



The effect of job stress on the relationship between organizational ostracism and knowledge hiding

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Abstract.

Purpose: The purpose of the present study was to investigate the effect of job stress on the relationship between organizational ostracism and knowledge hiding in the metropolitan area of Ahvaz.

Methodology: The research was applied and carried out using an analytical survey. The statistical population of the study included all the employees of the Ahvaz Metropolitan Municipality, over 3000 people, 341 of whom were selected as the research sample by stratified random sampling. The data were collected as part of a field study using questionnaires from previous studies on organizational ostracism (Chang et al., 2021), knowledge hiding (Demirkasimoglu, 2016), and job stress (Wooten et al., 2010). The validity of the instrument was approved formally and its reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient (0.830, 0.869, and 0.884) levels, respectively. The data were analyzed with the structural equation modeling method and AMOS software.

Findings: *The test of research hypotheses showed that there is a relationship between organizational ostracism by knowledge hiding ($\beta=0.51$ and $t\text{-Value}=8.5$) and job stress ($\beta=0.73$ and $t\text{-Value}=11.59$) and there is a significant relationship between job stress and knowledge hiding ($\beta=0.44$ and $t\text{-Value}=7.805$). In addition, the results revealed that job stress had a direct effect on the causal relationship between organizational ostracism and knowledge hiding ($\beta=0.828$) and that ($\beta=0.321$) is significant at ($p<0.05$).*

Conclusion: *It is concluded that organizational ostracism brings about negative consequences such as job stress and hidden knowledge. It means that the organization members miss the opportunity to use communication networks between organization members and knowledge resources. It also increases the costs of providing services and dependence on knowledge resources outside the organization.*

Keywords: *Organizational ostracism, Job stress, Knowledge hiding.*

EL EFECTO DEL ESTRÉS LABORAL EN LA RELACIÓN ENTRE EL OSTRACISMO ORGANIZACIONAL Y LA OCULTACIÓN DEL CONOCIMIENTO

Resumen.

Propósito: *El propósito del presente estudio es investigar el efecto del estrés laboral en la relación entre el ostracismo organizacional y la ocultación del conocimiento en el Municipio Metropolitano de Ahvaz.*

Metodología: *El propósito de la investigación fue aplicada, la cual se llevó a cabo mediante el método de encuesta analítica. La población estadística del estudio incluyó a todos los empleados de la metrópolis de Ahvaz, más de 3000 personas, y 341 personas fueron seleccionadas como muestra de investigación mediante un muestreo aleatorio estratificado. Los datos se recopilaron mediante un estudio de campo utilizando cuestionarios de estudios previos que incluyen el ostracismo organizacional (Chang et al., 2021), la ocultación del conocimiento (Demirkasimoglu, 2016) y el estrés laboral (Wooten et al., 2010). La validez del instrumento formal y su confiabilidad se confirmaron mediante los niveles del coeficiente alfa de Cronbach (0,830, 0,869 y 0,884), respectivamente. Se utilizó el método de modelado de ecuaciones estructurales del software Emus para analizar los datos.*

Hallazgos: *La prueba de hipótesis de investigación mostró que existe una relación entre el ostracismo organizacional por ocultar conocimiento ($\beta=0.51$ y $t\text{-Value}=8.5$) y el estrés laboral ($\beta=0.73$ y $t\text{-Value}=11.59$) y existe una relación significativa entre estrés laboral y ocultación de conocimientos ($\beta=0,44$ y $t\text{-Value}=7,805$). Además, los resultados revelaron que el estrés laboral tuvo un efecto directo en la relación causal*

entre el ostracismo organizacional y el ocultamiento del conocimiento ($\beta=0.828$) y que ($\beta=0.321$) es significativo en ($p<0.05$).

Conclusión: Se concluye que el ostracismo organizacional trae consecuencias negativas como el estrés laboral y, en consecuencia, el conocimiento oculto y hace que los miembros de la organización pierdan la oportunidad de utilizar la red de comunicación entre los miembros de la organización y los recursos de conocimiento. Además, aumenta los costos de prestación de servicios y la dependencia de recursos de conocimiento fuera de la organización.

Palabras clave: Ostracismo organizacional, Estrés laboral, Ocultamiento del conocimiento.

