

INFLUENCE OF WORKPLACE OSTRACISM ON WORKPLACE BEHAVIOR: THE MODERATING ROLE OF NEUROTICISM

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationship between workplace ostracism and workplace behavior, with a focus on how neuroticism moderates this relationship. Data from 100 employees in private firms in India were analyzed using PLS-SEM. Results indicate that workplace ostracism negatively impacts job performance but not deviant behavior. Neuroticism has a stronger moderating effect on the link between workplace ostracism and job performance but does not affect deviant behavior. The study contributes to existing knowledge by examining the moderating effect of neuroticism on workplace exclusion.

Keywords: *Workplace Ostracism, Job Performance, Deviant Behaviour, Neuroticism, COR (Conservation of Resource) Theory.*

INTRODUCTION

Stressful working conditions can hinder employees' ability to perform their tasks, leading

to negative attitudes and intentions to leave the organization (De Clercq, Haq, & Azeem, 2019). Exploring the "dark side" of organizational culture, including misbehaviors that cause stress, is crucial for understanding organizational life (Baruch & Vardi, 2015). Workplace ostracism, or social exclusion, contributes to such misbehavior and has detrimental effects on physical health, emotional exhaustion, and job dissatisfaction (De Clercq et al., 2019).

Ostracism is a widespread phenomenon across cultures, genders, and occupations, with various forms such as the "silent treatment" and exclusion from events (Williams, 2001). It affects employees' behavior, emotions, and competence. Previous studies have focused on the causes of ostracism, but individuals differ in their coping strategies (Wu et al., 2011). The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory suggests that employees' resources play a vital role in buffering the effects of resource loss (Hobfoll, 1989, 1998). Workplace ostracism depletes both human resources and positive

behavior, leading to stress and negative impacts on psychosomatic health and behavior, influenced by personality traits like neuroticism (De Clercq et al., 2019; Gürlek, 2021).

This study diverges from previous research by exploring the negative impact of workplace exclusion on employees and organizational success, which is an area still under investigation (Scott et al., 2015). The influence of neuroticism on workplace behavior remains uncertain. By employing the COR theory, this study aims to fill these research gaps and develop a conceptual model for workplace exclusion.

To overcome limitations, this study examines the impact of workplace ostracism on job performance and deviant behavior while considering the moderating role of neuroticism. By understanding these dynamics, organizations can address the detrimental effects of workplace exclusion and develop strategies to mitigate its impact on employees and overall organizational functioning.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Workplace Ostracism

Ostracism was historically used as a form of punishment in ancient Greece, involving the banishment of individuals from their community (Williams, 1997). Studies have associated ostracism with various implications, such as ignoring or excluding individuals from specific tasks (Williams, 2001). The workplace serves as a primary social context for ostracism due to its diverse composition of individuals from different cultural and religious backgrounds (Fox and Stallworth, 2005). The term “workplace isolation” refers to an employee’s perception of

being ignored or isolated by their co-workers (Williams, 2001).

Workplace ostracism encompasses various behaviors such as avoiding eye contact, excluding individuals from discussions or lunch plans and withholding important information. It is a significant occurrence extensively studied in sociology, psychology, and education (Leary et al., 2003). Ostracism activates the same brain region as physical pain, as revealed by psychologists (Eisenberger, Lieberman, and Williams, 2003). Passive workplace ostracism is considered a form of abuse, distinct from active bullying (Fox and Stallworth, 2005). It has been associated with deviant behavior and categorized as a subtle and psychologically abusive form of maltreatment (Robinson and Bennett, 1995). Despite extensive research on ostracism’s impact on psychology, sociology, and education, workplace ostracism has received limited attention (Ferris et al., 2008).

COR Theory and the Influence of Workplace Ostracism on Workplace Behavior.

