



Research Article

**THE EFFECT OF WORKPLACE OSTRACISM ON ORGANIZATIONAL SILENCE AND
WORKPLACE LONELINESS: A STUDY ON HEALTHCARE WORKERS**

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Abstract: *Employees contribute to their organizations by working with many colleagues and managers. Changes in working life and competitive environment cause employees to interact more with each other. These changes and interactions cause some problems in the workplace. This study aims to examine the mediating effect of workplace ostracism on workplace loneliness and organizational silence. Individuals working in health services in public institutions in the Marmara Region constitute the study group. The study data were collected using an online survey method. This study concluded that workplace ostracism has a positive effect on workplace loneliness. Workplace ostracism and workplace loneliness affect organizational silence positively. In addition, workplace loneliness has a mediating role in the effect of workplace ostracism on organizational silence.*

Keywords: *Workplace Ostracism, Organizational Silence, Workplace Loneliness, Healthcare Workers*

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1. Introduction

Business life undoubtedly covers a large part of our lives. Within this scope, many different issues and phenomena such as positive and negative interpersonal relationships, conflicts, organizational gossip and rumors, workplace ostracism, organizational silence, and workplace loneliness can come across as a chain of problems. Efforts to survive among these problems, trying to provide for the family, and lost time in reaching career goals complicate the issues even more for the employees. In this regard, for both managers and employees, workplace ostracism, organizational silence, and workplace loneliness stand out as topics that need to be addressed.

As social and emotional beings, people tend to have healthy relationships with other people in their life [1]. However, today, individualized societies, organizations, and relationships that are getting more complex day by day can lead employees to loneliness [2]. Individuals can experience loneliness in their personal life as well as in the organization they are a member of. Workplace loneliness refers not only to feeling lonely emotionally but also to being alone due to the social environment. Workplace loneliness as a result of being alone due to the external environment, insufficient social communication, and lack of belonging to the team within the organization, is a situation that can only be resolved if there are improvements related to socialization [2].

The concept of loneliness in terms of the organization includes differences from the concept of loneliness in that an individual feels alone. The concept of loneliness is a more subjective situation that occurs in one's characteristics. This subjectivity encompasses the negative or positive effects of one's relatives, family, and personal relationships in the environment in which one lives socially. Loneliness

within the organization is the isolation of the person alone within the existing social environment. In other words, loneliness in the workplace can be expressed as a negative emotional state caused by the lack of positive relationships in the workplace [4]. According to Wright et al. (2006), workplace loneliness is the state of being alone as a result of the development of the concept of loneliness in terms of the organization, the social incompleteness of the organization, and the low quality of interaction between individuals [3].

Workplace loneliness has two dimensions: emotional loneliness and social loneliness. Emotional loneliness is the loneliness that occurs as a result of a decrease in emotional attachment that occurs as a result of open and intimate relationships [5]. Anxiety as a result of the employee not feeling peaceful in the working environment, and not being able to establish an emotional bond as a result of being away from other employees can appear as an indicator of emotional loneliness [6].

The social loneliness dimension, on the other hand, shows the number of relationships. Employees do not share their feelings and thoughts with other employees and do not participate in activities held in the same social environment [1]. In social loneliness, the person cannot be included in the social network formed within the organization and does not feel that he belongs to that environment [7]. When evaluated in terms of social companionship, it can be considered that employees are lonely if they do not participate in social activities such as picnics, meals, and sports events, due to their inability to establish a relationship with other people in their working relations. In addition, these people have difficulty finding group friends with whom they can spend time and talk during breaks at work [6].

Emotional loneliness can be characterized as weak family and friendship relations. Social loneliness is the absence of a satisfying social environment [8]. It can be stated that emotional loneliness creates a more severe trauma than social loneliness, pushes individuals more, and makes them suffer [9].

Workplace ostracism is a concept that has been the subject of academic studies since the 1970s. Workplace ostracism occurs depending on the relations and social sharing between employees, managers, and other employees in the organization. Workplace ostracism is a phenomenon with negative consequences [10]. Workplace ostracism can also be expressed as isolation in the working environment. It is the case that the employee is ignored by other employees in the working environment. In other words, it can be explained as the exclusion of the person in the process of social interaction, and the neglect of the psychological contract in terms of the organization [11]. Workplace ostracism is the feeling of losing one's self-esteem in the working environment, lack of commitment to the organization, and staying away from positive behavior. It is also the case that individuals are deprived of their expectations from their colleagues [12].

