

Vertical Mistreatment, Horizontal Withdrawal: Workplace Ostracism as the Bridge Between Abusive Supervision and Knowledge Hiding

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Abstract

Grounded in social exchange theory, the present study examines whether workplace ostracism explains the association between abusive supervision and employee knowledge hiding, while testing political skill as a proposed boundary condition in the abusive supervision–workplace ostracism relationship. It is proposed that abusive supervision may foster a hostile workplace climate that increases workplace ostracism, thereby encouraging employees to withhold knowledge from co-workers as a defensive coping strategy. Using a cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from 370 employees working in Pakistan's hospitality sector through purposive sampling. Data were analysed using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) to test the hypothesized relationships. The results revealed a positive relationship between abusive supervision and employee knowledge hiding, with workplace ostracism significantly mediating this relationship. However, political skill did not significantly influence the abusive supervision–workplace ostracism association, suggesting that it may not function as an effective boundary condition in this context. This study extends the knowledge hiding literature by highlighting workplace ostracism as an underlying mechanism linking abusive supervision to employee knowledge hiding. The study further extends social exchange theory by explaining how employees respond to negative supervisory treatment under conditions of power asymmetry. Theoretical and managerial implications are also discussed.

Keywords: Abusive Supervision, Workplace Ostracism, Knowledge Hiding, Political Skill, Social Exchange, Hospitality Industry

Introduction

In the service sector, employees' knowledge and expertise serve as key sources of competitive advantage, beyond physical assets alone. As service value is created through continuous interaction and collaboration, service organizations rely on employee cooperation to deliver consistent and high-quality services to customers. Unlike physical assets, knowledge-based resources are difficult for competitors to imitate; however, much of this knowledge resides within employees and becomes valuable only when they are willing to share it with others at work. (Iqbal et al., 2026; Zhao, Detlor, & Connelly, 2016). It is particularly associated to the hospitality sector, where service is delivered through ongoing interaction, coordination, and cooperation among employees. Thus, effective knowledge flow helps service organizations convert employees' individual expertise into organizational capabilities, service excellence, and sustained competitive advantage. This is particularly important in Pakistan's growing hospitality sector, where service quality depends heavily on positive workplace interactions, employee cooperation, and the sharing of useful knowledge (Zhao et al., 2016; Yao et al., 2023).

Despite acknowledging importance of knowledge sharing, many organizations fail to promote knowledge-sharing behaviours within work settings. Employees do not always share information when it is requested by others. This deliberate withholding or concealment of requested knowledge is referred to as knowledge hiding (Connelly et al., 2012). Knowledge hiding is theoretically distinct from reduced knowledge sharing because it reflects an intentional decision to withhold requested knowledge. Employees may engage in such behavior to protect their status, expertise, and personal value in the workplace. It may be expressed through three behavioral manifestations: evasive hiding, playing dumb, and rationalized hiding (Connelly et al., 2012). Recent meta reviews on knowledge hiding show that knowledge hiding leads to reduced trust, cooperation, innovation, creativity, and job performance within workplace (Shen et al., 2025). In service settings, such behaviour is particularly damaging because it diminishes interpersonal trust, coordination, and the flow of useful information, thereby hindering employees' ability to effectively cater to customer needs.

Extant literature has identified several macro-, meso-, and micro-level antecedents of knowledge hiding behaviours (Arain et al., 2024; Shen et al., 2025). However, more scholarly attention is still required to understand how contextual factors, particularly negative supervisory behaviors, foster knowledge hiding as a counterproductive behavior among employees. Among these behaviors, abusive supervision represents an important form of negative supervisory conduct because supervisors possess formal power and authority that can shape employees' perceptions of respect, belongingness, and fairness (Tepper, 2007). Abusive supervision denotes subordinates' perceptions of repeated hostile verbal and non-verbal supervisory conduct, excluding physical contact (Tepper, 2000; Aryee et al., 2007). Such behaviors may include rudeness, humiliation, sarcastic remarks, and disrespectful treatment (Tepper, 2000).

Prior studies indicated that abusive supervision is positively associated with employee knowledge hiding (Guo et al., 2021; Chaudhry et al., 2023; Khalid et al., 2018).

However, this relationship has largely been explained through mechanisms such as psychological contract breach, interpersonal justice, and retaliatory behavioral motives (Pradhan et al., 2020; Khalid et al., 2018; Feng & Wang, 2019). Other studies have further explained this relationship through psychological safety (Agarwal et al., 2022), employee silence (Islam et al., 2024), interpersonal distrust (Farooq & Sultana, 2021), dehumanization (Ahmed & Makhbul, 2024), and face threats (Liu et al., 2025). However, limited scholarly attention has been devoted to understanding how abusive supervision may promote employee knowledge hiding by generating experiences of social alienation, neglect, and exclusion in the workplace (Ferris et al., 2008; Robinson et al., 2013). In other words, workplace ostracism remains an underexplored mechanism through which abusive supervision may lead to employee knowledge hiding.

