

# The Invisible Workers: A Preliminary Research on Workplace Ostracism and Organisational Dehumanisation Under the Influence of Self Dehumanisation

Ganeshdev Sahadevan

Department of Psychological Sciences, School of Human Sciences, Central University of South Bihar (Gaya), Bihar, India, E-Mail: [ganeshdevsahadevan@gmail.com](mailto:ganeshdevsahadevan@gmail.com)

## ABSTRACT

*This preliminary research aims to investigate the influence of workplace ostracism on organisational dehumanisation among employees in the design engineering sector, as well as the mediating role of self-dehumanisation. A cross-sectional and correlational design with mediation analysis was conducted among 60 design engineering employees, aged 30 to 40 years, from various software organisations in the Ernakulam district of Kerala, using a simple random sampling method. This research study examines how workplace ostracism can lead to organisational dehumanisation and the mediating role of self-dehumanisation among design engineering sector employees. This study suggests that workplace ostracism has a positive influence on organisational dehumanisation. Furthermore, self-dehumanisation significantly mediates the relationship between workplace ostracism and organisational dehumanisation. Ostracism and dehumanising tendencies among workers have devastating effects on employee well-being and employee mental health. These results highlight the need for further exploration in the areas of ostracism and dehumanisation, as employees are increasingly interacting with modern technologies.*

**Keywords:** Workplace Ostracism, Organisational Dehumanisation, Self-Dehumanisation, Mental Health, Human System Interaction.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This preliminary research study explores whether experiencing workplace ostracism would be positively related to employees' behaviour associated with organisational dehumanisation, and further examines the mediating role of self-dehumanisation, as well as its consequences for both employees and organisations. In this research study, design engineering employees are taken as the population. The design engineering sector, characterised by its demanding nature and focus on innovation, often necessitates intense collaboration and teamwork. Within this context, Aikaterini Roupa et al (2024) highlighted the phenomenon of workplace ostracism, the act of ignoring and excluding an individual or group, can have profound consequences on the mental health of the employees (Aikaterini Roupa et al., 2024). This research investigates the impact of workplace ostracism on organisational dehumanisation, specifically within the design engineering sector. Organisational Dehumanisation refers to the perception of individuals within an organisation as mere

instruments or cogs in a machine, devoid of unique human qualities and emotions. Experiencing ostracism can lead individuals to internalise a dehumanised view of themselves, which subsequently extends to their perception of the organisation as a whole. This study examines the mediating roles of an aversive form of self-awareness, cognitive deconstructive conditions, and feelings of shamefulness, guilt, anger and sadness in the relationship between workplace ostracism and organisational dehumanisation (Bastian & Crimston, 2014). Understanding this process will shed light on the detrimental effects of ostracism in this critical sector and inform interventions that foster a more inclusive and humane work environment.

## 2. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In the current modern world, employees interact with various organisational systems, social systems, and physical systems within different organisations. There is a greater chance for dehumanisation and ostracism tendencies to occur in an organisational context, and it is crucial to address the interaction of

employees with different systems from a dehumanisation and ostracism perspective. Noémie Brison and Gaëtane Caesens (2023) highlighted whether undergoing workplace ostracism is significantly linked to the workers' perceptions of organisational dehumanisation, and further investigated one underlying mechanism of this association, i.e., the thwarted need to belongingness, and its significance for both workers and organisations (Noémie Brison and Gaëtane Caesens, 2023). Noémie Brison et al (2024) investigated how supervisor and coworker ostracism affect workers' outcomes, examining the different roles of organisational dehumanisation and organisational embodiment (Noémie Brison et al., 2024). Lata Bajpai Singh et al (2021) research study focused on investigating the mediation of organisational dehumanisation in the associations between supervisor ostracism, coworker ostracism, and employee consequences, such as improved physical strains and reduced work engagement. It raised turnover intentions (Lata Bajpai Singh et al., 2021). Moreover, this study investigates the moderating role of the supervisor's organisational embodiment and further the colleagues' organisational embodiment in these indirect forms of relationships (Lata Bajpai Singh et al., 2021). Aisha Sarwar & Lakhi Muhammad (2020) highlighted the Impact of Organisational Dehumanisation on employee perceptions of mistreatment and Workplace Outcomes (Aisha Sarwar & Lakhi Muhammad, 2020) further investigates when and why organisational dehumanisation leads to employees' perceptions of workplace mistreatment, deviant work behaviours and decreased performance. Furthermore, this research study also examines the mediating role of injustice perceptions, perceived incivility, discrimination, and psychological capital as moderators between organisational dehumanisation and perceptions of injustice (Aisha Sarwar & Lakhi Muhammad, 2020).