The practices of organizations trying to apply contemporary management methods to increase the positive behavior of their employees as well as examining the cases that may cause negativities and finding solutions by detecting these behaviors are essential for the success of the organization. It is important to understand workplace ostracism, which is one of these negative factors, and to exhibit solution-oriented approaches. Because workplace ostracism can lead to results that may cause individuals to decrease their job satisfaction levels, intend to quit their job, and weaken their organizational commitment [13-14].

Workplace ostracism can cause the exposed person to spend most of their energy and time in the work environment to improve relations with their colleagues, to have difficulty in fulfilling their responsibilities, and subsequently decrease their performance [11-15]. Employees who are the most important resource and wealth of the organization, hiding their ideas and thoughts as a result of exclusion and not expressing their thoughts that can create added value will reduce the efficiency of the organization and have negative effects on the future of the organization.

There are 3 different types related to the way workplace ostracism occurs. The first type of workplace ostracism is related to the individual's subjective perception, that is, the subjective character of organizational exclusion. Even if the person thinks they are excluded, it may not be a real act of exclusion. However, perceptions can create attitudes and subsequently lead to different behaviors. The second type is that workplace ostracism is an indirect and implicit phenomenon. The individual's not actively participating in the sadness or joy of his/her co-workers and not helping new employees can be given as an example in this context. The third type is whether there is intent in the occurrence of workplace ostracism. In other words, whether the exclusion of the individual occurs as a result of an action or without reason [16-17-18]. Workplace ostracism is an increasingly common and glaring phenomenon in recent times. This phenomenon is closely related to the organization, and it is important what kind of roadmap to follow to prevent negativities.

Organizational silence is the situation in which employees who have the competence to show a change in working life stand back behaviorally, cognitively, and emotionally instead of taking favorable action on issues that concern the organization, are in a state of inaction and withhold the contribution they can make to the organization. Organizational silence is the concealment of working individuals despite having sufficient knowledge and experience about the issues and problems that concern the organization [19]. Organizational silence is the attitude of employees to do nothing or do little and remain silent in the face of important problems they encounter in their organizations [20].

The answer to the question of why employees prefer to remain silent in the organizational environment is important in the essence of the concept of organizational silence. From the answer to this question, it is important to understand why and how they become silent, and who they should talk to about the problems they are facing. If it is understood why employees prefer silence, it can be understood how they remain silent. Milliken mentioned two approaches to explain why employees remain silent. The first approach is the belief that employees in the organization will face a negative outcome if they do not remain silent. They find it risky to express their thoughts about the state of the organization and prefer to remain silent. The second approach is to remain silent, believing nothing will change even if any organizational problem is discussed [21]. In addition, employees see it as a choice to remain silent because of the organizational structure, values, and norms, fear of exclusion, worry about not getting attention, and perhaps the most important result, anxiety, and fear of losing their jobs [22].

It is important to understand the concept of organizational silence. Organizational silence is a negative situation that will prevent the change and development of the organization [23]. The silence of the majority of the employees of the organization on organizational issues shows the perception of organizational silence and ultimately leads to a decrease in the support of the employee towards the organization [24]. It is among the ways that will be beneficial for managers to display supportive behavior towards their employees to prevent organizational silence and to engage in activities to create a transparent organizational culture. This benefit will support the effective and harmonious work of the employees in line with the goals of the organization and will minimize the formation of organizational silence [25].

Organizations with organizational silence are organizations that have the perception that their employees' speech will be a waste of energy and that speech may have dangerous consequences. As a result of this perception, employees do not trust their organizations, do not participate in change, and their level of job satisfaction may decrease as a result of low motivation [26]. Defines workplace loneliness as a negative situation that occurs as a result of the inadequacy of the social network of the employee in the workplace, both qualitatively and quantitatively. When examining the concept of workplace loneliness, situations such as the lack of interpersonal relationships at the desired level and

the features that prevent or hinder the quality of relationships should be taken into consideration (25-26).

In this regard, in this study the human factor emerges as an undeniable fact for the quality perception of the service to be formed by the instant service in health services, which is a type of the service sector, and for organizations to maintain their productivity, image, reputation and competitive advantage in services where labor is spent. In this study, which aimed to determine the mediating effect of workplace ostracism on organizational silence and workplace loneliness, both the human factor, which has been at the forefront recently, and what kind of roadmap organizations will follow regarding the framework of these phenomena are among the subjects that are tried to be emphasized.

2. Instructions

2.1. Materials and Methods

This study was carried out between 04 February 2022 and 15 April 2022 in the Marmara Region. The data of the study were collected using the online survey method. Ethics committee approval was obtained with decision number 23 of the Sakarya University Social Sciences Ethics Committee meeting numbered 102856/42 dated 03 February 2022, indicating that there was no ethical objection to the research and that it was appropriate.