1. Introduction and statement of the problem

Knowledge is a key economic resource for gaining a competitive advantage (Esmaili and Ghaebi, 2019). Accordingly, in recent years organizations have paid a great deal of attention to managing such intangible assets in order to gain and maintain a competitive advantage (Bogilović, Černe & Škerlavaj, 2017). One of the key factors in knowledge management is the ability of organizations to transfer, share and generalize knowledge (Connelly, C. E., Černe, M., Dysvik, A., & Škerlavaj, M., 2019). Despite the efforts made to facilitate the transfer of knowledge in organizations, so far there has been little significant success (Jiang, Hu, Wang & Jiang, 2019). In most cases, employees are not willing to share their knowledge even when organizations are designed to facilitate the process of knowledge transfer. This unwillingness to transfer knowledge is observed even when employees are encouraged and rewarded to do so, and they hide their knowledge (Sadeghi, Rafiei, and Nilipour Tabatabai, 2019).

This phenomenon is a good description of the modern concept of knowledge hiding in organizations (Škerlavaj, Connelly, Černe & Dysvik, 2018). Knowledge hiding is defined as a deliberate attempt to withhold or hide knowledge that has been requested by another person. So sometimes a specific request for knowledge is made, it is ignored, and the knowledge hiding begins (Singh, 2019). Nowadays, for organizations, the consequences of knowledge hiding are devastating and destructive (Connelly & Zweig, 2015). Knowledge hiding is an active process of negative interpersonal interaction to protect one's own resources. Meanwhile, the theory of social networks (Granovetter, 1985) emphasizes that employees, companies, and their resources are embedded in a network; therefore, the behavior of employees is greatly affected by the complex interaction in this network. So when employees practice ostracism, they display the negative behavior of hiding knowledge, which in turn affects their affiliation in the organization's network and forms a vicious circle. This behavior also reduces the sense of organizational identity and belonging in employees and they no longer have the desire to present the organization with innovative ideas. Knowledge hiding represents a major challenge for most organizations seeking to improve their knowledge management activities, for the existence of knowledge is difficult to detect, and its effects are largely unknown. However, if knowledge is kept hidden from others, the key operations of the organization will be impaired and there will be delays, errors, lack of innovative ideas, etc. (Ahmad & Karim, 2019). It severely weakens the organization's ability to perform key tasks and improve its processes and activities (Friedrich, Becker, Kramer, Wirth, & Schneider, 2020). Knowledge hiding not only reduces the performance of an individual or a team but also, if detected, damages dominant social bonds and interpersonal relationships. It is a moral hazard that spreads easily (Connelly, Cherney, Dyswick, & Ashkerlavage, 2019).

One behavior in organizations that has a negative effect on knowledge hiding is organizational ostracism. Ostracism in organizations is a conventional phenomenon, which is a serious concern for today's organizations (Hsieh & Karatepe, 2019). In this respect, the results of some studies show that almost two-thirds of the members of an organization have experienced ostracism and that it can have harmful effects on both employees and the organization itself: for example, mental health issues (depression, anxiety, mental fatigue, and job stress), unfavorable job attitudes (job dissatisfaction and reduction of emotional commitment), deviant organizational behaviors, the tendency to quit, and reduced cooperation, job performance and organizational citizenship (Karim, Majid, Omar & Abu-rumman, 2021; Zare and Hadavinejad, 2019).

Job stress is one of the variables that researchers have found to be the consequence of ostracism and related to knowledge hiding (Riaz, Xu & Hussain, 2019). Stress is one of the major factors that threatens the mental and physical health of people in different environments. Job stress is a type of conflict that inevitably appears in the relationship between individual ability and the work environment (Jung, Kang & Choi, 2020). Tension arises in the workplace when people have a feeling of personal ineffectiveness in the face of an unfavorable, threatening, and uncomfortable work environment, which causes psychological and physical reactions (Rohollahi and Mashhour Al Hosseini, 2015).

According to the conservation of resources theory, resources are people's ability to satisfy their basic needs (Hobfoll, 2001; Wang, Liao, Zhan & Shi, 2011). These resources can belong to the individual or the environment (e.g., physical, social, or cognitive), and individuals work hard to maintain and acquire these valuable resources to reduce the risk of resource loss (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll, 2002). The conservation of resources theory may provide an explanation for how ostracism in the work environment reduces the useful resources needed by people at work (Leung, Wu, Chen & Young, 2011). People's protective mechanisms are activated and in order to protect themselves from further wasting resources they feel constant tension, which can have negative. The conservation of resources theory states that ostracism in the workplace is the main factor that influences the hiding of knowledge and increases the feeling of tension. As Connelly, Zweig, Webster, & Trogakos (2012) suggested, increasing alienation can also promote knowledge-hiding. In particular, the probability of knowledge-hiding increases when employees are unaware of the sanctions and guidelines (Gkorezis & Bellou, 2016). However, different types of knowledge hiding may have different consequences.