This gap is particularly salient in service and hospitality settings, where abusive supervision may undermine workplace relationships, employee cooperation, and knowledge exchange (Ayub et al., 2021; Jasim et al., 2024; Zhuang & Shi, 2025), but the role of workplace ostracism in explaining this relationship has not been sufficiently examined. This problem is more prevalent in high power-distance contexts such as Pakistan, where hierarchical structures give pronounced positional authority to supervisors and curb employees' ability to openly raise voice against mistreatment, thereby intensifying the negative consequences of abusive supervision (Hofstede, 2001; Gulzar et al., 2021). (Hofstede, 2001; Gulzar et al., 2021).

Drawing on social exchange perspective (Blau, 1964), the present research argues the quality of interpersonal relationship of workplace is undermined under the presence of abusive supervision. When employees face consistent hostility and humiliating behaviour from their supervisors, they may begin to generalize these negative experiences to the broader workplace. As a result, they may view the organization as unsafe, unfair, and marked by distrust, which can weaken their willingness to maintain cooperative workplace relationships. Such negative perceptions may foster workplace ostracism, as employees begin to feel ignored, excluded, and socially disconnected from others at work (Ferris et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2021). These feelings may make employees more defensive and less willing to share requested knowledge with co-workers (Williams, 2007; Zhao et al., 2016; Syifa et al., 2025). Hence, workplace ostracism is positioned as a relational mechanism through which abusive supervision contributes to employee knowledge hiding.

The present study further investigates political skill as a proposed boundary condition in the association between abusive supervision and workplace ostracism (Ferris et al., 2005). Although political skill has been examined as a direct antecedent of knowledge hiding (Offergelt & Venz, 2023), its potential buffering role in the pathway from abusive supervision to workplace ostracism remains underexplored. Employees with high political skill could have a better ability to identify and understand their surroundings, manage interpersonal stress, and maintain social ties with coworkers. Thus, political skill may act as a protective personal resource that reduces the chances of abusive supervision translating into workplace ostracism.

Based on the preceding discussion, the present study aims to examine how and when abusive supervision fosters employee knowledge hiding. Specifically, it investigates the mediating role of workplace ostracism in the relationship between abusive supervision and knowledge hiding, and the role of political skill as a boundary condition in the relationship between abusive supervision and workplace ostracism. In this regard, the present study makes several contributions.

First, this study advances the knowledge-hiding literature by shifting its focus from individual psychological pathways to a relational (social) mechanism, namely workplace ostracism, through which abusive supervision fosters knowledge hiding behaviors. By doing so, it enriches the existing explanations of this relationship beyond psychological contract breach, interpersonal justice, and retaliatory-driven behaviors (Guo et al., 2021; Chaudhry et al., 2023). Second, it contributes to the applicability of social exchange theory by showing that abusive supervision does not merely impact the supervisor–subordinate dyadic relation, but also negatively impacts the broader interpersonal workplace environment and, through workplace ostracism, prompts employees to engage in hiding behaviors as a self-protection strategy. Third, by assessing political skill as a boundary condition, this study further clarifies whether employees' personal resources, such as political skill, can reduce the likelihood of experiencing workplace ostracism under conditions of abusive supervision. Lastly, by examining the hypothesized relationships in the hospitality sector of Pakistan, it provides context-specific insights into how abusive supervision can disrupt knowledge sharing in a sector characterized by hierarchical structure and frequent interpersonal interaction.

Literature and Hypothesis Development

Abusive Supervision and Employee Knowledge Hiding

Knowledge hiding denotes a deliberate act of concealing or withholding knowledge in response to a coworker's explicit request (Connelly, Zweig, Webster, & Trougakos, 2012). It can range in seriousness from overlooking a minor request to withholding information central to organizational performance (Serenko & Bontis, 2016). Because organizational value increasingly depends on the free exchange of knowledge, such hiding carries tangible costs, undermining creativity, innovation, and team performance—effects that are amplified where work is highly interdependent (Fong, Men, Luo, & Jia, 2018; Labafi, 2017). Rather than examine its sub-strategies separately, the present study treats knowledge hiding as a single, global tendency to withhold requested knowledge from coworkers.

Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), along with the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), provides a useful theoretical lens for understanding how abusive supervision may lead to employee knowledge hiding. Because supervisors act as the organization's most proximal and visible representative, employees may interpret supervisors' treatment as an important cue for assessing the quality of their broader social exchange relationships within the workplace, including their relationship with the organization and other workplace members (Kulik, Bainbridge, & Cregan, 2008; Ul Haq, De Clercq, & Azeem, 2024). Sustained hostility, ridicule, or public criticism

from a supervisor is a signal to subordinates that the terms of this exchange have been violated and, consistent with the reciprocity norm, such treatment is answered with negative rather than cooperative discretionary behavior. As supervisors hold authority over rewards, evaluations, and promotions, employees may avoid direct confrontation and instead withdraw cooperation in safer ways, such as withholding knowledge from coworkers (Wang & Noe, 2010; Jahanzeb, Fatima, Bouckenooghe, & Bashir, 2019). Viewed this way, knowledge hiding is not only a targeted reaction against the supervisor but a broader withdrawal of cooperative exchange that follows from a degraded relationship with authority.

This exchange-based logic is likely to operate with particular force in hospitality settings, where service delivery depends on continuous interpersonal cooperation among frontline employees, so that any erosion of cooperative exchange is felt directly in the service effectiveness coworkers can jointly produce (Ayub, Ajmal, Iqbal, & Ghazanfar, 2021; Jasim, Abdel Moneim, & El-Sayed, 2024). It may be reinforced further in high power-distance contexts such as Pakistan, where the wide authority gap between supervisors and subordinates leaves employees with few sanctioned channels to challenge mistreatment directly, making a diffuse, non-confrontational withdrawal of exchange—such as withholding knowledge from coworkers—a more likely response than direct resistance (Hofstede, 2001; Gulzar et al., 2021). Consistent with this, abusive supervision has been found to relate positively to knowledge hiding among employees in Pakistan, where a wide power gap discourages direct retaliation and channels reciprocation into covert forms such as knowledge hiding (Jahanzeb et al., 2019).

Abusive supervision belongs to the broader family of destructive leadership behaviors, in which leaders prioritize their own interests at the expense of subordinates and cultivate a hostile work climate (Tepper & Henle, 2011). When supervisors treat employees with sustained hostility, ridicule, or intimidation, employees may feel threatened and become more protective of their valued resources, including knowledge (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007; Guo et al., 2021). Collectively, prior research indicates that destructive leadership and negative supervisory behaviors are positively associated with employees' knowledge hiding. Recent meta-analytic evidence further supports this conclusion by identifying destructive leadership as the strongest leadership-related predictor of knowledge hiding (Shen, Lythreathis, Singh, & Cooke, 2025). Accordingly, as a key form of negative supervisory behavior, abusive supervision is likely to increase employees' tendency to engage in knowledge hiding.

Hypothesis 1. Abusive supervision is positively related to knowledge hiding.

Workplace Ostracism as a Relational Mechanism Linking Abusive Supervision and Knowledge Hiding

Workplace ostracism reflects employees' general perception that they are socially disregarded, excluded, or left out by others in the workplace (Ferris, Brown, Berry, & Lian, 2008). It therefore captures a broader experience of workplace exclusion rather than exclusion directed from any one specific source. Evidence from prior studies indicates that employees exposed to abusive supervision are more likely to report

elevated levels of workplace ostracism (Wang, Du, Yu, Meng, & Wu, 2021). Similarly, research in frontline service contexts shows that authoritarian and fear-based supervisory practices can strongly predict employees' perceptions of workplace ostracism (Kanwal, Lodhi, & Kashif, 2019). The first path is conceptualized not as a matter of employees' personal confidence, but as a relational process through which abusive supervision creates feelings of social alienation and helplessness. Abusive supervisors may humiliate and criticize subordinates, often in public (Tepper, 2000), which can make employees feel devalued and unsupported within the work group. When such hostility continues over time and employees feel unable to control it, they may experience a reduced sense of control and belonging, which reflects the core experience of workplace ostracism (Robinson, O'Reilly, & Wang, 2013; Williams, 2007). Such hostility may also undermine employees' broader interpersonal relationships at work (Huang, Su, Lin, & Lu, 2019) and weaken their identification with the organization (Ambrose & Ganegoda, 2020).