Workplace ostracism has significant implications for job performance and employee behaviour (Abbas et al., 2012). According to the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, ostracism can deplete employees’ energy levels, hindering their ability to perform well on the job (Scott and Duffy, 2015). Feeling supported and included in interactions with co-workers, on the other hand, enhances work motivation (Wu et al., 2011). When employees experience being ignored or ostracized, their motivation and productivity are likely to suffer. Stressed workers may engage in unproductive behaviors instead of focusing on their tasks (McCarthy et al., 2016). Ostracism creates worries about the

professional position and drains energy, making it more difficult to meet performance standards. Additionally, it deprives employees of accessing important information and expertise from co-workers, further challenging their success (Jones et al., 2009).

Workplace ostracism not only reduces employees' skills but also diminishes their desire to fulfill their professional duties. Poor working conditions, as per the COR theory, lead to resource preservation and decreased job performance (Hobfoll, 2001). When employees feel left out of important organizational information, they can become frustrated and demotivated (Leary et al., 2003). Negative judgments about co-workers' treatment further decrease motivation and raise doubts about the value of their efforts (Abbas et al., 2012; Williams, 2001). This can result in decreased effort and a perception that the company does not care, leading to lower productivity. Workplace ostracism erodes employee motivation and contributes to a decline in productivity (Wu et al., 2011; Ferris et al., 2008).

Creating an empowering environment for employees is crucial for their performance as it affects their ability to carry out their duties efficiently. When employees feel the need to protect company assets due to ostracism, their focus may shift away from their work, resulting in lower productivity and potential engagement in unlawful activities. Deviant behaviour, including organizational and interpersonal deviance, disrupts an organization's procedures or regulations and can be a consequence of workplace ostracism (Muafi, 2011). Research shows a significant link between employment

discrimination and deviant behaviour (Gürlek, 2021). Occupational ostracism has also been reported to contribute to aberrant behaviour in specific industries (Preena et al., 2021).

Workplace ostracism negatively affects employees' cognitive well-being, attitudes, and their ability to fulfill their job responsibilities (Hobfoll, 1989; Williams, 2001). It jeopardizes their basic human needs and leads to a loss of intellectual capital. Employees divert their time and energy towards maintaining interpersonal resources rather than focusing on their professional duties, resulting in reduced capability. The research consistently demonstrates that workplace ostracism hampers job performance, leading to emotional disengagement, decreased productivity, and increased deviant behaviour (Ferris et al., 2008).

H1: Workplace ostracism is significantly negatively related to employee job performance.

H2: Workplace ostracism is significantly positively related to deviant behaviour.

Moderating Role of Neuroticism

Neuroticism, a dimension of Goldberg's Big Five personality model, is characterized by traits such as anxiety, scepticism, and hypersensitivity to unwanted stimuli (Liao et al., 2012). Highly neurotic individuals tend to experience negative emotions and exhibit poor stress management. Emotional stability, on the other hand, is associated with self-control and effective stress management and has been found to predict job performance and psychological health (Rothmann and Coetzer, 2003).

Employees with high levels of neuroticism tend to struggle with interpersonal interactions,

communication skills, and overall satisfaction in work relationships (Taggart et al., 2019). Their aggressive and unpleasant behavior in response to threats can lead to ostracism and bullying from colleagues (Demerouti et al., 2001). Studies have consistently shown a negative impact of neuroticism on job performance, with neurotic individuals exhibiting characteristics such as anxiety, fearfulness, and unpredictable emotions. Increased levels of neuroticism have been associated with higher levels of anxiety and lower work performance in specific occupational contexts (Uppal, 2017)

Furthermore, research has established a strong association between neuroticism and organizational deviance. Traits like trait anger and neuroticism have been linked to abnormal professional behaviors, and individuals with neurotic personalities are more likely to exhibit such behaviors due to their temperamental swings (Berry et al., 2007). Employees with high levels of neuroticism are more prone to engaging in bullying and other forms of organizational deviance. Lower levels of neuroticism, on the

other hand, are associated with lower levels of anger (Jahanzeb et al., 2020).