The lived experience of the authors of this article in Ahvaz Metropolitan Municipality shows that there are some unfortunate processes that lead to hiding of knowledge. The processes like individual works have relative success compared

to group projects; There is no relationship based on mutual trust between employees, and this organization cannot use the multiple expertise and knowledge of its human capital as a competitive advantage. For this reason, there is a real need to explore the variables involved in knowledge hiding in the metropolitan area of Ahvaz, such as organizational ostracism and job stress. The essential question that the research attempts to answer is whether job stress has an effect on the relationship between organizational ostracism and knowledge hiding in the metropolitan area of Ahvaz.

2. Literature review

Organizational ostracism, hiding knowledge, and job stress have been the object of various domestic and foreign studies as individual issues or in connection with each other. For example, the results of the study by Rashki Qala-No (2013) showed a significant and positive relationship between knowledge management and occupational stress and pressure. Vazifeh (2015) also showed that knowledge management processes naturally increase tension and can affect such factors as demand, control, supervisor support, communication, and changes. The research by Zhao, Xia, He, Sheard & Wan (2016) into workplace ostracism and knowledge hiding in service organizations showed that workplace ostracism has a positive relationship with employees engaging in evasive concealment and playing dumb. In terms of the relationship between workplace ostracism and information exchange with the mediating role of self-serving behavior, Gkorezis & Bellou (2016) showed that self-serving behavior completely mediates the effect of workplace ostracism on employee information exchange. Anand & Hassan (2019) showed that knowledge hiding is affected by four factors: personal factors (personality, emotional intelligence, negative goals, revenge, gaining power, the expectation of return if knowledge is shared); job factors (time pressure, protection of important information, complexity of knowledge, job requirements); organizational factors (unfavorable policies or norms, inappropriate motivational situation, competitive environment); and factors related to colleagues (lack of trust in colleagues, protection of friends or team). Riaz, Xu & Hussain (2019) also found that workplace ostracism positively affects knowledge concealment behavior such as evasive concealment and playing dumb, while it has no significant relationship with rational concealment. More specifically, workplace ostracism increases feelings of job stress, while job strain mediates the relationship between workplace ostracism and knowledge hiding. In addition, ostracism in the workplace destroys the benefits of employee loyalty because it has a strong impact on feelings of job stress.

Another study by Kamali Pour, Shojaei, Samiei, and Azma (2019) examined the factors affecting knowledge hiding with an emphasis on exclusion. Their results showed that the most influential factors were lack of interpersonal trust, uniqueness of knowledge, lack of organizational participation, unclear duties, lack of organizational incentives, the complexity of knowledge, the importance of the person requesting knowledge, the level of organizational knowledge culture, the level of information exchange among employees, the level of competitive work environment for acquiring new knowledge, the level of perceived job insecurity and the influence of personal values. Also, Yazdani Ahmadsaraei, Hassanzadeh & Habibi (2019) found that exclusion from the work environment has a significant effect on perceived tension, and self-efficacy and gender moderate this effect. Bakhshi, Hassanzadeh Pasikhani & Hassanzadeh Samarin (2020) found that the effect of ostracism in the work environment is negative and significant due to the mediating role of perceived tension on the behavior of organizational citizenship. Sepahvand & Momeni Mofrad (2021) also showed that ostracism in the work environment has an effect on the spread of knowledge-hiding behaviors, and that job stress strengthens this relationship. The results of the study by Ain, Azeem, Sial, and Arshad (2022) also showed that hiding knowledge by creating emotional fatigue reduces employees' extra-role and voluntary behaviors. Tung's study (2021) on the antecedents of knowledge concealment and its impact on the organization's use of knowledge showed that employee perception of a suitable and supportive organizational climate for knowledge sharing reduces knowledge concealment behavior.