2.2. Universe and Sample

The study universe consists of employees working in public health institutions in the Marmara Region. In the study, 391 questionnaires were collected.

2.3. Data Collection Tool

The study data were collected with an online questionnaire form consisting of four parts. The first part of the online questionnaire consists of questions about the demographic characteristics of the health workers participating in the study. The Workplace Ostracism Scale developed by Ferris et al. [11] was used in the second part of the survey. The Turkish validity and reliability study of the scale was conducted by Çalışkan and Pekkan [28]. The scale consists of 10 items in a 5-point Likert form (strongly disagree-strongly agree). The Loneliness in the Workplace scale, which consists of two factors (emotional deprivation and social companionship) and 16 items, was developed by Wright, Burt, and Strongman [3], and its Turkish validity and reliability study was conducted by Doğan et al. [1]. The organizational silence scale was developed by Dyna et al [37] and its Turkish validity and reliability study was conducted by Yıldırım and Oruç [38]. The scale consists of 3 sub-dimensions (acquiescent silence, defensive silence, and pro-social silence) and 15 items. In the analyzes performed to determine the reliability levels of the scales, Cronbach's alpha for the workplace ostracism scale was found to be $\alpha=0.953$, the organizational silence scale $\alpha=0.821$, and the workplace loneliness scale $\alpha=0.909$, and the reliability levels of all scales were high.

2.4. Data Analysis

SPSS 25.0 and Process Macro statistical software were used in the data analysis. Correlation, regression, and mediation analyzes were performed to determine the relationships between workplace ostracism, workplace loneliness, and organizational silence. The findings were evaluated at a 95% confidence interval and a 5% significance level.

2.5. Findings

The tables containing the data obtained, the results, and the evaluations made based on the results of the study are explained below. The majority of the participants were female, 59.1% (n=231), while 40.9% (n=160) were male. The mean age of the participants was 38.74±9.66 years. In terms of education level, 19.4% (n=76) of the participants are high school graduates, 20.7% (n=81) are associate degree graduates, 44.8% (n=175) are undergraduate graduates, and 15.1% (n=59) are graduate graduates. In terms of duration of employment, 19.2% (n=75) of the participants have been working in health services for 1-5 years, 19.4% (n=76) for 6-10 years, 17.1% (n=67) for 11-15 years, and 44.2% (n=173) for 16 years and over. It was determined that 3.3% (n=13) of the participants were physicians, 13.6% (n=53) were administrative personnel, 62.7% (n=245) were health personnel, 20.5% (n=80) were other personnel.

Table1. Correlation Analysis

| Variables | Mean | SD | 1 | 2 |
|---------------------------|-------|-------|--------|--------|
| 1. Workplace Ostracism | 1.567 | 0.657 | | |
| 2. Workplace Loneliness | 2.073 | 0.651 | 0.698* | |
| 3. Organizational Silence | 2.685 | 0.561 | 0.371* | 0.376* |

* p<0.001

According to the results of the correlation analysis, there is a positive correlation between workplace ostracism and workplace loneliness (r= 0.698) and between workplace ostracism and organizational silence (r= 0.371). There is also a positive correlation between workplace loneliness and organizational silence (r= 0.376) (Table 1).

Table 2. Impact Analyses

| Effect | β | S.E. | t | p | LLCI | ULCI |
|----------|-------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|
| Constant | 0.990 | 0.061 | 16.203 | 0.000 | 0.870 | 1.110 |
| WO→WL | 0.691 | 0.036 | 19.216 | 0.000 | 0.620 | 0.762 |
| Effect | β | S.E. | t | p | LLCI | ULCI |
| Constant | 1.994 | 0.087 | 22.909 | 0.000 | 1.823 | 2.165 |
| WO→OS | 0.181 | 0.055 | 3.270 | 0.001 | 0.072 | 0.289 |
| WL→OS | 0.197 | 0.056 | 3.524 | 0.001 | 0.087 | 0.307 |

WO: Workplace Ostracism, **WL:** Workplace loneliness, **OS:** Organizational Silence

It was determined that workplace ostracism positively affects workplace loneliness (β=0.691, p=0.000). In addition, workplace ostracism (β= 0.181, p=0.001) and workplace loneliness (β= 0.197, p=0.001) positively affect organizational silence (Table 2).