Importantly, the surrounding work group may reinforce, rather than reduce, employees' feelings of helplessness. In fear-based and politicized climates created by abusive supervisors, coworkers may avoid speaking up or intervening on behalf of the targeted employee (Kiewitz et al., 2016; Khalid & Ahmed, 2016). In some cases, observers of abusive supervision may also distance themselves from the victim, or even respond negatively toward them, instead of offering support (Xu et al., 2020). When coworkers do not support or include the targeted employee, abusive supervision may further intensify feelings of marginalization and disconnection at work. These feelings reflect the perceived experience of being ignored and excluded by others, which lies at the core of workplace ostracism (Ferris et al., 2008; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Dirican & Erdil, 2020).

The second path follows the same social-exchange logic (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Employees tend to shape their cooperative behavior based on the quality of exchange they perceive from others in the workplace (Gouldner, 1960). Thus, when employees feel excluded and unsupported, they may respond to this weakened relational environment by withholding their own cooperation, including valuable knowledge requested by coworkers. Workplace ostracism therefore explains the relational pathway through which abusive supervision weakens employees' workplace relationships and leads them to withhold knowledge from coworkers. Zhao, Xia, He, Sheard, and Wan (2016) established this ostracism-knowledge withdrawal pattern among hospitality employees, and more recently Syifa, Sulistiawan, and Lin (2025) confirmed that ostracized employees are more likely to hide what they know. Based on the above theoretical and empirical evidence, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2. Workplace ostracism mediates the relationship between abusive supervision and knowledge hiding behaviors.

The Moderating Role of Political Skill

Although abusive supervision reliably heightens perceived ostracism, the strength of this effect should depend on an employee's capacity to protect their standing within

the work group. Political skill—the ability to understand others at work and to use that understanding to build and maintain effective interpersonal networks (Ferris et al., 2005)—is one such capacity. Kept within the social-exchange logic used throughout this study, we position political skill not as a free-standing personal resource but as a relational capability that helps employees preserve trust-based, reciprocal exchange ties with coworkers even as their exchange relationship with an abusive supervisor deteriorates (Offergelt & Venz, 2023). This matters specifically for the interpersonal route theorized in H2, whereby a supervisor's visible mistreatment prompts coworkers to distance themselves from, and withhold support from, the target (Xu et al., 2020). Through social astuteness and impression management, politically skilled employees are better able to counter this stigma-by-association process—signalling continued competence and goodwill and actively sustaining lateral ties—so that coworkers are less likely to withdraw and exclude them. Because the felt alienation at the heart of workplace ostracism is thereby dampened, the positive relationship between abusive supervision and workplace ostracism should be weaker for employees high in political skill. This buffering logic is consistent with evidence that the harmful effects of abusive supervision are not fixed but conditional, weakening in the presence of mitigating cultural values and personal resources (Hon & Lu, 2016; Khalid, Bashir, Khan, & Abbas, 2018).

Hypothesis 3. Political skill moderates the relationship between abusive supervision and workplace ostracism, such that the relationship is weaker when political skill is high.

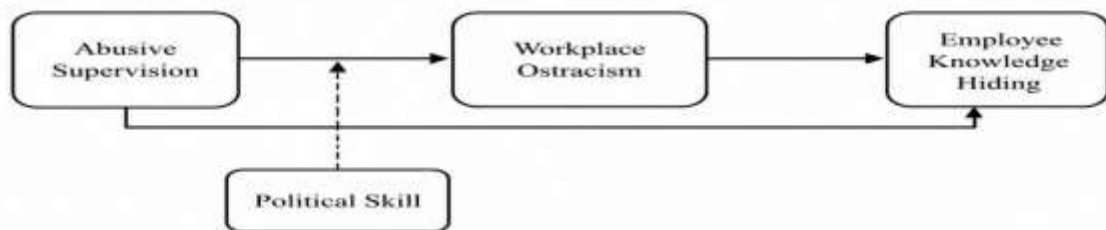


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

Method

Participants and Procedure

Data for this study were collected from employees working in hotels rated between three and five stars in Pakistan. The sample was drawn from hotels located in Lahore, Karachi, and Islamabad because these major cities have a high concentration of national and international hotels. Prior to data collection, formal permission was

obtained from the respective hotel administrations. Before completing the survey, participants were briefed about the study purpose and assured that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous. They were also informed that participation was entirely voluntary.