In another study, Salehpour, Rashidi & Masoumi (2022) also found that the perception of employee exclusion has a positive and significant effect on knowledge hiding, and confirmed that job autonomy has a moderating role in the effect these two variables have on each. However, job stress did not play a moderating role in the effect of employee perception of exclusion on knowledge hiding. Also, Xing & Li (2022) found that direct and indirect workplace ostracism through knowledge hiding and organizational identity is significantly and negatively related to innovative behavior. Rafique *et al.* (2022) also showed that knowledge sharing moderates the relationship between job stress and innovative work behaviors.

A review of theoretical literature and research backgrounds shows that organizational ostracism is a stress-causing factor that destroys a person's resources such as self-esteem. According to resource conservation theory, the harmful effects of stress increase when individuals fail to utilize resources (Hobfoll, 2001). Ostracism in the workplace as a source of stress includes behavior that is likely to increase deviant behaviors and the intention to quit the job (Robinson, Wang, & Kiewitz,

2014). When psychological stress conditions increase in the workplace, the mediating role of stress reduces the capacity of individuals to fulfill job demands and meet the expectations of the organization (Chisholm, Kasl & Eskenazi, 1983). In addition, ostracism in the workplace as a dilemma, causes the target to be felt as an eliminated important element for the team. As a result of which this limited access to social resources leads to the perception of resource loss (Duffy, Ganster, Shaw, Johnson, & Pagon, 2006). According to resource conservation theory, to cope with the loss of resources, people may have to undergo psychological stress and adopt defensive behavior (Zhao, Peng & Sheard, 2013). Ostracism at work can be the cause of such significant resource loss that it disrupts people's ability to respond to their work demands so they feel a high level of job stress. In addition, to cope with this pressure, they are more likely to adopt defensive behavior such as hiding knowledge. Therefore, ostracism in the workplace may lead to psychological disorders and job stress in employees. As a result, a person with a lack of resources feels tension and psychological pressure, and such a loss of resources reduces a person's ability to meet job demands and expectations. The background and theory underlying the research hypotheses are as follows:

H_1 There is a significant relationship between organizational ostracism and knowledge hiding in the Ahvaz Metropolitan Municipality.

H_2 There is a significant relationship between organizational ostracism and job stress in the Ahvaz Metropolitan Municipality.

H_3 There is a significant relationship between job stress and knowledge hiding in the Ahvaz Metropolitan Municipality.

H_4 Job stress has a significant effect on the causal relationship between organizational ostracism and knowledge hiding in the Ahvaz Metropolitan Municipality.

3. Methodology

The current applied research was carried out with an analytical survey method. The statistical population covered 8 regions and 13 organizations, consisted of all the official and contractual employees of the Ahvaz Metropolitan Municipality, and totalled 3000 people. A stratified random sampling method and the Cochran sample size formula were used to select 341 people as research samples. Data were collected by the field method using a questionnaire from previous studies on organizational ostracism (Chang *et al.*, 2021), knowledge hiding (Demirkasimoglu, 2016), and job stress (Wooten *et al.*, 2010). The face validity and reliability of which were confirmed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient (table 1). To analyze the data, structural equation modeling method was used in Amos software.

Table 1. Data collection tools.

Scale	Variable	Subscale	Number of items	Total number of questions	Alpha coefficient	Source
<i>Organizational ostracism</i>	Independent	-	12	12	0.830	Chang <i>et al.</i> (2021)
		Avoiding the presentation of knowledge	1 to 4			
<i>Hiding of knowledge</i>	Dependent	Ambiguity and stupidity in presenting knowledge	5 to 8	12	0.869	Demirkasimoglu (2016)
		Logical hiding of knowledge	9 to 12			
		Performance job stress	1 to 5			
<i>Job stress</i>	Mediator	Workload job stress	6 to 9	12	0.884	Wooten <i>et al.</i> (2010)
		Organizational design job stress	10 to 12			

4. Findings

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to check the normality of the distribution of the research data. The results are shown in Table 2.

As the results of Table 2 show, for all research variables, the significance level of the test is higher than 0.05, which confirms the assumption of normality of the data. The calculated Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z value is also smaller than +1.96 and larger than -1.96, which concludes with a 95% level of confidence that there is no difference between the observed and expected frequencies. This result shows that the distribution is normal and parametric tests can be used.

Table 2. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test results on the normality of research variables.