These findings provide the basis for the hypotheses presented in the study, highlighting the role of neuroticism in understanding employee behavior and its impact on job performance and deviant behavior.

H3: Neuroticism moderates the association between workplace ostracism and job performance.

H4: Neuroticism moderates the association between workplace ostracism and deviant behaviour.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Based on the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, a conceptual model is developed to explain the influence of workplace ostracism on employee behavior. Previous conceptual and empirical evidence has suggested that neuroticism is a personality trait that reinforces the relationship between workplace ostracism and deviant behavior.

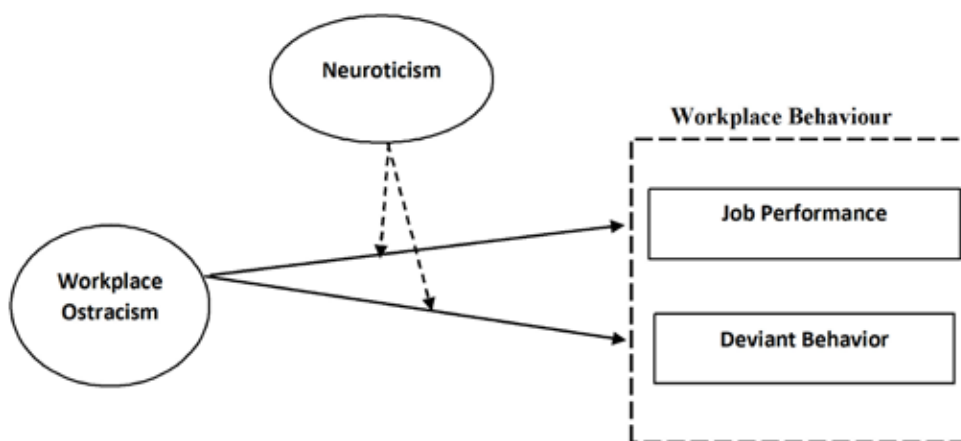


Figure 1: Conceptual Model

Source: Author's Compilation

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

1. Sampling and Data Collection

Data for the study was collected from employees in India's private sector. Convenience sampling, a non-probabilistic sampling method, was used to gather data from various departments across India. A semi-structured questionnaire was created using Google Forms and made available online. A total of 100 responses were collected, and the data was automatically saved in an Excel document for download. This approach allowed respondents to reply at their convenience, resulting in higher-quality data.

2. Questionnaire and Measurement

The research questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part included scale items to measure each construct, using existing measures or similar scales. The items were rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Agree" (5) to "Strongly Disagree" (1). Workplace ostracism was measured using a 10-item scale developed by Ferris, Brown, Berry, and Lian (2008). Job performance was assessed using a five-item scale developed by Williams and Anderson (1991). Deviant behavior was measured using a fifteen-item scale developed by Aquino, Lewis, and Bradfield (1999). Neuroticism was assessed using a five-item scale developed by John and Srivastava (1999). The second part of the survey collected demographic characteristics information.

DATA ANALYSIS

The study employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with Smart PLS 3.0 as the analysis technique. PLS-SEM is a widely used multivariate data analysis

method in the social sciences. It was used to validate the measures, test the hypotheses, and examine the proposed model. This approach allows for the combination of reflective and formative assessments and has less stringent data assumptions (Hair et al., 2011). Various statistical techniques, including confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), were used to assess the model fit, composite reliability (CR), Cronbach's alpha, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and other relevant measures. The structural model was utilized to investigate the relationships between the constructs, including any moderation effects, and to analyze the coefficients necessary for testing the hypotheses through path analysis.

RESULTS

1. Model assessment

The evaluation of the conceptual framework involves two steps using PLS analysis. Firstly, the measurement (outer) model is tested through CFA, focusing on convergence and discriminant reliability. Convergent validity is assessed using average Cronbach Alpha values, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). Acceptable values for CR, AVE, and Cronbach Alpha are typically 0.70, 0.50, and 0.70, respectively. The second step involves evaluating the structural (inner) model and examining the relationships between constructs as defined in the research model. The PLS analysis results are presented in Figure 2.

