



WORKPLACE OSTRACISM AND COUNTERPRODUCTIVE WORK BEHAVIORS IN THE HEALTHCARE SECTOR: A MODERATED MEDIATION ANALYSIS OF JOB STRESS AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Mr. Attaullah

Hazara University, Pakistan
attaullah.hu@gmail.com

Bilal Afsar

Hazara University, Pakistan
bilalafsar@hu.edu.pk

Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between workplace ostracism and nurses' tendency to engage in counterproductive work behaviours. The healthcare sector worldwide, and especially in developing countries, faces serious problems because the demand for healthcare professionals is increasing due to rapid population growth. Nursing staff plays an important role in this regard, especially in the current COVID-19 pandemic. However, nursing staff sometimes tends to engage in counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs), aggravating the problem. Workplace ostracism and job stress may be the factors associated with the tendency of nursing staff to engage in CWB. Therefore, this problem needs further investigation so that appropriate strategies may be developed to control their engagement in CWB. A time-lagged survey was conducted in public-sector hospitals of Pakistan to collect data from the nursing staff. Workplace ostracism was found to be positively related to nurses' feelings of job stress and their tendency to engage in CWB. Similarly, job stress was positively related and emotional intelligence was negatively related to nurses' tendency to engage in CWB. Job stress was found to mediate the relationship between workplace ostracism and CWB. Emotional intelligence was found to moderate the positive association between workplace ostracism and CWB mediated by job stress.

Keywords: Workplace Ostracism (WPO), Job Stress, Emotional Intelligence, Counterproductive Work Behaviors (CWBs) Nurses, Hospitals

1. INTRODUCTION

In the healthcare system, the significant role of nurses is paramount. Nurses are in frequent contact with patients, and they have to ensure quality service to patients (De Cieri et al., 2019). Nurses face heavy workloads, long working hours, role stress, emotional labor, low salary, work–family conflict, and patients' rude and aggressive behavior (e.g., Admi & Eilon-Moshe, 2016; Hong & Lee, 2016; Rhéaume & Mullen, 2018; Riskin et al., 2019; Wu et al., 2018). More importantly, nurses suffer from ostracism in the workplace (e.g., Gkorezis,

Panagiotou & Theodorou, 2016; Qi et al., 2020; Shafique et al., 2020). Ostracism is “the extent to which an individual perceives that he or she is ignored or excluded by others” (Ferris et al., 2008, p. 1348). Ostracism is prevalent among nurses, who always need quality interaction to perform their jobs effectively (Shafique et al., 2020). Therefore, when nurses are ostracized by their colleagues, they start to feel helplessness, dejection, alienation, and unworthiness (Jones et al., 1981), which ultimately lead to counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs) (Chung & Yang, 2017; Gkorezis et al., 2016; Shafique et al., 2020).

Pakistan, being one of the most densely populated countries of the world, faces severe healthcare problems. There is a sharp increase in demand for healthcare professionals due to the rapid increase in population. Nursing staff, an important segment of healthcare professionals, play an important part in fulfilling the ever-increasing demand for the healthcare sector. However, at times, the nursing staff engage in CWBs, adding to the severity of the problem. CWB refers to any deliberate behavior on the part of an organizational member which is considered to be contrary to the legitimate interests of the organization or its members (Sackett, 2002). Involvement of the employees in CWB is detrimental to organizational success. This especially is true in the case of hospitals, because if nurses engage in CWBs, the quality of care to patients might be compromised. Therefore, it is extremely important for the hospital administration and frontline nursing managers to have a thorough understanding of the factors that may influence nurses' tendency to engage in CWB.

Moreover, the nature and quality of interpersonal relationships among co-workers have important individual- and organizational-level consequences, because positive interpersonal relationships lead to positive outcomes. However, workplace ostracism is an inevitable issue (Fox & Stallworth, 2005) which negatively affects interpersonal relationships. In other words, a cooperative work environment is highly desired in organizations, yet employees may recall events in which they have been ignored or excluded by others in social contexts, including even their place of work. This phenomenon is known as ostracism in the literature. Workplace ostracism occurs "when an individual or a group omits to take actions that engage another organizational member when it is socially appropriate to do so" (Robinson, O'Reilly & Wang, 2013, p. 207). In other words, a situation in which individuals are aware of being neglected or isolated by others in their place of work is called workplace ostracism (Williams, 1997).

The extant research shows that ostracism has serious negative consequences (Williams, 2009), for instance, increasing emotional burden that may result in poor work attitudes, increased turnover intentions, and high turnover rate (Pierre et al., 2019). In the nursing context, we know that nursing is one of the most demanding vocations, because nurses

must deal directly with patients, patients' relatives, and physicians. Likewise, emergency duties, night shifts, emotionally exhausting jobs, patients' rude behavior, and physicians' pressure all make it an extremely challenging job. This can be witnessed in the current outbreak of COVID-19, in which nurses are at the forefront of the fight against this contagious virus. In such tiring situations, nurses need support from their co-workers and supervisors to regain their energy and motivation in order to serve patients at their best. Nevertheless, if the nursing staff feels isolated or ignored at their workplace, they might engage in negative workplace behaviors. For example, the nursing literature has shown that workplace ostracism has a negative impact on nurses' work attitudes and behavioral responses (Gkorezis, Panagiotou & Theodorou, 2016; Tsai, 2011), by arousing the antisocial and aggressive behaviors (Rajchert & Winiewski, 2016), and increasing the levels of CWB, harassment, and workplace conflicts (Chung, 2015; Zhao, Peng & Sheard, 2013). Therefore, this paper examined the relationship between workplace ostracism and the tendency of nursing staff to engage in CWB.

The nursing profession was studied because the literature shows that the nursing profession is one of the most key but stressful professions in the healthcare sector (Hunsaker et al., 2015; Martos et al., 2018). This is because at times nurses are exposed to emotionally arousing and challenging situations. They have to provide a good quality of compassionate and sympathetic care to patients, mostly in unpleasant circumstances (Bolton, 2001). Therefore, one of the fundamental requirements of the nursing profession is that they should have not only the ability to regulate their own feelings/emotions but also the ability to ease the pain of their patients and the concerns of patients' families (Diefendorff et al., 2011). Moreover, if nurses feel stressed on the job, their stressful mental state may be related negatively to the level of care patients receive. This may cause substantial medical errors that may result in detrimental consequences not only for the patients but also for the entire organization (hospital). Therefore, it is extremely important that nursing staff recover as quickly as possible from the stressful state so that individuals' wellbeing and healthiness can be maintained (Geurts & Sonnen-

tag, 2006). This means that the nursing staff must have emotional intelligence so that they are able to control the negative emotional state resulting from job stress.

