Workplace Ostracism

A Summary of Workforce Research Evidence Relevant to the Child Welfare Field

What is workplace ostracism?

Workplace ostracism is "the extent to which an individual perceives that he or she is ignored or excluded by others at work" (Ferris et al., 2008, p. 1348). The most popular measure is the 10-item Workplace Ostracism Scale (Ferris et al., 2008). Example items include "others avoided you at work," "others refused to talk to you at work," and "others at work shut you out of the conversation."

Why is workplace ostracism important?

Ostracism in the workplace is important because it is associated with an array of job attitudes, stress indicators, and behaviors. Specifically, ostracism is moderately associated with lower job satisfaction and organizational commitment, higher burnout, lower performance, and higher intention to leave, though it is only modestly connected with actual turnover (Howard et al., 2020).

What contributes to workplace ostracism?

Meta-analytic research on ostracism has thus far focused on assessing factors that are merely associated with ostracism, not on causal relationships. However, there are several factors associated with ostracism that are seen as potential influences. The strongest connections are with victim personality and leadership. Specifically, people are more likely to experience or perceive ostracism if they are high in neuroticism (i.e., emotional instability) and/or low in extraversion, agreeableness, or conscientiousness (Howard et al., 2020). Those that have good relationships with their supervisors are less likely to experience ostracism, and when a person experiences abusive supervision, they are very likely to also experience ostracism (Howard et al., 2020). Because the Workplace Ostracism Scale does not capture who is doing the ostracizing (it only refers to "others"), it is not clear whether a) poor supervision creates or thrives in an environment where ostracism is more likely to occur among staff or b) abusive supervisors themselves are the perpetrators of the reported ostracism. What has not been studied well are factors associated with perpetrators—what characteristics or conditions lead to ostracizing behaviors—and other environmental factors such as organizational culture, which may tolerate or even promote such behaviors.

QIC-WD Takeaways

► Ostracism is moderately associated with lower job satisfaction and organizational commitment, higher burnout, lower performance, and higher intention to leave, though it is only modestly connected with actual turnover.

► People are more likely to experience or perceive ostracism if they are high in neuroticism (i.e., emotional instability) and/or low in extraversion, agreeableness, or conscientiousness.

► People that have good relationships with their supervisors are less likely to experience ostracism.

► When a person experiences abusive supervision, they are very likely to also experience ostracism.

► Research is needed on factors associated with perpetrators of ostracism and environmental factors such as organizational culture.

► Practitioners or researchers that would like to assess workplace ostracism should consider the Workplace Ostracism Scale developed by Ferris et al. (2008).

References

Ferris, D. L., Brown, D. J., Berry, J. W., & Lian, H. (2008). The development and validation of the Workplace Ostracism Scale. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 93*, 1348–1366.

Howard, M. C., Cogswell, J. E., & Smith, M. B. (2020). The antecedents and outcomes of workplace ostracism: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 105*, 577–596.

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