Assessment of measurement model

1. Reflective Measurement

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to assess the validity of the questionnaire by evaluating the measurement model. This involved examining the relationship between

indicators and constructs and assessing internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The measurement model evaluation considered both reflective and formative constructs. Workplace ostracism, neuroticism, and job behavior were reflective constructs, while deviant behavior was a formative construct in the conceptual framework (see Figure 2).

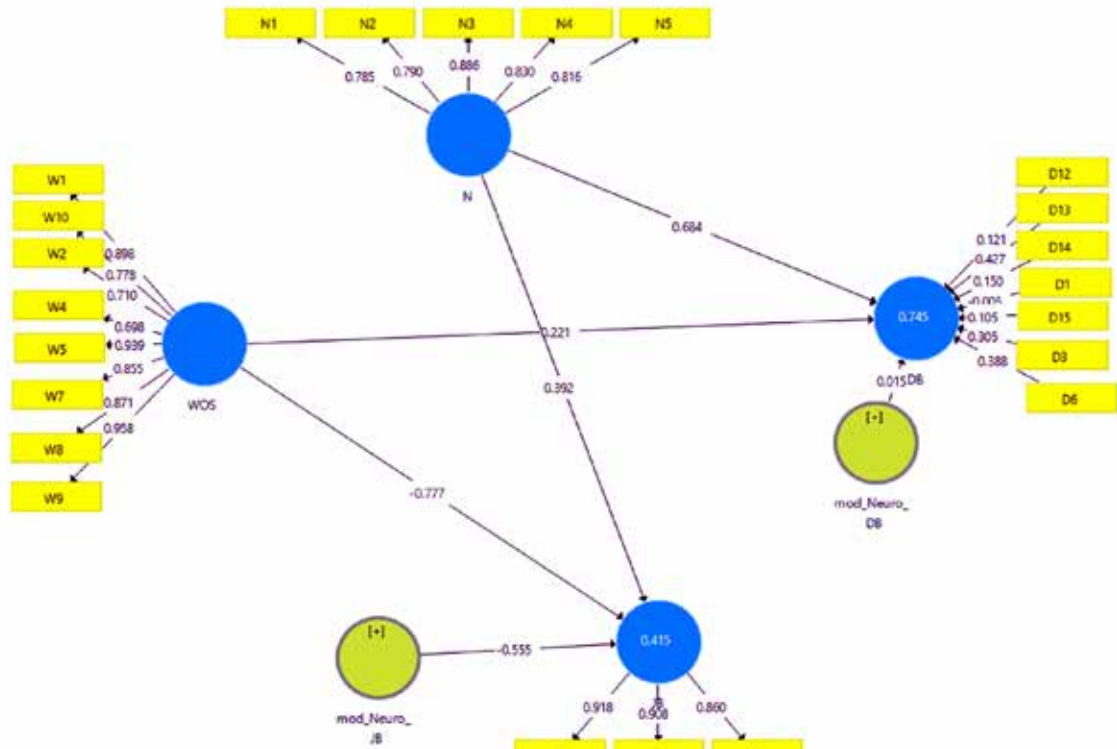


Figure 2: PLS Run of Conceptual Model

Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability were used to determine internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha values were greater than the suggested 0.7 values (Hair et al., 2012). It also found that composite reliability ranged from 0.7 to 0.91. (See Table 1). As a result, internal consistency was discovered. Convergent validity was established by examining the outer loadings and calculating the average variance. Factors with loadings below the recommended threshold (0.7) were removed (W3, W6, J1, J5), while the AVE values exceeded 0.5, indicating convergent validity (refer to Table 1). Discriminant validity was assessed using cross-loadings and the Fornell-Larcker Criterion (1981). Cross-loading was not an issue as the factors had higher loadings on their respective constructs than on other constructs (Hair et al., 2012). Additionally, the AVE values were greater than the squared correlation values with other components, confirming discriminant validity (discriminant validity was only tested for reflective constructs: Workplace Ostracism, Neuroticism, and job behavior) (refer to Table 2).