The study employed purposive sampling because respondents were required to have direct supervisory relationships and regular workplace interactions. The required sample size was calculated through the item response theory. Since the questionnaire contained 35 measurement items, and the recommended ratio is 10 respondents per item, minimum sample of 350 respondents was required for this study. The final sample comprised 370 usable responses, which exceeded the recommended minimum sample size. As the data were collected through a self-reported questionnaire, common method bias was addressed through procedural and statistical remedies. As a procedural remedy, respondents were assured that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential, and they were informed that participation was voluntary. As a statistical remedy, Harman's single-factor test was applied to assess common method bias. The results showed that the first factor explained 44.165% of the total variance, which is below the recommended threshold of 50%. Thus, common method bias was not a potential concern in this research (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

The demographic profile indicates that the sample was largely male, with approx. 70 % male respondents and 30% female respondents. Most respondents were relatively young, as 76% were below 35 years of age, with the largest age group being 25–34 years. In terms of education, the highest proportion held a bachelor's degree (49%). Most respondents were employed in middle-level positions (46.5%), had one to five years of organizational experience (46.7%), and were working as full-time employees.

Measures

Consistent with previous studies conducted in Pakistan, the questionnaire was administered in English. All constructs were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Abusive supervision was measured using the five-item scale developed by Mitchell and Ambrose (2007).

Measurement Model Assessment

The reliability and validity of the measurement model were assessed using four criteria: indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Observing the recommendations of Hair et al. (2019, 2021), indicators with weak outer loadings were examined and removed when they failed to meet the acceptable loading criterion. During the preliminary assessment, four items of employee knowledge hiding and one item of political skill showed outer loadings below 0.60 and were therefore removed from further analysis. The final model retained 5 items for abusive supervision, 8 items for employee knowledge hiding, 7 items for political skill, and 10 items for workplace ostracism.

As presented in Table 1, the outer loadings of the retained indicators ranged from 0.712 to 0.947, which exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70. The values of Cronbach's alpha varied between 0.928 to 0.970, rho_A values fell between 0.938 to

0.971, and composite reliability values were between 0.942 to 0.974, all achieving the suggested criteria of 0.70. The average variance extracted (AVE) values varied between from 0.674 to 0.873, thereby exceeding the suggested minimum value of 0.50. These results showed that measurement model has high internal reliability and convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2019).

Table 1. Reliability and Convergent validity

| Construct | Initial items | Removed items | Retained items | Loading range | Cronbach's α | rho_A | CR | AVE |
|---------------------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|---------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Abusive supervision | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0.907–0.947 | 0.963 | 0.964 | 0.972 | 0.873 |
| Employee knowledge hiding | 12 | 4 | 8 | 0.712–0.875 | 0.931 | 0.938 | 0.943 | 0.674 |
| Political skill | 8 | 1 | 7 | 0.774–0.873 | 0.928 | 0.941 | 0.942 | 0.698 |
| Workplace ostracism | 10 | 0 | 10 | 0.826–0.911 | 0.970 | 0.971 | 0.974 | 0.787 |

Note. CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted. Item-level outer loadings can be provided in an appendix or supplementary material if required by the journal

.As per the recommendation of Henseler et al. (2015), heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT) was used to check the discriminant validity. It can be seen from Table 2 that all values of HTMT were below the suggested threshold of 0.85. Thus, the results confirmed discriminant validity of the measurement model.

Table 2. Discriminant validity: HTMT ratio

| Construct | AS | EKH | PS | WO |
|-----------|-------|-------|-------|----|
| AS | — | | | |
| EKH | 0.675 | — | | |
| PS | 0.442 | 0.372 | — | |
| WO | 0.710 | 0.647 | 0.389 | — |

Note. AS = abusive supervision; EKH = employee knowledge hiding; PS = political skill; WO = workplace ostracism.