In recent times, job stress is becoming a serious problem. Due to its prevalence in the work environment, many contemporary studies have explored its causes and consequences. Cropanzano et al. (1997) found that job stress has a detrimental impact at the individual and organizational levels. Some of the negative consequences associated with job stress include poor job performance, absenteeism, job dissatisfaction, loss of memory, increased medical bills, lateness to work, low productivity, etc. Similarly, job avoidance and job dissatisfaction are associated with job stress and poor interpersonal relationships respectively (Banerjee & Mehta, 2016). The literature has documented several factors that cause job stress; the major factors include work overload, insecurity of the job, and the increasing pace of life. In the view of Wilton (2011), job stress is associated with poor workplace experience, lack of autonomy, lack of control over the job, no role in decision-making, and no input in work processes. Moreover, job stress depends directly on the level of inability of an employee to meet job demands (Jamal, 2005).

In the context of this study, if nurses are ignored or isolated in their workplace, they will be unable to cope with the situation, job demands, patients' expectations, and physicians' prescriptions. Performing their duties inefficiently due to the lack of crucial job resources (social acceptance) results in an increasing level of job stress. Similarly, in the context of the conservation of resources (COR) theory, we expect that workplace ostracism might result in job stress in nurses, and the negative effect of this stress may lead to negative behavioral responses (Chung, 2018) directed toward their patients. Therefore, we expect that workplace ostracism among nurses may increase their levels of job stress, engendering negative outcomes.

However, nurses' level of emotional intelligence may influence the relationship between workplace ostracism and CWB. Emotional intelligence is a term used to denote a number of skills and abilities including the ability to be aware of one's own as well as others' emotions, and being capable of managing them

(Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Essentially, emotional intelligence demonstrates the extent to which individuals are able to identify, process, and effectively manage emotions to attain goals, adapt in a better manner, and cope with challenges. Emotional intelligence has been found to be associated with significant individual- and organizational-level consequences. Emotional intelligence produces a positive (dampening) impact on the negative consequences associated with job stress and job burnout (Schneider, Lyons & Khazon, 2013). It is associated with the effective identification, regulation, and use of emotions to reduce the adverse outcomes associated with unfavourable workplace events. Similarly, it affects work behaviors, increases altruistic behaviors, promotes work outcomes, and reduces interpersonal conflicts and the resultant stress (Carmeli, 2003). Furthermore, there is a negative relationship between emotional intelligence and perceived stress (Bao, Xue & Kong, 2015), and it works as a potential factor to manage stress effectively in general (Zysberg et al., 2017). Therefore, we expect that emotional intelligence may have a dampening effect on the tendency of the employees to engage in CWB in response to the stress they feel when exposed to workplace ostracism.

In short, the role of workplace ostracism as an interpersonal stressor (Jahanzeb and Fatima; 2017, Williams, 1997) has been well examined in previous studies. However, the effect of emotional intelligence as a moderating variable in the association of workplace ostracism, job stress, and CWB largely is unknown, specifically in the nursing context. It is extremely important to know the association between workplace ostracism, job stress, and its related behavioral outcomes to improve the quality of the service nurses provide to their patients. In addition, this study addresses calls for research identifying the various boundary conditions associated with workplace ostracism and its behavioral consequences (Lyu & Zhu, 2017; Zhu et al., 2017; Abubakar et al., 2018; Chung, 2018), specifically in the services sector in the context of a developing country (Abubakar et al., 2018). Therefore, we used emotional intelligence as a potential moderator that might play a mitigating role in preventing nursing staff from engaging in CWB in the face of job stress due to workplace ostracism in a developing country such as Pakistan.

In summary, this study examined whether workplace ostracism influences employee behavior. Specifically, it examined the relationship between workplace ostracism and the tendency of employees to engage in CWB, using job stress and emotional intelligence as mediating and moderating variables, respectively.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Workplace Ostracism and CWB

Workplace ostracism is a problem that generates serious individual- and organizational-level consequences. According to Huang et al. (2017), ostracism is an annoying situation which puts at stake the meaningful existence of its victims and leads them to feelings of self-worthlessness. Hence, ostracism is considered to be a social death by its victims (Einarsen, Skogstad & Glasø, 2013). Previous studies concluded that ostracism adversely affects employees' attitudes and behaviors. For example, according to Yan, Zhou, Long, and Ji (2014), workplace ostracism has a positive impact on employees' tendency to engage in CWB. Likewise, ostracism intensifies the knowledge-hiding behavior of workers engaged in the services sector (Zhao et al., 2016). Workplace ostracism negatively affects employees' tendency to engage in OCB (Wu, Liu, Kwan & Lee, 2016), and motivates them to engage in CWB (Yang & Treadway, 2018).

In addition to the individual-level consequences, some outcomes of workplace ostracism that may negatively affect organizational performance include low levels of motivation on the part of its victims to engage in organizational citizenship behavior (Wu et al. 2016), lower job performance, and high turnover rate (Renn, Weblar & Wiedemann, 2013). Moreover, the victims of ostracism have a greater tendency to engage in antisocial and aggressive behaviors (Rajchert & Winiewski, 2016). These factors ultimately have a negative effect on organizational performance. Therefore, we suggest the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1: *Workplace ostracism is positively related to employees' tendency to engage in CWB.*

2.2 Workplace Ostracism and Job Stress

As mentioned previously, workplace ostracism has been found to generate severe negative consequences, including task conflict, reduced engagement in OCB, increased involvement in CWB, and knowledge hiding. Moreover, according to Chung (2015), ostracism motivates its victims to engage in CWB while demotivates them to engage in OCB, because they feel themselves to be misfit in their workplace. This feeling of being misfit in the work environment creates job stress for the individual concerned. Ostracism negatively affects employee's attitudes and emotions (Ferris, Brown, Berry & Lian, 2008). Similarly, ostracism is associated with negative affect (Williams et al., 2002) and with negative emotional states such as sadness, depression, loneliness, jealousy, guilt, shame, embarrassment, and social anxiety (Gruter & Masters, 1986; Leary, Koch & Hechenbleikner, 2001).