Statistical indicators research variables	Kolmogorov Smirnov's Z statistic	Significance level
Organizational ostracism	1.211	0.165
Avoiding the presentation of knowledge	1.051	0.305
Ambiguity and stupidity in presenting of knowledge	0.271	1.114
Logical hiding of knowledge	1.109	0.285
Hiding of knowledge	1.003	0.312
Performance job stress	1.022	0.285
Workload job stress	1.208	0.158
Organizational design job stress	1.201	0.165
Job stress	1.052	0.270

The data in Table 3 shows that the average organizational ostracism is 2.22, the average knowledge hiding is 2.16, and the average job stress is 2.55. Below are the results of the one-sample t-test for determining the significance of the difference between the mean of the variables and the value of the test (3) (table 4).

According to the results in Table 4, the mean of the organizational ostracism variable from the respondents' point of view is 2.22, the mean of the knowledge hiding variable from the point of view of the respondents is 2.16 and the mean of the job stress variable from the point of view of the respondents is equal to 2.55. Mean of all variables are lower than the mean value of the test (3). On the other hand, the value of the test statistic for organizational ostracism is 15.93, for knowledge hiding it is 17.46, and for job stress it is 10.32. The significance

Table 3. The overall score of the respondents on the research components.

Research variables	Dimensions	Indicator			
		M	SD	Min.	Max.
	Organizational ostracism	2.2	0.89	1	4.67
Hiding of knowledge	Avoiding the presentation of knowledge	2.21	0.94	1	5
	Ambiguity and stupidity in presenting knowledge	2.17	1.01	1	5
	Logical hiding of knowledge	2.10	0.90	1	5
Total		2.16	0.88	1	5
Job stress	Performance job stress	2.44	0.91	1	5
	Workload job stress	2.51	0.86	1	5
	Organizational design job stress	2.81	0.89	1	5
Total		2.55	0.79	1	5

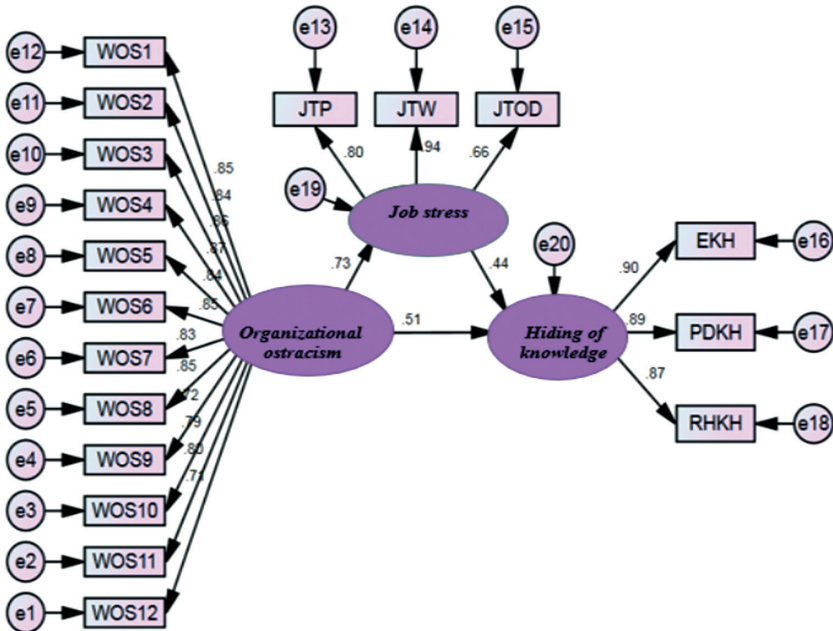
Table 4. The results of a sample T- test for investigating the status of organizational ostracism, knowledge hiding and job stress.

Variable	M	SD	t	df	95% confidence interval for the difference between the mean and the test value		Sig.
					Upper	Lower	
					Organizational ostracism	2.22	
Avoiding the presentation of knowledge	2.21	0.94	15.40	340	-0.68	-0.88	0.0001
Ambiguity & stupidity in presenting knowledge	2.17	1.01	15.07	340	-0.71	-0.93	0.0001
Logical hiding of knowledge	2.10	0.90	18.15	340	-0.79	-0.99	0.0001
Hiding of knowledge	2.16	0.88	17.46	340	-0.74	-0.92	0.0001
Performance Job stress	2.44	0.91	11.28	340	-0.45	-0.65	0.0001
Workload job stress	2.51	0.86	10.40	340	-0.39	-0.58	0.0001
Organizational design job stress	2.81	0.89	3.89	340	-0.09	-0.28	0.0001
Job stress	2.55	0.79	10.32	340	-0.35	-0.52	0.0001

level of the test for these variables is less than 0.05. The limits of the confidence interval obtained for the difference between the population mean and the test value are negative for all variables. As a result, considering the mean and the significance level of the test with a confidence interval above 95%, it can be concluded that the respondents believe that the status of research variables is favorable.