Table 1: Loadings, Validity, Reliability for Reflective Indicators.

Items	Factor loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Workplace Ostracism		0.940	0.951	0.712
W1: Others ignore me at work	0.903			
W2: Others left the area when I enter	0.704			
W4: I involuntarily sit alone in a crowded lunchroom at work	0.686			
W5: Others avoid me at work	0.939			
W7: Others at work shut me out of the conversation	0.860			
W8: Others refuse to talk to me at work	0.877			
W9: Others at work treated me as if I weren't there	0.957			
W10: Others at work did not invite me or ask me if I wanted anything when they went out for a coffee break	0.779			
Job Performance		0.877	0.924	0.802
J2: I Fulfills responsibilities specified in job description	0.907			
J3: I Perform tasks that are expected of me	0.914			
J4: I Meet formal performance requirements of the job	0.866			
Neuroticism		0.880	0.912	0.675
N1: I see Myself as Someone Who Is depressed, blue	0.803			
N2: I see Myself as Someone Can be tense	0.788			
N3: I see Myself as Someone Worries a lot	0.880			
N4: I see Myself as Someone Can be moody	0.828			
N5: I see Myself as Someone Gets nervous easily	0.808			

Table 2: Discriminant Validity.

Fornell-Larcker Criteria				
	DB	JB	N	WOS
DB				
JB	-0.119	0.895		
N	0.849	-0.086	0.822	
WOS	0.724	-0.306	0.726	0.843

Cross Loadings				
	DB	JB	N	WOS
D1	0.372	-0.088	0.321	0.252
D3	0.721	-0.212	0.627	0.476
D6	0.660	-0.246	0.556	0.491
D12	0.467	-0.090	0.397	0.338
D13	0.742	0.162	0.630	0.538
D14	0.685	-0.067	0.566	0.360
D15	0.473	0.018	0.395	0.476
J2	-0.123	0.922	0.009	-0.259
J3	-0.086	0.903	-0.150	-0.280
J4	-0.105	0.860	-0.115	-0.288
N1	0.630	-0.315	0.785	0.746
N2	0.694	0.045	0.791	0.564
N3	0.691	-0.136	0.886	0.573
N4	0.755	-0.055	0.830	0.569
N5	0.710	0.094	0.815	0.542
W1	0.593	-0.310	0.563	0.898
W2	0.589	-0.184	0.600	0.711
W4	0.609	-0.244	0.654	0.698
W5	0.639	-0.345	0.649	0.939
W7	0.630	-0.189	0.612	0.854

2. Formative measurement

The weights of the significant constructs in the formative model were determined, while some constructs were removed due to their insignificant outer weights (D2, D4, D5, D7, D8, D9, D10, and D11). The outer loadings were found to be less than 0.5, aligning with the underlying hypothesis (Andreev et al., 2009). Multicollinearity, which can affect the stability and significance of the weights in formative constructs, was assessed using the variance inflation factor (VIF). The VIF values ranged from 1.454 to 2.865, below the typical cutoff criterion of 5, indicating the absence of excessive multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2011). Please refer to Table 3 for detailed information.

Table 3: Loadings, Validity, Reliability for Formative Indicators.

Formative scale Items	VIF	T Statistics	P value	Outer Weights	Outer Loadings
D1	1.454	3.089	0.002	-0.003	0.372
D3	2.610	6.961	0.000	0.307	0.721
D6	2.362	5.824	0.000	0.392	0.661
D12	2.865	3.486	0.001	0.143	0.467
D13	2.303	6.655	0.000	0.398	0.742
D14	2.482	9.787	0.000	0.164	0.685
D15	2.542	3.720	0.000	0.098	0.473

The structural model examined the relationships between the constructs and tested four hypotheses (H1-H4). Hypotheses H1 and H3 were found to be significant, while H2 and H4 were not supported. The results indicate that workplace ostracism has a significant negative impact on employee job performance (H1; $b = -0.778$, $t=4.024$), supporting H1. However, the relationship between workplace ostracism and deviant behavior was found to be not significant (H2; $b = 0.221$, $t=0.989$), failing to support H2. Please refer to Table 5 for detailed information.