Furthermore, ostracism can be regarded as an interpersonal stressor leading to stress. Ostracism puts at stake the fulfilment of four fundamental needs of its victims, i.e., the need for self-esteem, the need to belong, the need for control, and the need for a meaningful existence. When these needs are not fulfilled, stress at the workplace is likely to ensue (Williams, 2001). In the context of this study, nursing staff who have supportive co-workers and supervisors tend to experience less stress on the job (Albar Marin & Garcia-Ramirez, 2005), because co-workers' and supervisors' support (social support) has a direct negative effect on the level stress felt on the job (Yang et al., 2016). However, we know that workplace ostracism signifies the lack of social support, and it is logical to suggest that it will generate job stress. Therefore, we suggest the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: *There is a positive relationship between workplace ostracism and job stress.*

2.3 Job Stress and CWB

Job stress is a significant factor with a strong influence on employees' behavioral tendencies. A stressful work environment is associated with several problems, for example, reduction in

worker effectiveness and productivity, loss of interpersonal coordination among co-workers, increased frequency and severity of accidents, and rising levels of absenteeism (Ganster & Schaubroeck, 1991; Golembiewski et al., 1996). Likewise, according to Haq (2014), job stress leads to increasing turnover intention. Job stress motivates employees to engage in withdrawal, deviant, and hostile behaviors toward their clients (Mojoyinola, 2008). Job stress and stressful working conditions damage the mental health (Schonfeld, Bianchi & Luehring-Jones, 2017) and the physical health (Goswami, 2015) of employees. Cardiovascular disease, one of the major causes of death, especially in the western societies, also was found to be associated with job stress (Serano & Costa, 2018).

Furthermore, job stress has a significant effect on employees' engagement in CWB; specifically, stress resulting from work overload and role ambiguity were found to be significant predictors, and work overload was the strongest predictor (Silva & Ranasinghe, 2017). Raza, Hussain, Azeem, and Aziz (2017) established that there is a significant positive relationship between job stress and CWB. Similarly, work overload and role conflict also have been found to have a significant positive impact on CWB, of which role conflict is the major contributor. According to Spector and Fox, (2005), stressful work conditions can activate anger, anxiety, and other negative emotions that may result in violence under some circumstances. Furthermore, the victims of job stress tend to apply different coping strategies to combat their stress. For example, employees adopt different coping behaviors in response to job stress, e.g., direct actions, avoidance behaviors, resignation, and the use of alcohol (Wong, Leung & Lam, 2001). Other negative coping strategies include absenteeism, arriving late to work, apathy, carelessness, dissatisfaction, dejection, irritability, and withdrawal behaviors. Because these behaviors and strategies are negative in nature and fall under the concept of CWB, we suggest the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3: Job stress is positively associated with employees' tendency to engage in CWB.

2.4 The Mediating Role of Job Stress between Workplace and CWB

Workplace ostracism works as a stressor by putting at stake crucial job resources needed by employees to perform their duties, and thus is a major source of stress on the job (Wu, Yim, Kwan & Zhang, 2012). Social support works as a crucial job resource for employees to perform their duties and to engage in contextual performance, such as OCB. However, workplace ostracism signifying the absence of social support leads to the lack of these crucial job resources. Hence, ostracised employees feel stressed and have a tendency to engage in avoiding behaviors to escape ostracism. Moreover, as mentioned previously, workplace ostracism is a negative workplace experience that leads to the generation of negative emotions. Having negative emotions generally leads to job stress that may entice employees to engage in CWB. In other words, job stress is the outcome of workplace ostracism, whereas CWB is the outcome of job stress. Hence, job stress may be regarded as a bridge transmitting the effect of workplace ostracism to CWB. According to Farrastama, Asmony, and Hermanto (2019), job stress works as a mediator to transmit the effect of negative workplace events to CWB. Because workplace ostracism is a negative workplace event, we suggest the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 4: Job stress mediates the relationship between workplace ostracism and CWB.

2.5 The Moderating Role of Emotional Intelligence

Different individuals have different skills, abilities and competencies to identify their own feelings and the feelings of others and to adapt their behavior in response to these emotional cues. These competencies have been organized into a framework called emotional intelligence (Salovey, Woolery & Mayer, 2001). Emotional intelligence is an umbrella term for a number of skills and abilities, including the ability to be aware of one's own as well as others' emotions, and being capable of managing them (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Emotional intelligence is an important personality variable that has a significant effect on employees' behavioral tendencies. Individuals who are emotionally intelligent tend to handle stress more

effectively (Salovey, Bedell, Detweiler & Mayer, 1999). Likewise, emotional intelligence dampens the negative behavioral response to job stress (Jordan, Ashkanasy & Hartel, 2002). Emotionally intelligent people are able to handle negative emotions positively, and they perceive situations to be less stressful (Salovey et al., 1999). Similarly, emotional intelligence affects work behaviors, increasing altruistic behaviors, promoting work outcomes, and decreasing interpersonal conflicts (Carmeli, 2003).

As stated in the literature, workplace ostracism has severe a negative effect on nurses’ job performance and workplace behaviors. According to Kam-meyer-Mueller et al. (2013), nursing staff exposed to ostracism experience loss of resources in the form of lack of social support, which ultimately results in negative effects such as mental stress. Moreover, tension between nurses and patients increases (Zhang et al., 2017). Ostracism negatively affects nurses’ work attitudes and work behaviors, endangering patient care by preventing them to provide opinion and suggestions pertinent to patient safety (Gkorezis et al., 2016).

Furthermore, nursing staff generally engage in a high level of emotional labor because they are required to display emotions that are in line with their job demands (Delgado et al., 2017). They constantly regulate their emotions to ensure that they do not contradict organizational norms, causing them to engage in more emotional labor. In fact, most nurses think of emotional labor as a basic feature of patient

care (Gray 2010), because they have to face many undue behaviors from patients. Moreover, according to Farrastama et al. (2019), CWB and job stress both are affected negatively by stress-induced CWB. Hence, job stress is related positively to employees’ engagement in CWB, but emotional intelligence may dampen the relationship. In summary, nursing staff are bound to feel stressed in the face of workplace ostracism due to their feelings of loss of resources in the form of lack of social support. They tend to respond negatively by having an increased tendency to engage in CWB. However, whether they respond as expected depends on their level of emotional intelligence. Stating it more vividly, workplace ostracism and the resultant stress may not provoke them to engage in CWB if they are emotionally intelligent. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis.

