

Workplace Ostracism: Mapping the Global Research Landscape, Emerging Themes, and Future Directions

Nisha Makwana¹, Dr. Neela Multani^{2*}, Dr. Pankajray Patel³

¹Research Scholar, Gujarat Technological University, Ahmedabad, India
nishamakwana26@gmail.com

^{2*}Assistant Professor, Gujarat Technological University, Ahmedabad, India
ap_neela@gtu.edu.in

³Professor, Gujarat Technological University, Ahmedabad, India
prof_pankajraypatel@gtu.edu.in

HOW TO CITE:

Nisha Makwana, Neela Multani, Pankajray Patel, (2026) Workplace Ostracism: Mapping the Global Research Landscape, Emerging Themes, and Future Directions
International Journal of Special Education, 41(22s), 476 -488

ABSTRACT

Workplace ostracism, defined as the isolation or social rejection of employees within an organization, has received a lot of attention in studies because of its profound effect on employee well-being, performance, and organizational outcomes. This study presents a bibliometric analysis of 467 Scopus-indexed journal articles and reviews retrieved using the keyword "Workplace Ostracism," with data up to June 2026, following a PRISMA-guided screening process (Page et al., 2021). Using the performance-analysis techniques suggested for bibliometric studies in management research (Donthu, Kumar, Mukherjee, Pandey, & Lim, 2021), the study addresses seven research questions covering annual publication trends, subject-area and document-type distribution, country and institutional contribution, author productivity, funding patterns, journal-level trends, keyword network and country-level citation patterns. The findings support the exponential increase of WO scholarship since 2015, the domination of the fields of business, management, and psychology, the concentration of output in China and Pakistan, and the substantial reliance on a few highly productive authors, institutions, and funding agencies. The report concludes by mapping these results back onto each research question and discussing the implications for researchers positioning new WO studies within the present trajectory of the field.

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Keywords: Workplace ostracism, Exclusion, organizational behaviour, psychological well-being, knowledge hiding

1. Introduction

Ostracism is a passive form of mistreatment where employees are ignored, excluded from meetings, or denied access to important information (Williams, 2007; Balliet & Ferris, 2013). Workplace ostracism is defined as “the exclusion, rejection, or ignoring of an individual (or group) by another individual (or group) that

hinders one’s ability to establish or maintain positive interpersonal relationship, work-related success, or favorable reputation within one’s place of work” (Hitlan et al., 2006, p. 222). Workplace ostracism may take many forms such as avoiding eye contact or conversation, silent treatment, giving cold

shoulder and concealing critical information (Williams & Zadro, 2001). According to Williams (2007), ostracism is the deliberate disregard or exclusion of a person by others. A number of detrimental behaviors, such as workplace deviance (Chung, 2015) and counterproductive work conduct (Hitlan & Noel, 2009; Zhao, Peng, & Sheard, 2013), have been connected to workplace ostracism. According to Williams (2007), the four basic needs are the need for self-worth, the need to fit in, the need for control, and the need for a purposeful life can all be concurrently threatened by exclusion. Ostracism affects self-esteem because they are ostracized because something they did was wrong or because they have undesirable characteristics (Williams, 2007).

The Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) proposes that when there is a perceived violation of reciprocity, ostracized employees can feel a violation of reciprocity and engage in counterproductive work behaviors as a result. Belongingness Theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) suggests that there is a basic need for belongingness, and that when employees feel ostracized they may feel a violation of this basic need, and therefore engage in counterproductive work behaviors. Moreover, the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) explains ostracism's effects on psychological resources and their link to stress and burnout — outcomes that recur throughout the WO literature (Ferris et al., 2008; Wu et al., 2016) and, as the keyword network in Section 4.9 shows, remain closely associated with ostracism in the field's published research.

Rationale for the Current Bibliometric Mapping

Workplace ostracism has been examined bibliometrically on a few occasions to date. Asmita, Akhouri, Singh, and Tabash (2025) combined a systematic review with VOSviewer-based bibliometric mapping including keyword co-occurrence, co-citation, and bibliographic coupling across 134 Scopus-indexed articles spanning the field from 2000 to the present. Kaushal, Kaushik, and Sivathanu (2021) earlier analysed 144 documents drawn from Web of

Science and Scopus, using a combination of content analysis, bibliometrics, and network analysis. More recently, Kumari and Singh (2026) applied the PRISMA Framework to a sample of 309 Scopus-indexed articles published between 2006 and 2024, using VOSviewer to conduct citation analysis, bibliographic coupling, and keyword co-occurrence analysis to map the field's theoretical and geographic landscape. Together, these studies reflect different stages of a rapidly growing field: according to Scopus records (Scopus, 2026), annual output on workplace ostracism rose from 6 documents in 2015 to a peak of roughly 75 in 2024–2025, so each mapping necessarily reflects the literature available up to its own data-collection point.

Building on this line of work, the present study offers a wider-scoped, PRISMA-guided census of 467 Scopus records, capturing a broader span of the field's growth. In addition to publication trends, subject-area and document-type distribution, geographic and institutional contribution, author productivity, funding patterns, and journal-level trends, this study also examines co-keyword patterns and strongest citation linkages within the field, with data collection extending through June 2026.