The standard model shows the intensity of the relationship between latent variables and observable variables by factor loadings (figure 1).

Figure 1. The main model in the standard mode.



We now go on to examine the fit indices.

Table 5 shows that the chi-square ratio to the degree of freedom is 2.364 (criterion less than 3), the goodness of fit index (GFI) is 0.917, the adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI) is 0.882, the comparative fit index (RFI) is 0.921, the incremental fit index (CFI) is 0.951, and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is 0.072. This shows that the final model possesses a good fit and does not need to be modified. Also, all the relationships between the variables in the model are significant at the $p < 0.05$ level.

To test the first hypothesis that there is a relationship between organizational ostracism and knowledge hiding in the metropolitan area of Ahvaz, the null hypothesis and researcher's hypothesis were presented and tested as follows.

H_0 : There is no relationship between organizational ostracism and knowledge hiding in the metropolitan area of Ahvaz.

Table 5. Calculated fit indices of the main research model.

Indicator	Indicator		The amount calculated in the present research
	Measure	threshold	
Comparative	NFI	>0.80	0.935
	CFI	0.90 and more	0.951
	RFI	0.90 and more	0.921
	$\frac{\chi^2}{df}$	Less than 3	2.364
Estimated discrepancy	RMSEA	0-0.08	0.072
	GFI	near 1	0.917
Absolute	AGFI	near 1	0.882
	Chi-Square	Depends on the sample size	208.06

H_1 : There is a relationship between organizational ostracism and knowledge hiding in the metropolitan area of Ahvaz.

According to the results in Table 6, the coefficient of influence of the predictor variable of organizational ostracism on the criterion of knowledge hiding is $\beta=0.51$ and the critical value of the t coefficient is 8.500, which is greater than 1.96. Therefore, the null hypothesis of the test is rejected and it can be concluded that organizational ostracism has a direct relationship with knowledge hiding in the metropolitan area of Ahvaz.

Table 6. The effect of the organizational ostracism variable on the criterion variable of hiding knowledge.

Direct path	β	t-value	Result
Organizational ostracism \rightarrow Hiding of knowledge	0.51	8.500	Confirmed

To test the second hypothesis that there is a direct relationship between organizational ostracism and job stress in the metropolitan area of Ahvaz, the null hypothesis and researcher's hypothesis were presented and tested as follows.

H_0 : There is no relationship between organizational ostracism and job stress in the metropolitan area of Ahvaz.

H_1 : There is a relationship between organizational ostracism and job stress in the metropolitan area of Ahvaz.

According to the results in Table 7, the coefficient of influence of the predictor variable of organizational ostracism on the criterion variable of job stress is $\beta=0.73$ and the critical value of the t coefficient is 11.159, which is greater than

Table 7. The effect of the variable of organizational ostracism on the criterion variable of job stress.

Direct path	B	t-value	Result
Organizational ostracism → Job stress	0.73	11.159	Confirmed

1.96. Therefore, the null hypothesis of the test is rejected and it can be concluded that organizational ostracism has a direct relationship with job stress in the metropolitan area of Ahvaz.

To test the third hypothesis that there is a direct relationship between job stress and knowledge hiding in the metropolitan area of Ahvaz, the null hypothesis and the researcher's hypothesis were presented and tested as follows:

H_0 : There is no relationship between job stress and knowledge hiding in the metropolitan area of Ahvaz.

H_1 : There is a relationship between job stress and knowledge hiding in the metropolitan area of Ahvaz.

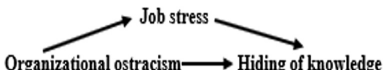
The results of the analysis of structural equations in Table 8 showed that the coefficient of influence of the predictor variable of job stress on the criterion variable of knowledge hiding is $\beta=0.44$ and the critical value of the reported t coefficient is 7.805, which is greater than 1.96. Therefore, the null hypothesis of the test is rejected and it can be concluded that job stress has a direct relationship with knowledge hiding in the metropolitan area of Ahvaz.