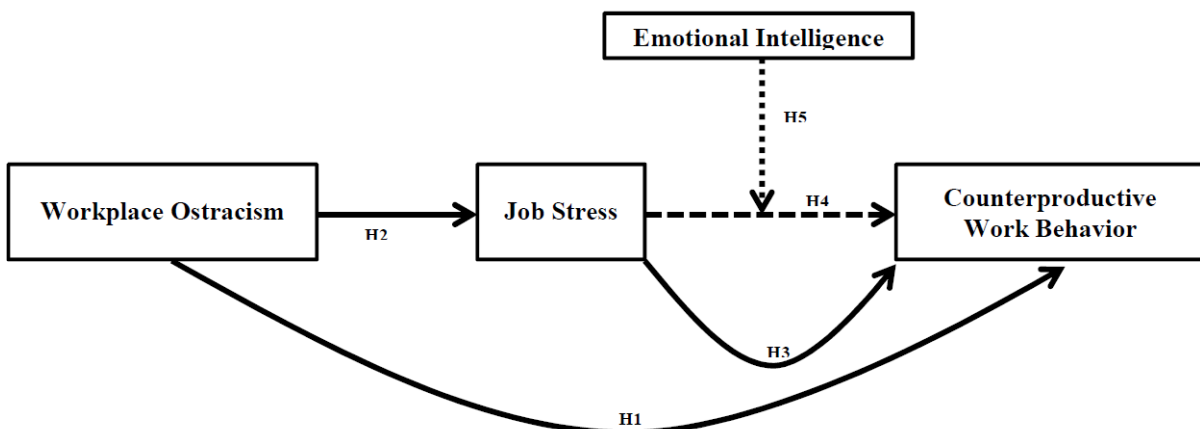
Hypothesis 5: Emotional intelligence moderates the positive relationship between workplace ostracism and CWB mediated by job stress, such that the relationship is dampened when emotional intelligence is high.

Figure 1 illustrates the proposed conceptual model of the study.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study was quantitative in nature, based on a questionnaire-based-survey technique. Two waves of questionnaire survey were conducted to collect data.

Figure 1: Research model with hypotheses



3.1 Sample and collection of data

The nursing staff of five public sector hospitals in Mansehra district, Pakistan, participated in the study. The survey was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, data were collected through a questionnaire which contained “demographic information,” “workplace ostracism,” and “job stress” scales with a total of 23 questions; 320 questionnaires were distributed (self-administered), and 254 were returned. Nine were incomplete, leaving 245 usable questionnaires. In the second phase, data were collected through a questionnaire which contained “demographic information,” “emotional intelligence,” and “CWB” scales with a total of 26 questions. The 245 respondents of the first phase were requested to complete the questionnaire, and 245 questionnaires were distributed among them. Of the distributed 245 questionnaires, 160 were returned complete in all respects (66% response rate). These 160 questionnaires were used for the final analysis of the study.

3.2 Measurements

All constructs were measured using 5-point Likert scales. The workplace ostracism and CWB scales were anchored on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = never to 5 = always. Job stress and emotional intelligences were anchored on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

Workplace ostracism was measured using a 10-item workplace ostracism scale developed by Ferris et al. (2008). A sample item is “others ignored me at work.” The Cronbach’s alpha for the scale was 0.85. This scale has been used widely to measure workplace ostracism, for example, by Sarfraz et al. (2019), Riaz et al. (2019), and Kanwal et al. (2019) with Cronbach’s alpha values ranging from 0.85 to 0.97.

Job stress was measured using a 13-item scale developed by Parker and DeCotiis (1983). A sample item is “working here makes it hard to spend enough time with my family.” The Cronbach’s alpha for the scale was 0.87. This scale has been used frequently to measure job stress, for example, by Alghamdi (2017), Hussain and Chaman (2016), and Kouchi, Hashemi, and Beshlideh, (2016) with Cronbach’s alpha values ranging from 0.86 to 0.95.

Emotional intelligence was measured using Wong and Law’s (2002) EI scale, which contains 16 items. A sample item is “I have a good sense of why I have certain feelings most of the time.” The Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was 0.86. This is considered to be a reliable instrument and has been used widely by researchers, for example, by Zych, Ortega-Ruiz, and Marín-López, (2017), LaPalme et al., (2016), Pacheco, Rey, and Sánchez-Álvarez (2019), Iliceto and Fino, (2017), and Kong (2017) with Cronbach’s alpha values ranging from 0.87 to 0.91.

CWB was measured using a 10-item scale developed by Sjoberg and Sjoberg (2007). Sample items are “I have seen to private affairs during work hours (CWB-O)” and “I have made fun of co-workers (CWB-I).” The Cronbach’s alpha for the overall scale was 0.88. This scale has wide application and has been used by many researchers, for example, by Jensgård (2009) with Cronbach’s alphas of 0.73 and 0.71 for interpersonal and organizational CWBs, respectively.

Control Variables

In addition to job stress and emotional intelligence, variables such as age, sex, job experience, and the level of education may affect employees’ behavioral responses to ostracism. For example, workplace ostracism may have more influence on men than on women (Cross & Madson 1997). Likewise, junior employees may expect some degree of inattention, and hence might overlook ostracism more readily than their senior counterparts (Greenglass & Burke 1988). Moreover, Chung (2018) and Lee & Ok (2014) demonstrated that variables such as age, education, and experience do affect the outcomes associated with workplace ostracism. Therefore, we used them as control variables.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

The study was allowed by the medical superintendent of each hospital. In addition, we sought the permission of each participant and ensured that their identity would not be disclosed and the information would be used for research only.