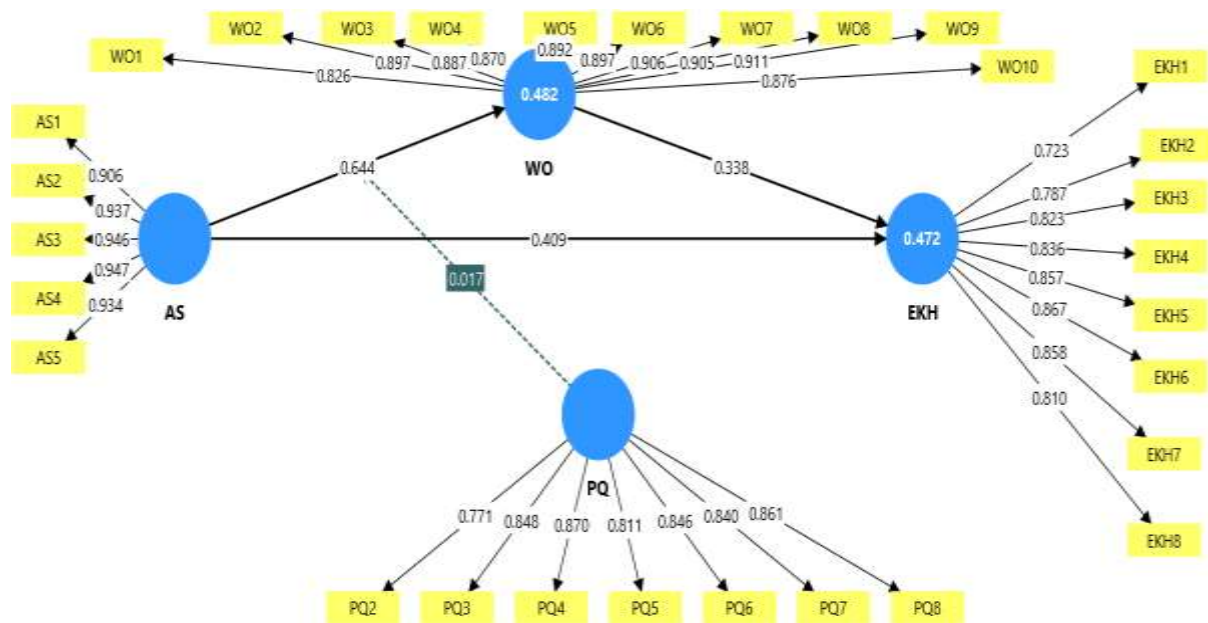


Figure 2. Measurement Model

Structural Model Assessment

After evaluating the appropriateness of the measurement model, structural model was tested through path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), effect sizes (f^2), mediation, and moderation analysis. The hypotheses were tested using the bootstrapping procedure in SmartPLS. Beta coefficients, t-values, and p values were utilized to check the level of significance of the hypothesized relationships (Hair et al., 2019, 2021).

The results indicated that abusive supervision was positively and significantly linked to employee knowledge hiding ($\beta = 0.409$, $t = 8.474$, $p < .001$), supporting Hypothesis 1. Abusive supervision also had a positive impact on workplace ostracism ($\beta = 0.644$, $t = 19.243$, $p < .001$), and workplace ostracism had a positive impact on employee knowledge hiding ($\beta = 0.338$, $t = 7.236$, $p < .001$). Political skill showed a negative significant effect on workplace ostracism ($\beta = -0.111$, $t = 3.121$, $p = .002$). However, the interaction effect of political skill and abusive supervision on workplace ostracism was not significant ($\beta = 0.017$, $t = 0.533$, $p = .594$); therefore, Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

Table 3. Direct effects

| Hypothesis / Path | B | SE | t-value | p-value | Decision |
|--------------------------|-------|-------|---------|---------|-----------|
| H1: AS \rightarrow EKH | 0.409 | 0.048 | 8.474 | < .001 | Supported |

| | | | | | |
|------------------|--------|-------|--------|--------|---------------|
| AS → WO | 0.644 | 0.033 | 19.243 | < .001 | Supported |
| PS → WO | -0.111 | 0.035 | 3.121 | .002 | Significant |
| WO → EKH | 0.338 | 0.047 | 7.236 | < .001 | Supported |
| H3: PS × AS → WO | 0.017 | 0.032 | 0.533 | .594 | Not supported |

Note. β = standardized path coefficient; SE = standard error.

Table 4. Mediation and conditional indirect effects

| Effect | β | SE | t-value | p-value | Decision |
|--------------------|---------|-------|---------|---------|---------------|
| H2: AS → WO → EKH | 0.217 | 0.033 | 6.647 | < .001 | Supported |
| PS → WO → EKH | -0.037 | 0.014 | 2.757 | .006 | Significant |
| PS × AS → WO → EKH | 0.006 | 0.011 | 0.527 | .599 | Not supported |

Note. H2 represents the specific indirect effect of abusive supervision on employee knowledge hiding through workplace ostracism.

Results of mediation showed that abusive supervision had a positive and significant impact on employee knowledge hiding via workplace ostracism ($\beta = 0.217$, $t = 6.647$, $p < .001$), supporting Hypothesis 2. Given that the direct effect of abusive supervision on employee knowledge hiding is significant, workplace ostracism represents a partial mediating mechanism. However, the indirect effect conditional on the interaction term was not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.006$, $t = 0.527$, $p = .599$), which further confirms that political skill did not function as a significant boundary condition in the first-stage path.

Table 5. Coefficient of determination

| Endogenous construct | R ² | t-value | p-value |
|---------------------------|----------------|---------|---------|
| Employee knowledge hiding | 0.472 | 13.764 | < .001 |
| Workplace ostracism | 0.482 | 14.107 | < .001 |

Note. R² represents the explained variance in endogenous constructs.

