily change due to feeling ostracized. However, our research found that workplace ostracism affects organizational commitment through lower psychological empowerment. Based on the result, workplace ostracism reduces the target's psychological empowerment since the target lacks support and feels low self-esteem. When being ostracized by co-workers specifically, those individuals tend to perceive that they are not able to positively impact the working conditions at their workplace ("impact" sub-element of psychological empowerment), are not competent to perform their respective jobs ("competence" sub-element of psychological empowerment), are not accessible in taking their own decisions ("self-determination" sub-element of psychological empowerment), and do not perceive their job as meaningful ("meaning" sub-element of psychological empowerment). Such situations lower their attachment toward the workplace and work, consequently lowering their commitment. In other words, the adverse effect of ostracism on psychological empowerment leads to lower commitment toward the organization. According to the conservation of resources theory, the loss of resources due to ostracism (e.g., support from co-workers) makes an individual more stressed and less empowered at work, resulting in low commitment toward the organization.

1. Theoretical implication

The result of the study confirms the social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), where individuals often make social comparisons, especially in a competitive organizational

environment. Such social comparisons result in either emotional or social reactions. In the present study, envy results from an upward social comparison. This study is also expected to extend the understanding and empirical evidence on the concept of workplace ostracism, which is still understudied (Wu et al., 2015), particularly regarding the ostracized individual's perspective and his/her response to the organization, which is also still scarce (Chang et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the present study has proven that the conservation of resources theory can be used to explain the effect of workplace ostracism from the envied person's point of view. The present study has also confirmed the indirect impact of workplace ostracism on commitment toward the organization. In this study, psychological empowerment is identified as a mechanism that mediates the indirect effect of these variables. The present study fills the gap created by the inconsistency of the results of previous studies on the direct impact of workplace ostracism on organizational commitment.

In addition, the present study proves the premises of the affective events theory, where the internal influence of employees and their reaction to particular events that occur during their time working, influence employee attitudes and behavior such as job satisfaction, employee commitment, as well as job performance (Thompson & Phua, 2012; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Workplace ostracism is an adverse event for an employee at his/her workplace. The present study has proven that this adverse event affects an individual's attitude in the form of lower commitment toward the organization, which is preceded by a decrease in intrinsic task motivation (psychological empowerment).

2. Practical implications

Because the social context substantially impacts employees and organizations, organizations and managers must understand how important it is for organizational members to have good relationships with each other in the workplace. Feelings of exclusion caused by envious co-workers can hurt employees psychologically, which can affect their attitude and behavior at work. This study showed that an employee's psychological empowerment and commitment toward an organization declines when he or she feels ostracized by co-workers. Accordingly, from this study, some practical implications are offered. First, managers must promote procedural justice to minimize the adverse effect of co-worker envy. Fair and transparent procedures, especially in making a decision related to rewards and punishment based on an employee's performance, may minimize envy among co-workers. Second, a manager should be able to create a collaborative atmosphere through transformational leadership that emphasizes collective purposes and incentives based on team performance. Third, a manager needs to encourage open and informative communication in which group members feel comfortable approaching colleagues if they are experiencing problems in the workgroup. Preventing workplace ostracism is a must since this study proves that it leads to low employee psychological empowerment and commitment to the organization, especially in the communication and technology sectors. Besides reducing employee commitment, workplace ostracism also causes knowledge hoarding (Khalid et al., 2020) in which committed employees, who are willing to share their knowledge, are essential for innovation (Al-Abbadi et al., 2020; Sedighi et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

By employing the social comparison theory and the conservation of resources theory, we strived to analyze the workplace ostracism phenomenon experienced by individuals. We examined the role of co-worker envy as a potential trigger for workplace ostracism and how this negative experience affects employees' psychological empowerment and commitment. This study has found that co-worker envy positively influences workplace ostracism. The resulting workplace ostracism further leads to lower commitment, indirectly, via employee psychological empowerment as a mediator.

The present study had a number of limitations. First, the present study involved Indonesian employees in ICT fields as its participants; accordingly, generalizations on the results of other studies should be made carefully. As previously explained, in highly collectivist cultures, such as Indonesia, the influence of workplace ostracism tends to be stronger (Anjum et al., 2021). People in this culture have a greater need to be connected to other people or groups in their social life than people in other cultures do. Research results have the potential to differ when applied in countries with different cultures. Further research is recommended to cross-validate our results by using samples from different cultures, or by involving more participants in other sectors, such as not-for-profit organizations like hospitals, schools, etc., to test the generalizability of the workplace ostracism phenomenon.

Second, cross-sectional data prevents causal inferences and a more in-depth analysis of co-worker envy, workplace ostracism, psychological empowerment, and commitment because the data were collected only from a single period. It is suggested that longitudinal studies should be

used in future research to learn more about the phenomenon.

Third, the collected data were limited to the respondent's responses to the questions in the questionnaire. Future studies should add in-depth interviews with the respondents so that the information is more robust than that based only on self-report questionnaires.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the present study has opened an exciting avenue for future studies into workplace ostracism. From a theoretical perspective, the present research brings a novel finding related to the indirect

relationship between workplace ostracism and commitment toward the organization. Future research into the relationship between workplace ostracism and organizational commitment should look into other possible mediating variables, such as organizational cynicism. Previous studies have examined these three variables separately. However, studies have yet to investigate them simultaneously. Future studies should consider moderating variables in analyzing the negative consequences of workplace ostracism, such as the workplace's supervisors or organizational support.

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