3.4 Data Analysis and Results

Data were analyzed using statistical techniques such as frequency tables, correlation, and regression. A Process macro by Hayes (2013) was used to perform the mediation and moderation analyses in SPSS (version 20). The fitness of the measurement model was assessed using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), using different fitness indicators, i.e., chi-squared, goodness-of-fit index (GFI), comparative fit index (CFI), (standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). The overall fitness of the model was assessed through the chi-squared, with a threshold value of 0.05 (Barrett, 2007). Furthermore, any value of chi-squared divided by degrees of freedom (χ^2/df) below 3 and with a significant p -value indicated a good fit of the model. Likewise, a value of standardized root mean square residual below 0.08, RMSEA ranging from 0.06 (Hu & Bentler, 1999) to 0.07 (Steiger, 2007), CFI above 0.92, and GFI equal to or greater than 0.9 were considered as acceptable values indicating a good fit of the model. All measurement scales applied in the study were passed through CFA. Our measurement model consisted of four latent variables (workplace ostracism, job stress, emotional intelligence, and counterproductive work behaviors), which were measured with separate scales. Four separate models were tested with different configurations (Table 1).

In the single-factor model, workplace ostracism, job stress, emotional intelligence, and counterproductive work behaviors were combined into a single factor ($\chi^2 = 129.31$; $df = 160$; $p < 0.001$, RMSEA = 0.034; CFI = 0.84; GFI = 0.85 and SRMR = 0.124). In the two-factor model, counterproductive work behaviors, job stress, and emotional intelligence were merged into one factor, and workplace ostracism was treated as the second factor ($\chi^2 = 131.24$; $df = 159$; $p < 0.001$; RMSEA = 0.046; CFI = 0.86; GFI = 0.89 and SRMR = 0.101). In the three-factor model, job stress and emotional intelligence were merged into one factor, counterproductive work behavior was treated as the second factor, and workplace ostracism was taken as the third factor ($\chi^2 = 137.23$; $df = 158$; $p < 0.001$; RMSEA = 0.058; CFI = 0.88; GFI = 0.92 and SRMR = 0.08). Lastly, in the four-factor model, each of the variables was treated as a separate factor. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis for the four-factor model demonstrated a good fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 143.45$; $df = 157$; $p < 0.001$; RMSEA = 0.065; CFI = 0.93; GFI = 0.95 and SRMR = 0.061). Hence, it is proved that the four-factor model resulted in the best fit indices compared with the other three models, and was the best-fit model to the data.

Table 2 shows that 66.9% (107/160) of the study participants were female, and 31.1% (53/160) were male. Likewise, 81.25% (130/160) of respon-

Table 1: Confirmatory factor analysis

Model	χ^2	df	RMSEA	CFI	GFI	SRMR
Single-factor model	129.31	160	0.034	0.84	0.85	0.124
Two-factor model	131.24	159	0.046	0.86	0.89	0.101
Three-factor model	137.23	158	0.058	0.88	0.92	0.080
Four-factor model	143.45	157	0.065	0.93	0.95	0.061

$\chi^2 =$ chi-squared, $df =$ degree of freedom, RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; CFI = comparative fit index; GFI = goodness-of-fit index; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual; $p < 0.01$

Table 2: Demographic information (n = 160)

Gender	Frequency	Experience (years)	Frequency	Education (years)	Frequency
Male	53	1–10	130	10	8
Female	107	11–20	18	12	22
		21–30	12	14	55
				16	75

dents had 1–10 years of work experience, 11.25% (18/160) had 11–20 years, and 7.5% (12/160) had 21–30 years; 5% of the respondents had 10 years of education, 13.7% had 12 years of education, 34.4% had 14 years of education, and 46.9% had 16 years of education. This means that majority (81%) of respondents had 14–16 years of education. The analysis of correlation is reported in Table 3. There were significant positive correlations between CWB and job stress ($r = 0.65, p = 0.05$), CWB and workplace ostracism ($r = 0.69, p < 0.01$), job stress and emotional intelligence ($r = 0.27, p < 0.01$), and job stress and workplace ostracism ($r = 0.58, p < 0.05$). There were significant negative correlations between emotional intelligence and CWB ($r = -0.30, p < 0.01$), and emotional intelligence and workplace ostracism ($r = -0.20, p < 0.05$).

The Cronbach's alpha values were 0.88 for CWB, 0.87 for job stress, 0.86 for emotional intelligence, and 0.85 for workplace ostracism. Hence, all the scales had Cronbach's alpha values well above the threshold level (0.70) indicating that the scales were reliable.

Table 4 lists the regression path coefficients. The path coefficients were used to assess the direct effects of independent variable on dependent variables. Workplace ostracism had a significant direct positive effect on both CWB ($\beta = 0.69, p < 0.01$, 48% of variance explained) and job stress ($\beta = 0.58, p < 0.05$, 34% of variance explained). Therefore, H1 and H2 are supported. Job stress had a direct positive significant effect on nurses' tendency to engage in CWB ($\beta = 0.65, p < 0.05$, 42% of variance explained). Therefore, H3 also is supported. The first part of Table 5 reports the

Table 3: Descriptive statistics and correlations

Variable	Mean (SD)	Cronbach's alpha	1	2	3	4
1. CWB	1.87 (0.701)	0.88	1			
2. Job stress	3.24 (0.779)	0.87	0.65*	1		
3. Emotional intelligence	3.91 (0.533)	0.86	-0.30**	0.27**	1	
4. Workplace ostracism	1.57 (0.525)	0.85	0.69**	0.58*	-0.20*	1

** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

Table 4: Regression path coefficient (direct effects)

Regression path	Standardized coefficient (beta)	R ²	p
WPO→CWB	0.69	0.48	$p < 0.01$
WPO→Job stress	0.58	0.34	$p < 0.05$
Job stress→CWB	0.65	0.42	* $p < 0.05$

Table 5: Indirect effect and moderated mediation effect

Indirect effect			
	Effect size	LLCI	ULCI
Job stress	0.213	0.0287	0.0517
Moderated mediation effect			
	Index size	LLCI	ULCI
Job stress × emotional intelligence	-0.106	0.0435	.0852

Note: Dependent variable = counterproductive work behavior; independent variable = workplace ostracism; mediator = job stress; and moderator = emotional intelligence.

indirect effect of workplace ostracism on CWB through job stress. The second part demonstrates the moderated mediation effect of job stress and emotional intelligence on the relationship of workplace ostracism and CWB. The indirect effect of workplace ostracism on CWB through job stress was statistically significant [indirect effect size = 0.213, CI95 (0.0287, 0.0517)]. Therefore, H4 is supported. Finally, emotional intelligence had a significant moderating effect on the relationship of workplace ostracism and CWB mediated by job stress [moderated mediation index = -0.106, CI95 (0.0435, 0.0852)], showing that the moderated mediation was statistically significant. Therefore, H5 is also supported.