Table 8. The effect of the job stress variable on the criterion variable of hiding knowledge.

Direct path	β	t-value	Result
Job stress → Hiding of knowledge	0.44	7.805	Confirmed

Bootstrap analysis was used to test the main hypothesis that job stress has a significant effect on the causal relationship between organizational ostracism and knowledge hiding in the metropolitan area of Ahvaz. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 9.

Table 9. Testing the causal effect of job stress on the relationship between organizational ostracism and knowledge hiding.

Path	Full effect		Indirect effect		Result
	B	Sig.	β	Sig.	
	0.828	$P<0.05$	0.321	$P<0.05$	Confirmed

The results of the bootstrap analysis in Table 9 show that the full effect of organizational ostracism on knowledge hiding is $\beta=0.828$ and the significance level of the test is less than 0.05. Also, the coefficient of the indirect effect of organizational ostracism on knowledge hiding with the mediating effect of job stress is 0.321, and the significance level of the test calculated for the analysis of the above paths is less than 0.05. Therefore, the hypothesis is confirmed. Also, organizational ostracism has an indirect relationship with knowledge hiding through the mediating role of job stress in the metropolitan area of Ahvaz Metropolitan Municipality.

5. Conclusion

As mentioned above, knowledge and its management are considered today to be an important challenge for organizations. Hence, a considerable amount of research focuses on investigating and identifying those components that can facilitate the organization's knowledge management programs. The inability of organizations to facilitate the flow of knowledge not only increases the costs of providing services but also intensifies the dependence on external sources. One of the actions that has a destructive and harmful effect is the hiding of knowledge. And one of the major variables that has an important effect on knowledge hiding is ostracism in the organization and work environment.

The results of the research hypotheses test showed a significant relationship between organizational ostracism and knowledge hiding ($\beta=0.51$ and critical t -value=8.500) and job stress ($\beta=0.73$ and critical t -value=-11.59). The relationship between job stress and knowledge hiding ($\beta=0.44$ and critical t -value=7.805) was also significant.

In addition, the results showed that the effect of job stress on the causal relationship between organizational ostracism and knowledge hiding ($\beta=0.828$) was direct, and ($\beta=0.321$) is significant at $p<0.05$. In other words, these results indicate that no matter how much employees feel rejected by an organization and their work environment, they try not to show their knowledge, skills, and expertise.

Knowledge hiding as a consequence of organizational ostracism may take the form of evading knowledge presentation, ambiguity/dumbness in knowledge presentation, or logical hiding of knowledge. On the other hand, organizational ostracism causes the feeling of job stress to increase in one of its forms: performance, workload, or organizational design. Job stress also becomes a basis for hiding knowledge.

The results also showed that job stress is a consequence of organizational ostracism, and a predictor of knowledge-hiding. In this respect, the results of the present research agree with some of the results of Gkorezis & Bellou (2016),

Zhao, Xia, He, Sheard & Wan (2016), Kamali Pour *et al.* (2019), Riaz, Xu & Hussain (2019), Salehpour, Rashidi & Masoumi (2022), Sepahvand & Momeni Mofrad (2021), Ain *et al.* (2022), Tung (2021), Xing and Li (2022) and Rafique *et al.* (2022). One explanation for these results is that organizational ostracism makes it difficult for those rejected to be part of an organization's network for communicating and interacting with other colleagues, so they lose out on information and knowledge interaction. Those excluded understand that the organizational atmosphere is not suitable and supportive of innovative activities. Therefore, they have not only no interest in sharing and transferring their own knowledge to others, but also no desire to receive knowledge, learn or gain experience. Likewise, organizational ostracism takes opportunities for interaction away from individuals by creating emotional fatigue. Finally, those people who feel excluded from the work environment do not offer their knowledge, which may be vital for the organization to create added value.

The results suggest that managers from the metropolitan area of Ahvaz create an atmosphere of trust and intimacy between the organization's employees, design appropriate mechanisms for the conditions that cause employees to be excluded from the work environment and make use of rewarding techniques to encourage employees to share and present their knowledge. In the future, they need to reduce the psychological pressure in the work environment so that people can rise more easily to challenges at work, reduce job stress, and trust sufficiently in their colleagues to share and transfer knowledge.

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