Table 4: Testing of Hypotheses.

Hypotheses	Beta value	T Value	P value	Result
H1: Workplace ostracism is significantly negatively related to employee job performance.	-0.778	4.024	0.000	Significant
H2: Workplace ostracism is significantly positively related to deviant behaviour.	0.221	0.989	0.323	Insignificant
H3: Neuroticism moderates the association among workplace ostracism and job performance.	-0.555	3.104	0.003	Significant
H4: Neuroticism moderates the association among workplace ostracism and deviant behaviour.	0.015	0.056	0.955	Insignificant

Note: Hypothesis were tested at a 5% level of significance

The study examined the moderation effect of Neuroticism on the relationship between Workplace Ostracism and job performance. The results were confirmed using the bootstrapping method. Hypothesis H3 was supported, indicating that Neuroticism moderates the link between Workplace Ostracism and job behavior ($b = -0.555$, $t = 3.014$). On the other hand, Hypothesis H4 was not supported, as Neuroticism did not moderate the relationship between Workplace Ostracism and deviant behavior ($b=0.015$, $t= 0.056$).

5.1.2.3 Simple Slope Analysis

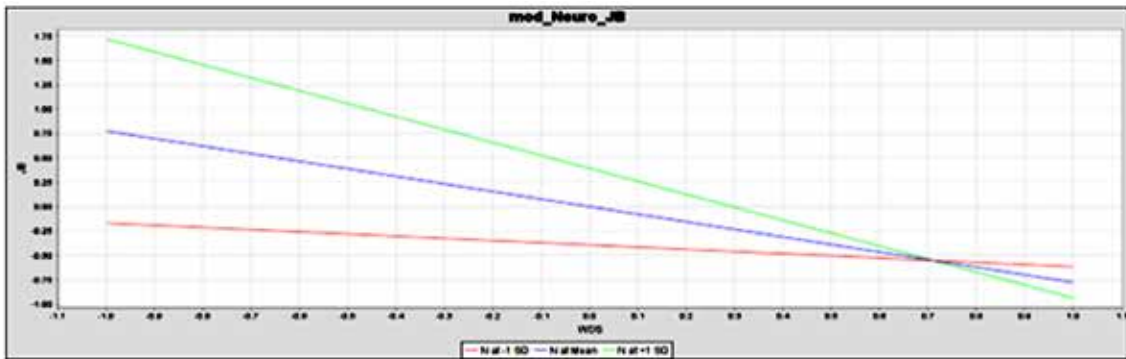


Figure 3: Moderation effect of Neuroticism on the association between workplace ostracism and job performance

The study aimed to examine the moderating effect of neuroticism on the relationship between workplace ostracism and job performance. The results indicate that neuroticism acts as a significant moderator ($b = -0.555$, $t = 3.014$, $p = 0.003$). Figure 3 illustrates that as neuroticism increases, the negative impact of workplace ostracism on job performance decreases, suggesting a stronger influence of neuroticism as a moderator.