4. DISCUSSION

This study investigated the relationship between workplace ostracism and employees' tendency to engage in CWB. In addition to the direct effect, we also examined the indirect effect of workplace ostracism on CWB through job stress; and whether emotional intelligence moderates the relationship between workplace ostracism and CWB mediated by job stress. Job stress (mediator) and emotional intelligence (moderator) were used to explain the underlying mechanism through which workplace ostracism may be related to employees' tendency to engage in CWB.

Our results revealed that workplace ostracism positively affects employees' tendency to engage in CWB. This result is similar to the findings of previous studies which is established that the feeling of being ostracized enhances the victim's tendency to engage in the antisocial and aggressive behaviors (Poon, Chen & DeWall, 2013); Rajchert & Winiewski, 2016; Yan et al., 2014). We also found a positive relationship between workplace ostracism and job stress. Our result is similar to the findings of Vui-Yee, and Yen-Hwa (2019) that employees' perceived workplace ostracism leads to job stress. This result also is in line with the huge stock of the literature that reveals that ostracism results in psychological distress, for example, Williams' (2009) temporal-need threat model of ostracism.

Our findings further revealed that job stress positively affects employees' tendency to engage in CWB. This result is in line with the findings of Fox and Stallworth (2010) that job-related tension and anxiety

inspire employees to engage in CWBs. Our result also is similar to the findings of Silva and Ranasinghe (2017) and Raza et al. (2017) that job stress has a significant positive impact on employees' tendency to engage in CWB. Moreover, we found that job stress mediates the relationship between workplace ostracism and CWB. This result is in line with the finding of Ferris, Yan, Lim, Chen & Fatimah (2016) that avoidance-oriented CWB is associated with workplace ostracism through a negative emotional impact, i.e., anxiety (an outcome of job stress). This result also is similar to the finding of Chung (2018) that perceived job stress links workplace ostracism with employee behaviors. Our result also is similar to the findings of Mahfooz, Arshad, Nisar, Ikram, and Azeem (2017) that job stress works as a mediator between workplace ostracism and employee turnover intention (a dimension of CWB). Our finding also supports the findings of Vui-Yee, and Yen-Hwa (2019) that workplace ostracism results in job stress, which in turn results in negative behavioral outcomes.

Lastly, we found that emotional intelligence moderated the relationship between workplace ostracism and CWB mediated by job stress. This result is in line with the findings of Sun, Li, and Chang, (2019) that employee tendency to engage in deviant behaviors is affected positively by job stress, but emotional intelligence dampens this relationship. Our finding also supports the findings of Naseem (2018) that employees' emotional intelligence has a moderating effect on their stress management, such that they can cope better with their level of perceived job stress, and can protect themselves from being affected negatively. Moreover, our result reinforces the findings of Farrastama et al. (2019), that emotional has a negative effect on CWB mediated by job stress.

In short, our results support findings of the previous literature relating to the effects of workplace ostracism, for example, the findings of Ferris et al. (2008) that workplace ostracism is an agonizing and disliked experience, and therefore is associated with significant negative effects on the wellbeing of its victims. Similarly, our findings also support the idea that ostracism is associated with negative emotional states such as sorrow, despair, solitude, envy, culpability, indignity, embarrassment, and social apprehension (e.g., Gruter & Masters, 1986; Leary, Koch & Hechenbleikner, 2001). Moreover, our results also

support the findings of Williams (1997, 2001) that ostracism may be regarded as an interpersonal stressor that ultimately results in stress.

4.1 Theoretical Foundation

The conservation of resources theory was used as the basis of the model in our study. This theory rests on the idea that people strive to attain, preserve, foster, and defend the belongings they centrally value (Hobfoll, 1989). According to this theory, “stress occurs when; (a) central, or key resources are threatened with loss, (b) central or key resources are lost, or (c) there is a failure to gain central or key resources following significant effort” (Hobfoll et al., 2018; p.104). Because the feelings of affiliation, belongingness, and support from co-workers and supervisors represent a critical social and job resource, whenever employees face ostracism, they realize a loss of valuable resource and resultantly feel stressed. This is because ostracism demonstrates the absence of affiliation, belongingness, and social support from co-workers which, in fact, is very irritating for its victims.

In addition to the COR theory, the need-threat model (Williams, 1997) also can be used as a theoretical basis for our study’s model. In light of the need-threat model, ostracism prevents its victims from satisfying their fundamental needs, i.e., belongingness, self-esteem, meaningful existence, and control. Among these needs, deprivation of control and meaningful existence are considered to be associated with the provocation of antisocial thoughts and antisocial behaviors. The idea that a threat to belongingness and self-control needs instigates a series of maladaptive behavioral reactions from the victims of ostracism was supported by Gerber & Wheeler (2009) and Warburton et al. (2006).

In addition to the aforesaid theoretical basis, our model is supported by the relevant literature, concluded that stress is associated positively with employee engagement in CWB. For example, according to Raza, Hussain, Azeem & Aziz (2017), there is a significant positive relationship between job stress and CWB. Similarly, job stress provokes employees to engage in withdrawal, deviant, and hostile behaviors directed toward their clients (Mojoyinola, 2008). Furthermore, a stressful environment is associated

with several problems, such as reduction in workers’ effectiveness and productivity, loss of interpersonal coordination, increase in the frequency and severity of accidents, and increase in the level of absenteeism (Ganster & Schaubroeck, 1991; Golembiewski et al., 1996). Moreover, ostracism arouses affective or emotional responses in its victims, including sadness, hurt, and anger. These negative feelings prompt them to retaliate to even the score (Buckley, Winkel & Leary, 2004; Chow, Tiedens & Govan, 2008). For example, avoidance-oriented CWBs are linked with ostracism through anxiety (Ferris et al., 2016), which is an outcome of continuous job stress. Therefore, these findings also support our proposed model, which treats job stress as the outcome of workplace ostracism, and treats CWB as the outcome of job stress.