Gaëtane Caesens & Florence Stinglhamber (2017) highlighted the perceived organisational support and workers' well-being, examining the mediating role of organisational dehumanisation (Gaëtane Caesens & Florence Stinglhamber, 2017). Perceived organisational support (POS) has been found to predict important organisational outcomes, such as increased employees' well-being. Furthermore, this research study focuses on a new underlying aspect of the relationship between POS (Perceived Organisational Support) and employees' well-being,

namely, employees' perceptions that their organisation dehumanises them. This proposition was tested across two studies, workplace ostracism and turnover intention in Organisations. Workplace ostracism poses a significant threat to organisational well-being, with implications for employee turnover intention. (Das & Ekka, 2024).

Sainz et al (2023) provide practical insights for managers, emphasising the importance of addressing workplace ostracism to enhance employee retention and employee well-being. Recommendations include developing and facilitating inclusive cultures, as well as implementing targeted interventions to mitigate the adverse effects of ostracism in diverse organisational settings. Despite the increasing salary differences and the unjust allocation of resources within multiple organisations, there is a shortage of academic exploration into the role of these contextual variables on dehumanisation approaches and psychosocial threat factors among workers (Sainz et al., 2023). Subsequently, perceptions of financial and economic inequality, as well as mistreatment in resource distribution, can influence people's perceptions of dehumanisation and self-objectification, ultimately leading to detrimental consequences in the workplace. Self-objectification is associated with lower work satisfaction and a reduced sense of job satisfaction. Further, examines the impact of economic and financial differences on people's self-awareness of their humanity (Sainz et al., 2023).

### 3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

#### 3.1 Need For The Study

While the adverse effects of workplace ostracism are well understood, its specific link to organisational dehumanisation within design engineering sector employees and the mediation of self-dehumanisation remains under-explored. Furthermore, there has been a lack of research within the design engineering sector among employees in the context of ostracism and dehumanisation, particularly in the Ernakulam district of Kerala state, India, which remains unexplored. Further, there are not enough research studies conducted on ostracism and dehumanisation from an organisational perspective. Understanding this link can help organisations create healthier work environments and potentially improve employee well-being and productivity.

### 3.2. Aim

To investigate how workplace ostracism affects organisational dehumanisation, particularly among employees in the design engineering sector, this study also focuses on the mediating role of self-dehumanisation in this relationship. This study examines how feeling ostracised can lead individuals to perceive themselves and, consequently, the organisation in a dehumanised manner.

### 3.3 Research Hypotheses

**Hypothesis 1:** Workplace ostracism is positively related to organisational dehumanisation among design engineering sector employees.

**Hypothesis 2:** Self-dehumanisation positively mediates the relationship between workplace ostracism and organisational dehumanisation among design engineering sector employees.

### 3.4 Research Design and Sample

The study variables are 'Workplace Ostracism' and 'Organisational Dehumanisation', and the mediating variable is 'Self-Dehumanisation'. In addition, the Study place is within the Ernakulam district in Kerala, and the district covers design engineering sector industries and organisations. The study design in this pilot study is a quantitative, cross-sectional and correlational study design that is employed to examine the relationships between workplace ostracism and self-dehumanisation as well as organisational dehumanisation and the employees working in the design engineering sector. This study focused on a total of 60 design engineering employees from various organisations to ensure a diverse representation of experiences related to workplace ostracism. A simple random sampling technique was employed to select the participants, which further increases the generalizability of the findings across the industry

(Bastian & Haslam, 2010). Participants were recruited through professional networks, industry associations, and social media platforms, with an emphasis on obtaining a sample size sufficient for robust statistical analysis.