Table 6. Effect sizes

| Path | f ² | t-value | p-value | Interpretation |
|--------------|----------------|---------|---------|----------------|
| AS → EKH | 0.167 | 3.529 | < .001 | Medium |
| AS → WO | 0.656 | 6.068 | < .001 | Large |
| PS → WO | 0.017 | 1.468 | .142 | Very small |
| PS × AS → WO | 0.001 | 0.163 | .871 | Negligible |

WO → EKH 0.114 3.332 .001 Small to medium

Note. Effect size interpretation follows Cohen's (1988) general guidelines: 0.02 = small, 0.15 = medium, and 0.35 = large. Interpretations are contextual and should be considered alongside theory and model complexity.

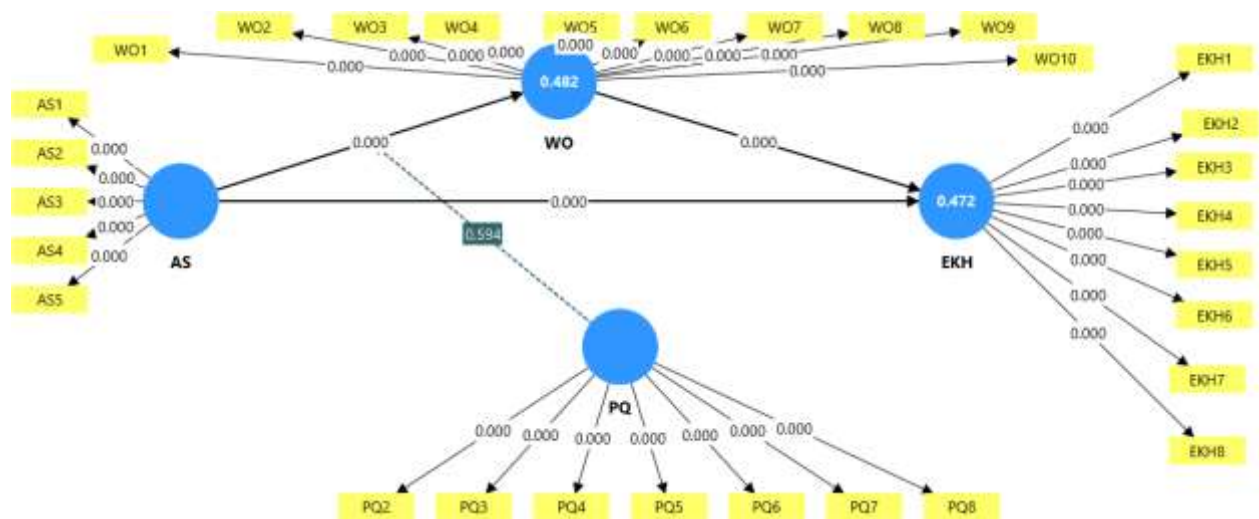


Figure 3. Structural Model

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine why and how abusive how abusive supervision contributes to employee knowledge hiding and whether workplace ostracism serves as the relational mechanism linking these variables. Based on social exchange theory (SET) (Blau, 1964) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), this study hypothesized a direct impact of abusive supervision on employee knowledge hiding (H1), a mediational impact through workplace ostracism (H2), and a attenuating role of political skill on the first-stage path (H3). Consistent with the proposed relationships, abusive supervision was positively impacting knowledge hiding ($\beta = 0.409, t = 8.474, p < .001$), supporting H1. Workplace ostracism also significantly mediates this relationship (indirect effect: $\beta = 0.217, t = 6.647, p < .001$), supporting H2. The results did not support the expected moderating role of political skill in the relationship between abusive supervision and workplace ostracism ($\beta = 0.017, t = 0.533, p = .594$); therefore, H3 was not supported. Overall, the findings suggest that employees exposed to abusive supervision may hide knowledge in two ways: directly as a response to mistreatment and indirectly because abusive treatment makes them feel ostracized at work.

The support for H1 confirms that abusive supervision is an important antecedent of employee knowledge hiding, which is consistent with prior evidence from sales,

hospitality, and other service contexts (Koay, 2023; Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007). From a social exchange perspective, employees may view abusive supervision as a violation of fair and respectful treatment. Since direct retaliation against supervisors can be risky, employees may respond by reducing their cooperation in less visible ways, such as withholding knowledge from coworkers. This logic highlights why a mediating mechanism is needed to explain how supervisory mistreatment is transferred into coworker-directed knowledge hiding.