Table 3. Mediation Effect Analysis

| Effect | β | S.E. | t | p | LLCI | ULCI | |
|-----------------|----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Direct Effect | WO→OOS | 0.181 | 0.055 | 3.270 | 0.001 | 0.072 | 0.289 |
| Indirect Effect | WO→WL→OS | 0.136 | 0.051 | | | 0.034 | 0.237 |
| Total Effect | WO→ OS | 0.317 | 0.040 | 7.884 | 0.000 | 0.238 | 0.396 |

WO: Workplace Ostracism, **WL:** Workplace loneliness, **OS:** Organizational Silence

According to the results of the analysis, which can be seen in Table 3, workplace loneliness has a mediating role in the effect of workplace ostracism on organizational silence ($\beta = 0.136$), and it further increases the positive effect of ostracism on organizational silence ($\beta = 0.317$, $p = 0.000$).

3. Discussion and Conclusion

Organizations now take advantage of intellectual capital and attach more importance to people and knowledge to maintain their existence, increase productivity and gain superiority over their competitors. Despite this importance, negative phenomena arising from the organizational structure, managers, or employees can also be encountered. This study aimed to examine the mediating effect of workplace ostracism on workplace loneliness and organizational silence. This study determined that workplace ostracism positively affects workplace loneliness. In addition, workplace ostracism positively affects workplace loneliness and organizational silence. It was determined that workplace loneliness has a mediating role in the effect of workplace ostracism on organizational silence, and it further increases the positive effect of ostracism on organizational silence.

Uslu and Aktaş found a positive relationship between organizational silence and leave of employee behavior and intention [27]. Çalışkan and Pekkan also found a relationship between organizational silence and job performance [28].

Similar to the current study, Nartgün and Demirer investigated teachers' organizational silence and their levels of workplace loneliness. As a result of the study conducted on 102 teachers, they found that there is a significant positive relationship between organizational silence and workplace loneliness. These results are similar to the results of the present study. No significant relationship was found between demographic characteristics and organizational silence [29]. Durak, in his study on academic employees in a higher education institution, found that there was no relationship between demographic characteristics, gender, and organizational silence, while those over 40 preferred to speak more than younger employees, and academicians with the title of associate professor and professor were more willing to speak than others [30].

In a study conducted with teachers, Lam and Lau found that role performance and organizational citizenship behavior negatively affected workplace loneliness. They concluded that leading member interaction has a mediating effect between workplace loneliness and organizational citizenship behavior. In other words, they stated that employees who feel lonely at work are less likely to engage in in-role and organizational citizenship behavior [31]. Yılmaz and Aslan found a positive relationship between life satisfaction and workplace loneliness in their study with teachers [32]. Peng et al. found that workplace loneliness negatively affects creativity and the leader-member interaction plays a mediating role between these variables [33].

Halis and Demirel found a negative correlation between the dimensions of social support and workplace ostracism and determined that the phenomenon of social support affects organizational exclusion [34]. Yarmacı and Ayyıldız, in their study titled 'The Impact Employees Perceptions of Organizational Ostracism on Organizational Silence and Whistleblowing: Hotel Establishments Case', found that workplace ostracism had a moderate effect on the level of organizational silence and on explaining negative situations [35]. Yıldız and Develi found that workplace ostracism positively increases the tendency of the employee to lie [36].

Today, the awareness that the richest resource that organizations have is human resources has settled. Organizations that still fail to comprehend this are unlikely to survive in the brutal competition environment. In cases such as when the employee experiences workplace ostracism and workplace loneliness and remains silent, managers must understand very well the reason for negative organizational behaviors that will reduce efficiency in the workplace, disrupt work peace, and make it difficult for the organization to survive and should take the necessary steps for a solution.

The negative organizational behavior of individuals working in health services, both in their working relationships and in their interactions with patients and their relatives, can bring great problems. In line with all that has been said, these negative organizational behaviors may cause employees to quit their jobs, experience burnout, and decrease their commitment to the organization, as well as negative reflections of this situation in their business lives, social lives, and families. To prevent this, it will be beneficial to organize professional training so that employees do not feel alone and not excluded, organize social events that will enable employees of the organization to socialize with each other, and create a structure and climate that will allow employees to talk sincerely when they encounter a problem. This study, which was conducted with employees in institutions in the health sector in the Marmara Region, concluded that workplace ostracism has a positive effect on workplace loneliness and organizational silence. It is expected to contribute to the related literature by associating the study results and solution recommendations with managers, employees, and other studies in the related literature and by developing them further.

Ethical statement:

Ethics committee approval was obtained with decision number 23 of the Sakarya University Social Sciences Ethics Committee meeting numbered 102856/42 dated 03 February 2022, indicating that there was no ethical objection to the research and that it was appropriate.

Conflict of interest:

There is no conflict of interest in this single-authored article.

Authors' Contributions:

This study has been prepared by the author alone. No conflict of interest has been declared by the author.

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