### 3.5 Tools and Procedure

The researcher specially designed the socio-demographic and personal data sheet. It includes all relevant socio-demographic and personal information, as per the study's purpose, and the Workplace Ostracism Scale (Ferris et al., 2008). This is a reliable and valid measurement tool for workplace ostracism. It is an essential tool that can be used to examine, among other things, the effects of deviant behaviour on targets. Ostracism represents a behaviour that is qualitatively different from those behaviours examined by existing scales. This is a seven-point Likert-type response scale.

Organisational Dehumanisation Scale (Noémie Brison et al., 2023). An 11-item scale, developed to assess organisational dehumanisation perceptions, is used in this study. It ranges from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" on a Likert scale. The items have been developed based on the main components of denied humanness, such as instrumentality, fungibility, also subjectivity. Furthermore, the self-dehumanisation scale (Morgan Robison et al., 2024) identifies self-dehumanising tendencies that developed during childhood or as a result of past experiences. All the selected tools were used in sessions as per the standard procedure. The collected data were analysed using 'Hayes Process Macro (Hayes, 2022), SPSS for mediation analysis and Pearson correlation analysis was further conducted.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**4.1 Hypothesis I:** Workplace ostracism is positively related to organisational dehumanisation among employees in the design engineering sector.

**Table 1: Correlational analysis between Workplace Ostracism and Organisational Dehumanisation**

Variables	Workplace Ostracism	Organisational Dehumanisation
Workplace Ostracism(IV)	1	0.413
Organisational Dehumanisation(DV)	0.413	1

**Note.**  $N = 60$ .  $p < .01$  (2-tailed), IV is Independent Variable, and DV is Dependent Variable

The descriptive statistics indicate that Workplace Ostracism has a mean of 38.50 and a standard deviation of 14.04, while organisational dehumanisation has a mean of 51.80 and a standard

deviation of 10.55. The sample size for both variables is 60, and the Pearson correlation analysis reveals a significant positive correlation between workplace ostracism and organisational

dehumanisation, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.413 and a p-value of 0.001, which is statistically significant. This suggests that higher levels of workplace ostracism are linked with increased perceptions of organisational dehumanisation, and the correlation is statistically significant at the  $p < .01$  level. Hence, hypothesis (H1) is accepted, which states that "Workplace

ostracism is positively related to the organisational dehumanisation among design engineering sector employees.

**4.2 Hypothesis II:** Self-dehumanisation positively mediates the relationship between workplace ostracism and organisational dehumanisation.

**Table 2: Results of Mediation Analysis, H2( M is Mediation Variable, X is Independent Variable, Y is Dependent Variable)**

Dependent Variable(DV)	Independent Variable(IV)	B	SE	$\beta$	P- Value
Self-Dehumanisation (M)	Workplace Ostracism (X)	0.3022	0.0408	0.6971	< .001
	Model Summary				
	$R^2 = .4859$				
	$F(1, 58) = 54.8157$				
	$p < .001$				
Organisational Dehumanisation (Y)	Workplace Ostracism (X)	0.3107	0.0899	0.4134	0.001
	Self-Dehumanisation (M)	1.6406	0.1944	0.9464	< .001
	Model Summary				
	$R^2 = .6314$				
	$F(2, 57) = 48.8103$				
	$p < .001$				

The mediation analysis is conducted and investigated using 'Process Model 4' (Hayes, 2022) to further examine the relationship between Workplace Ostracism and Organisational Dehumanisation, with Self-Dehumanisation as a mediator. The analysis is based on a sample size of  $N = 60$ . For investigating the self-dehumanisation as a mediator and its significance, workplace ostracism significantly predicts self dehumanisation that is the unstandardised regression coefficient is 0.3022, the standard error is 0.0408, so this is more precise and t value is 7.4038 which is high that means significantly high, further,  $p < .001$ , which is highly significant statistically and further the standardised regression coefficient for workplace ostracism that is,  $\beta$  value of .6971, indicating a strong positive relationship between workplace ostracism and self dehumanisation. Subsequently total effect of workplace ostracism on organisational dehumanisation with an unstandardised regression coefficient of 0.3107 with a standard error of 0.0899 and t value of 3.4578, Further the p value is .001 which is highly statistically significant, indicating that without considering the mediator, workplace ostracism has a positive and significant relationship with organisational dehumanisation and Direct effect of workplace ostracism on organisational