The support for H2 represents the central contribution of this study. Abusive supervision comes from the supervisor, whereas knowledge hiding is directed toward coworkers. Workplace ostracism helps explain this shift by showing how abusive supervision can make employees feel ignored, unsupported, and socially disconnected from the wider work group. These feelings of alienation explain how supervisory mistreatment is translated into knowledge hiding toward coworkers. Thus, this study positions workplace ostracism not only as a workplace stressor but also as a perceptual mechanism through which abusive supervision leads employees to withhold knowledge from coworkers.

The non-significant effect of political skill is theoretically informative. It suggests that, in this context, the isolating effect of abusive supervision may be too strong to be reduced through employees' individual interpersonal skills. Several explanations may account for this finding. First, in a high power-distance and collectivist setting, ostracism may be driven more by a shared fear-based climate than by the employee's own interpersonal ability. Second, public and repeated abusive treatment may be difficult to offset through impression management. Third, political skill may have mixed effects in collectivist cultures because networking and influence behaviors may be viewed as self-serving political behavior, which can increase rather than reduce workplace exclusion. Finally, methodological explanations such as restricted variance in political skill or limited statistical power cannot be ruled out.

Theoretical Implications

The study makes three contributions. First, it advances a mechanism-based account of the abusive supervision–knowledge hiding relationship by showing that the effect of supervisory abuse on knowledge hiding is transmitted, at least in part, through workplace ostracism. Second, by theorizing ostracism as a perceived state of alienation and helplessness, the study keeps the mediator conceptually distinct from knowledge hiding and offers a clearer interpretation of workplace ostracism. Third, by situating the model in a high power-distance hospitality context, the study shows that abusive supervision may create relational harm that is not easily reduced by individual-level resources. Relatedly, the non-significant moderation indicates that the abusive supervision–workplace ostracism relationship may be relatively robust against individual-level buffering, particularly in high power-distance service contexts. This directs theoretical attention toward group- and organizational-level boundary conditions.

Practical Implications

For hospitality organizations, the findings provide an important managerial message. Abusive supervision is not only harmful for employee morale but can also disturb the flow of knowledge needed for effective service delivery. In hotels, service quality depends on the combined efforts of employees from different departments. When abusive supervision leads employees to hide knowledge, important operational information may not be shared properly. This can weaken coordination, service effectiveness, teamwork, and customer relationship management. Therefore, organizations should design reward and incentive systems that promote cooperation rather than unhealthy competition within teams, so that employees do not view knowledge sharing as a zero-sum game (Bartol & Srivastava, 2002; Fong et al., 2018).

Supervisors should also be trained to achieve work goals through ethical, respectful, and supportive supervisory practices rather than relying excessively on authority, pressure, or reward power (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005). In addition, organizations should ensure that supervisors and employees have adequate staffing, resources, and time to complete work tasks because excessive workload and top-management pressure may increase the risk of abusive supervisory behavior. Performance appraisal systems should therefore evaluate not only service outcomes but also the process through which those outcomes are achieved, including supervisory conduct, team cooperation, and knowledge-sharing behavior. Such practices may help reduce workplace ostracism and create a more supportive climate in which employees prioritize collective team outcomes over personal interests.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional and single-source design limits strong causal conclusions and may raise concerns about common-method bias. Future research should use time-lagged or multi-source data, including supervisor or peer ratings of knowledge hiding, to address these concerns. Second, because the data were collected from the Pakistani hospitality sector, the findings may not generalize to lower power-distance or non-service contexts. Future studies should test the model in different cultural and industrial settings. Third, this study treated knowledge hiding as a global construct; future research may examine whether evasive hiding, playing dumb, and rationalized hiding are affected differently by abusive supervision and ostracism. Finally, the proposed explanation suggests that coworker non-support may be involved in the process linking abusive supervision with workplace ostracism. However, this aspect was inferred rather than directly measured. Future research should examine perceived coworker support or bystander responses to better assess the alienation mechanism (Xu et al., 2020). Future studies should also examine whether the non-significant effect of political skill reflects its limited role in this context or methodological issues such as restricted variance, low power, or suppression effects. Alternative buffers, including supportive coworker climate, perceived organizational support, and psychological capital, may also be tested.

Conclusion

This study shows that abusive supervision leads to knowledge hiding both directly and indirectly through workplace ostracism. By treating workplace ostracism as a relational link between supervisory mistreatment and knowledge hiding from coworkers, the study explains how the effects of abusive supervision can spread beyond the supervisor-subordinate relationship. The non-significant moderating role of political skill further suggests that employees may not be able to manage this isolation through individual interpersonal ability alone. In knowledge-intensive and cooperation-dependent service settings, preventing abusive supervision and reducing workplace ostracism are therefore important for sustaining the knowledge exchange required for quality service.

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