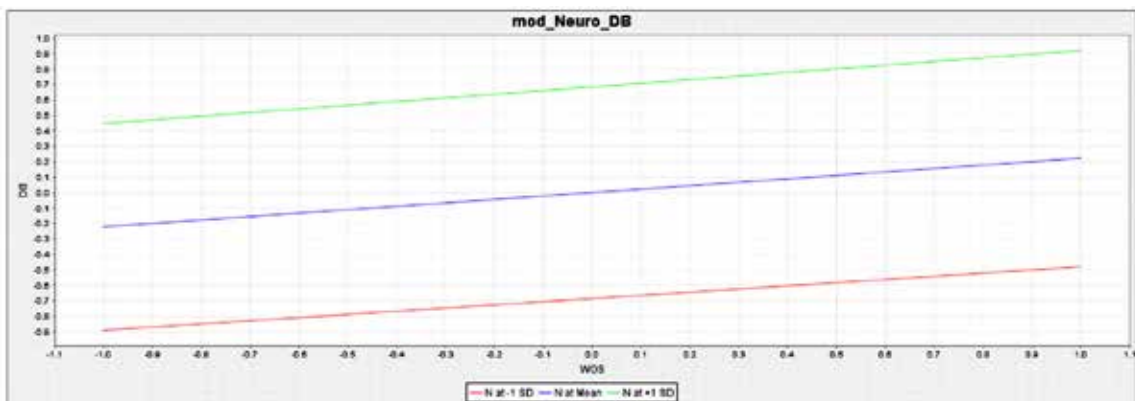


Figure 4: Moderation effect of Neuroticism on the association between workplace ostracism and Deviant Behaviour

The hypothesis aimed to explore the role of neuroticism as a moderator in the relationship between workplace ostracism and deviant behavior. However, the results indicate that neuroticism does not have a significant moderating effect ($b = 0.015$, $t = 0.056$, $p = 0.955$). Figure 4 shows parallel lines, suggesting that neuroticism does not influence the relationship between workplace ostracism and deviant behavior, contrary to our initial expectations.

The model's R-square values were 0.415 and 0.745, while the adjusted R-square values were 0.376 and 0.728. The f-square values ranged from 0.122 to 0.867, indicating moderate to strong effect sizes.

Additionally, the model exhibited a significant predictive relevance, as indicated by an SRMR value of 0.106.

DISCUSSION

Our findings indicate a significant association between workplace ostracism and job performance. Moreover, neuroticism was found to moderate the negative relationship between workplace ostracism and job performance, suggesting a stronger detrimental impact on highly neurotic individuals. However, the influence of neuroticism as a moderator in the relationship between workplace ostracism and deviant behavior was found to be insignificant, contrary to our expectations. Neurotic individuals tend to perceive their work environment as more threatening, and when they experience ostracism, their negative reactions intensify, leading to a decline in job performance.

This study proposes a conceptual model based on the conservation of resource theory (COR) to understand the impact of workplace ostracism on employee behavior, with a focus on the moderating role of neuroticism. Previous theoretical and empirical research supports the hypothesis that neuroticism strengthens the relationship between workplace ostracism and deviant behavior.

CONCLUSION

This study explores the relationship between workplace ostracism and job performance, with a focus on the moderating role of neuroticism. It examines situations where employees are less likely to be affected by workplace ostracism and have higher job performance due to increased self-confidence and reduced fear of rejection.

Extensive literature analysis indicates that high neuroticism amplifies the negative impact of workplace ostracism on both individual and organizational performance (Uppal, 2017; Jahanzeb et al., 2020). Research by Leung et al. (2011) reveals that highly neurotic employees perceive themselves as victims of workplace ostracism, leading to detrimental effects. Preena (2021) found a significant influence of workplace ostracism on deviant behavior among technical workers in the information and technology sector. Future studies can enhance understanding by incorporating additional factors, employing longitudinal and qualitative research methods, and expanding the research sample. It is crucial for organizations to address workplace ostracism to safeguard both organizational outcomes and individuals' quality of life.

THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study fills a gap in the existing literature by exploring the moderating role of neuroticism in the relationship between workplace ostracism and workplace behavior, which is an aspect often overlooked in previous studies focused on psychological constructs (Chung, 2018). The findings provide practical implications for managers in understanding and addressing complex workforce behavior, formulating policies for the new normal, and fostering a positive work environment that reduces negative feelings and ostracized behavior. Organizing regular gatherings, workshops, and training programs can contribute to employees' psychological well-being and mitigate the negative impact of workplace ostracism on workplace behavior, particularly by addressing neuroticism.

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