4.2 Emotional Intelligence as a Moderating Variable

We included emotional intelligence as a moderating variable in our model because it has significant individual- and organizational-level consequences. It has a significant influence on employee behaviors, specifically in shaping employees’ behavioral responses in the face of negative workplace events. For example, emotional intelligence affects work behaviors such as increasing altruistic behaviors, promoting work outcomes, and defusing interpersonal conflicts and their related stress (Carmeli, 2003). Similarly, workers who are high in emotional intelligence perceive minimum job stress (e.g., Extremera, Durán & Rey, 2007; Gohm, Corser & Dalsky, 2005; Mikolajczak, Balon, Ruosi & Kotsou, 2012; Vesely, Siegling & Saklofske, 2013), and as a result have a lesser tendency to react negatively.

Moreover, highly emotionally intelligent individuals tend to engage in positive rather than negative coping strategies. For example, individuals with high emotional intelligence are able to retrieve their pleasant past memories during stressful events, helping them to regulate their mood, unlike those with low emotional intelligence (Ciarrochi, Chan & Caputi, 2000). Hence, they tend to respond less aggressively to stressful workplace events. Similarly, emotional intelligence works as a significant moderator dampening the negative responses associated with the stress caused by job insecurity (Jordan, Ashkanasy & Harrel, 2002).

Furthermore, the positive role of emotional intelligence in stress management has been recognized in research (e.g., Karimi, Leggat, Donohue, Farrell & Couper, 2014). Because emotional intelligence is related to the identification of emotions, use of emotions, and regulation of emotions, it helps avoid or minimize the adverse outcomes associated with the negative emotions stimulated by job stress and job burnout (Austin, Dore & O'Donovan, 2008; Saklofske, Austin, Mastoras, Beaton & Osborne, 2012). According to Bar-On, (2000), individuals high on the scale of emotional intelligence tend to be more easy-going in stressful circumstances because they have the ability to adopt to circumstances with ease. Similarly, highly emotionally intelligent people are able to handle negative emotions positively, and perceive situations to be less stressful (Salovey et al., 1999).

4.3 Theoretical Contributions

Our study offers several significant theoretical contributions. The extant literature relating to the attitudinal, affective, and physical outcomes of ostracism shows consistent results; however, studies exploring the behavioral outcomes associated with workplace ostracism have mixed findings. The behavioral responses displayed by the victims of ostracism have been found to be either prosocial or antisocial. For example, according to Baumeister & Leary (1995), ostracized individuals have a desire to be accepted by others and strive to form stable relations as a means of social acceptance, and hence they have an increased tendency to engage in OCB. This, in fact, shows the prosocial side of workplace ostracism. On the other hand, ostracism puts at stake the fulfilment of fundamental human needs (Williams, 2009), i.e., the need for belonging, self-esteem, meaningful existence, and control. When these needs are threatened by ostracism, the victims feel frustrated, leading to the generation of negative emotions, which increases their tendency to engage in CWB. For example, according to Rajchert & Winiewski (2016), ostracism intensifies victims' tendency to engage in antisocial and aggressive behaviors. This is the antisocial side of workplace ostracism. Due to such contradictory findings, this study investigated the effect of workplace ostracism on employee behavioral tendencies. It contributes to the literature by authenticating the negative behavioral outcomes associated with workplace ostracism.

Furthermore, our suggested moderated mediation model supports the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and the need-threat model (Williams, 1997) in the healthcare sector of Pakistan, with workplace ostracism as the explanatory variable, CWB as the explained variable, job stress as the mediating variable, and emotional intelligence as the moderating variable. We also found support for the social exchange theory in which negative treatment in the workplace is reciprocated by engaging in negative behaviors and vice versa (Li & Tian, 2016).

The present study also adds to the literature by considering the underlying mechanism through which workplace ostracism affects employee behaviors, and therefore provides a broader perspective of the problem. Likewise, our study contributes to the literature by offering an answer to the calls for research identifying the various boundary conditions associated with workplace ostracism and its behavioral consequences (Lyu and Zhu, 2017; Zhu et al., 2017; Abubakar et al., 2018; Chung, 2018), specifically in the services sector in the context of a developing country (Abubakar et al., 2018).

Lastly, our findings also add to the existing body of literature by concluding that the emotional intelligence of employees can work as a shield to protect them from engaging in negative behavioral responses even in the face of negative workplace events. Therefore, our study extends the body of knowledge by confirming the moderating role of emotional intelligence in the association between workplace ostracism and CWB mediated by job stress. Moreover, our study extends the body of knowledge by proving that job stress works as a mediator in the association between workplace ostracism and CWB, and thus helps understand how employee behavior is affected by workplace ostracism.

4.4 Implications for Practice

This study offers significant implications, specifically for the management of nursing professionals in the healthcare sector. The study established that workplace ostracism leads to increased engagement in CWB, and thus reaffirms the detrimental effect of workplace ostracism on nurses' behavioral tendencies. Therefore, management should take appropriate steps to control workplace ostracism. Similarly, the problems of job stress and CWB can be controlled by

providing an ostracism-free work environment. For this purpose, open communication channels should be provided to employees to complain about workplace ostracism, and reasonable feedback should be given to them to overcome the problem. Moreover, organizational commitment and loyalty can be inculcated in employees by ensuring an ostracism-free working environment. Lastly, emotional intelligence training programs must be arranged to minimize staff engagement in CWB by making staff more emotionally intelligent so that they can handle workplace ostracism and its related stress appropriately.

4.5 Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has several limitations that need to be highlighted not only to explain the actual context of the study but also to provide directions for the future research. The study has three major limitations: (1) cross-sectional design of data collection, (2) collection of data from only one sector (hospital nursing staff), and (3) a relatively small sample size. Future studies may overcome these limitations by using time-series data, larger sample sizes, and diversified populations. In addition, future research endeavors also may use a holistic approach to examine the effect of workplace

ostracism on employee behaviors, considering CWB and OCB simultaneously. Finally, different mediators and moderators may be tested to explain the underlying mechanism through which workplace ostracism may affect employee behavioral tendencies.