dehumanisation with an unstandardised regression coefficient of -0.1851 with a standard error of 0.0843 and the t value is -2.1955, Further the p value is .0322 which is statistically significant, suggesting that once self-dehumanisation is accounted for and the direct effect becomes adverse further Indirect effect of workplace ostracism on organisational dehumanisation through self dehumanisation with an unstandardised regression coefficient of 0.4958 with BootSE of 0.1098 and with 95% of confidence interval ranging from 0.2994 to 0.7351, confirming a significant mediation effect and completely standardised indirect effect of  $\beta$  value of 0.6597, further supporting the role of self-dehumanisation as a potent mediator. Hence, Hypothesis 2 is accepted, that is, Self-dehumanisation positively mediates the relationship between workplace ostracism and organisational dehumanisation.

The results from the analysis suggest that workplace ostracism is significantly related to organisational dehumanisation, and employees who experience higher levels of workplace ostracism tend to perceive their organisations as more dehumanising in nature. These findings highlighted the significance of addressing workplace ostracism to mitigate its potential adverse effects on employees' perceptions of their work environment. The results

indicate that self-dehumanisation fully mediates the association between workplace ostracism and organisational dehumanisation. Initially, workplace ostracism has a significant positive total effect on organisational dehumanisation. However, when self-dehumanisation is included in the model, the direct impact turns negative, suggesting that workplace ostracism primarily influences organisational dehumanisation through self-dehumanisation. These findings indicate that employees who experience workplace ostracism may internalise self-dehumanisation, which in turn widens their perception of organisational dehumanisation. The adverse direct effect implies that workplace ostracism alone does not directly cause organisational dehumanisation, but its impact is channelled through changes in employees' perceptions.

## 5. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This study highlights the importance of human-centred workplace policies in technical sectors to counteract dehumanisation. Tech industries and organisations should foster inclusive cultures, recognise employees as individuals, and reduce maladaptive behaviours. Future research could investigate the longitudinal effects and develop intervention strategies to break this harmful cycle. Overall, this investigation contributes to understanding how workplace ostracism perpetuates dehumanisation, offering insights for improving employee mental health and organisational health in high-technical environments. The above findings emphasise the importance of organisational dehumanisation in creating healthier organisations, particularly in the design engineering sector of Ernakulam District of Kerala, India. This involves prioritising mental health in the technology sector, focusing more on employees' mental health, creating more inclusive work environments, and further increasing employees' overall well-being. Furthermore, the findings of this research study have implications for organisational practices focused on creating a positive and inclusive work environment. Future research could explore potential mediators or moderators to better understand this relationship in an organisational context.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study summarises that workplace ostracism significantly influences organisational dehumanisation and self-dehumanisation among

design engineering employees. A positive correlation was found between workplace ostracism and organisational dehumanisation. Mediation analysis revealed that self-dehumanisation partially mediates the relationship between workplace ostracism and organisational dehumanisation. There is a moderate positive correlation between Workplace Ostracism and Organisational Dehumanisation. This suggests that as workplace ostracism increases, employees perceive more organisational dehumanisation within the organisation. The correlation is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. The analysis is based on 60 design engineering sector employees, indicating a modest but adequate sample for correlational research.

The findings support the hypothesis that workplace ostracism can lead to organisational dehumanisation, where employees feel treated like objects or tools rather than human beings. When self-dehumanisation is not included, workplace ostracism has a positive and significant effect on organisational dehumanisation. More intense workplace ostracism leads to more perceived dehumanisation. After accounting for the mediating role of self-dehumanisation, the direct impact of workplace ostracism on organisational dehumanisation becomes negative and still significant. This suggests that suppression or indirect mediation may be present further, so self-dehumanisation significantly mediates the relationship between workplace ostracism and organisational dehumanisation. In other words, employees who feel ostracised internalise that experience, feel less human themselves, and as a result, perceive the organisation as treating them like machines. The path through self-dehumanisation explains a substantial portion of the impact that workplace ostracism has on organisational dehumanisation perceptions. Workplace ostracism significantly influences organisational dehumanisation, and self-dehumanisation is a potent mediator of this relationship. Furthermore, Workplace ostracism has a strong, positive, and significant effect on self-dehumanisation. As employees feel more ostracised, they report higher levels of internalised self-dehumanisation that developed during their previous years of employment.

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