5. CONCLUSION

This study offers new insights into the relationship of workplace ostracism and employee behavioral tendencies in the healthcare sector of Pakistan. Based on the emotional regulation model and the conservation of resources theory, this study used a two-wave survey technique with a sample of 160 nursing professionals from public-sector hospitals in Pakistan. The results led us to conclude that workplace ostracism has a significant positive effect both on employees' tendency to engage in CWB and on the level of job stress they experience. Job stress positively affects and emotional intelligence negatively affects employees' tendency to engage in CWB. Moreover, job stress mediates the relationship between workplace ostracism and CWB. Finally, emotional intelligence dampens the positive association between workplace ostracism and employees' tendency to engage in CWB mediated by job stress.

EXTENDED SUMMARY/IZVLEČEK

Študija preučuje razmerje med ostrakizmom na delovnem mestu in težnjo medicinskega osebja h kontraproduktivnem vedenju na delovnem mestu. Zdravstveni sektor po vsem svetu, zlasti v državah v razvoju, se sooča z resnimi težavami, saj se povpraševanje po zdravstvenih delavcih zaradi hitre rasti prebivalstva povečuje. Negovalno osebje ima posledično pomembno vlogo, zlasti v času trenutne pandemije COVID-19. Kljub vsemu se zdravstveno osebje včasih nagiba h kontraproduktivnem vedenju na delovnem mestu (CWB), kar situacijo še otežuje. Ostrakizem in stres na delovnem mestu sta lahko dejavnika, ki povzročata prej omenjeno kontraproduktivno ravnanje pri negovalnem osebju. Tako ravnanje je potrebno podrobno raziskati, saj se le na ta način lahko razvijejo ustrezne strategije za nadzor slednjega. V pakistanskih javnih bolnišnicah je bila izvedena raziskava med negovalnim osebjem. Ugotovljeno je bilo, da je ostrakizem na delovnem mestu pozitivno povezan z občutki delovnega stresa pri medicinskem osebju in njihovo težnjo h kontraproduktivnem vedenju. Podobno je bilo ugotovljeno, da stres delovnem mestu pozitivno vpliva na težnjo medicinskih delavcev h kontraproduktivnemu ravnanju, medtem ko je čustvena inteligenca negativno povezana s težnjo h kontraproduktivnem vedenju. Raziskava je tudi pokazala, da je stres na delovnem mestu mediator v odnosu med ostrakizmom na delovnem mestu in kontraproduktivnim vedenjem. Ugotovljeno je bilo tudi, da čustvena inteligenca zmanjšuje pozitivno povezavo med ostrakizmom na delovnem mestu in kontraproduktivnim vedenjem, ki ga povzroča stres na delovnem mestu.

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Appendix 1

For the questions given below, please indicate the extent to which you experience each of the following at your job. (N = never = 1, R = rarely = 2, S = sometimes = 3, F = frequently = 4, and A = always = 5)

Workplace Ostracism	N	R	S	F	A
Others ignored you at work.	1	2	3	4	5
Others left the area when you entered.	1	2	3	4	5
Your greetings have gone unanswered at work.	1	2	3	4	5
You involuntarily (not by your own choice) sat alone in a crowded lunchroom at work.	1	2	3	4	5
Others avoided you at work.	1	2	3	4	5
You noticed that others would not look at you at work.	1	2	3	4	5
Others at work shut you out of the conversation.	1	2	3	4	5
Others refused to talk to you at work.	1	2	3	4	5
Others at work treated you as if you were not there.	1	2	3	4	5
Others at work did not invite you or ask you if you wanted anything when they went out for a coffee/tea break.	1	2	3	4	5

CWB	N	R	S	F	A
You see to private affairs during work hours.	1	2	3	4	5
You make fun of co-workers.	1	2	3	4	5
You take objects from work without permission.	1	2	3	4	5
You hurt someone's feelings at work.	1	2	3	4	5
You take more or longer breaks, than necessary.	1	2	3	4	5
You comment or make fun of others' descent (lower status), or religion.	1	2	3	4	5
You are late for work.	1	2	3	4	5
You act in a threatening manner towards other at work.	1	2	3	4	5
You show up for work (come to work) under the influence of drugs or alcohol.	1	2	3	4	5
You act rudely towards co-workers or customers.	1	2	3	4	5

For the questions given below, please indicate the extent to which you experience each of the following at your job. (SD = strongly disagree = 1, D = disagree = 2, N = neither agree nor disagree = 3, A = agree = 4, and SA = strongly agree = 5)

Job Stress	SD	D	N	A	SA
Working here (in your organization) makes it hard for you to spend enough time with your family.	1	2	3	4	5
You spend so much time at work.	1	2	3	4	5
Working here (in your organization) leaves little time for other activities.	1	2	3	4	5
You frequently get the feeling that you are married to the company.	1	2	3	4	5
You have too much work and too little time to do it in.	1	2	3	4	5
You sometimes dread (anticipate with fear) the telephone ringing at home because the call might be job-related.	1	2	3	4	5
You feel like you never have a day off.	1	2	3	4	5
Too many people at your level in the company get burned out (too tired due to overwork) by job demands.	1	2	3	4	5
You have felt nervousness as a result of your job.	1	2	3	4	5
Your job gets you more than it should.	1	2	3	4	5
There are lots of times when your job drives you right up the wall.	1	2	3	4	5
Sometimes when you think about your job you get a tight feeling in your chest.	1	2	3	4	5
You feel guilty when you take time off from job.	1	2	3	4	5

Emotional Intelligence	SD	D	N	A	SA
You have a good sense of why you have certain feelings most of the time.	1	2	3	4	5
You have a good understanding of your own emotions.	1	2	3	4	5
You really understand what you feel.	1	2	3	4	5
You always know whether or not you are happy.	1	2	3	4	5
You always know your friends' emotions from their behaviors.	1	2	3	4	5
You are a good observer of others' emotions.	1	2	3	4	5
You are sensitive to the feelings and emotions of others.	1	2	3	4	5
You have good understanding of the emotions of people around you.	1	2	3	4	5
You always set goals for yourself and then try your best to achieve them.	1	2	3	4	5
You always tell yourself that you are a competent (able, capable) person.	1	2	3	4	5
You are a self-motivating person.	1	2	3	4	5
You would always encourage yourself to try your best.	1	2	3	4	5
You are able to control your temper so that you can handle difficulties rationally.	1	2	3	4	5
You are quite capable of controlling your own emotions.	1	2	3	4	5
You can always calm down quickly when you are very angry.	1	2	3	4	5
You have a good control of your own emotions.	1	2	3	4	5