2. Research Questions

Following the performance-analysis approach recommended for bibliometric studies in management research (Donthu, Kumar, Mukherjee, Pandey, & Lim, 2021), this study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1. What is the annual publication trend of workplace ostracism research?

RQ2. Which subject areas and document types dominate workplace ostracism publications?

RQ3. Which countries and institutions lead in publishing workplace ostracism research?

RQ4. Which authors have contributed most to workplace ostracism research?

RQ5. Which funding sponsors support workplace ostracism research, and what does this reveal about the field's research infrastructure?

RQ6. Which journals are the primary outlets for workplace ostracism research, and how has this

distribution evolved?

RQ7. What are the dominant keyword co-occurrence patterns in workplace ostracism research, and which countries show the strongest citation linkages within the field?

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Source And Search Strategy

Bibliographic data were retrieved from the Scopus database, chosen for its broad, structured coverage of peer-reviewed social-science journals and its provision of standardised journal-quality metrics (Donthu et al., 2021; Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016). Scopus has also been demonstrated to have better recall and citation coverage for the social-science literature than other similar databases (Norris & Oppenheim, 2007). Only one keyword search was done (Workplace Ostracism) with no lower year specified and yielded an initial set of 542 records. The final analytic dataset was the result of screening this pool in stages as described in Figure 1.

3.2 Screening and Eligibility (PRISMA-Guided)

The screening sequence followed the logic of

the PRISMA 2020 reporting framework, adapted here for a bibliometric rather than a systematic-review context (Page et al., 2021). Records were filtered in four sequential steps:

Document-type filter: non-article, non-review document types (e.g., conference papers, book chapters, editorials, notes) were removed, reducing the pool from 542 to 499 records.

Language filter: non-English-language records were removed, reducing the pool from 499 to 488 records.

Publication-stage filter: records still classified as “Article in Press” were removed, reducing the pool from 488 to 468 records.

Source-type filter: records not indexed under a journal source were removed, reducing the pool from 468 to 467 records.

All of the analyses in Section 4 were based on the final dataset, which consisted of 467 records (journal articles and reviews only). Adeosun (2024) notes that the data for 2026 is a provisional and partial year figure only and should not be interpreted as a complete annual figure.

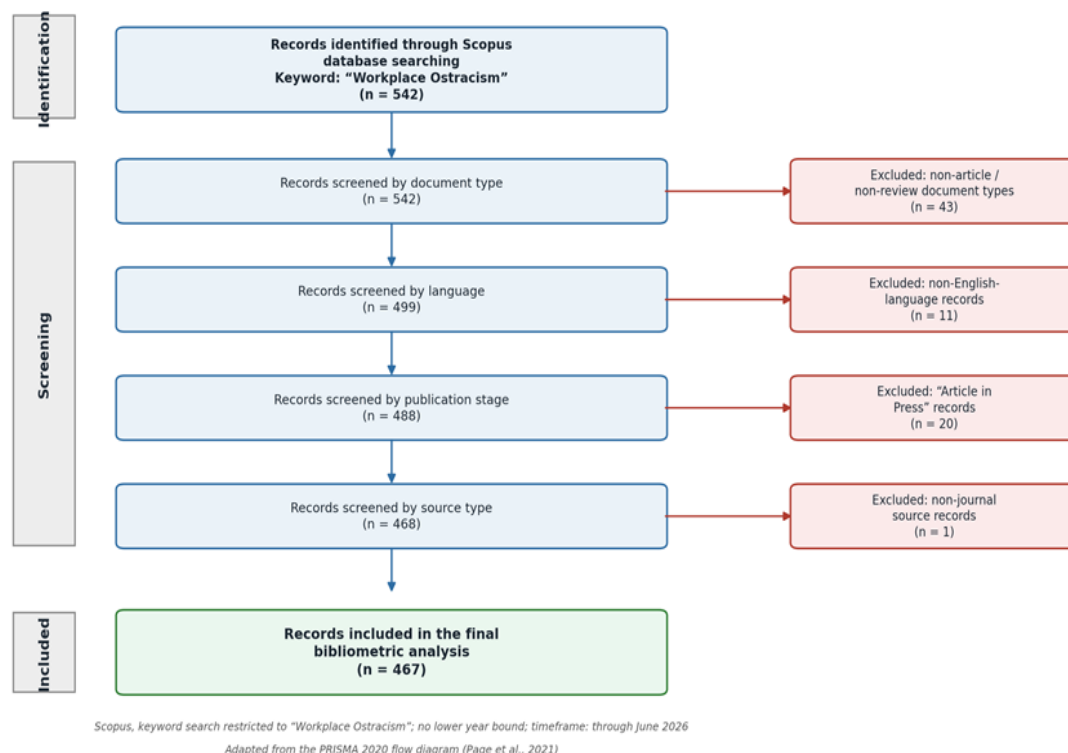


Figure 1. PRISMA-guided flow diagram of record identification and screening (adapted from Page et al., 2021).

4. Results

4.1 Annual Publication Trend

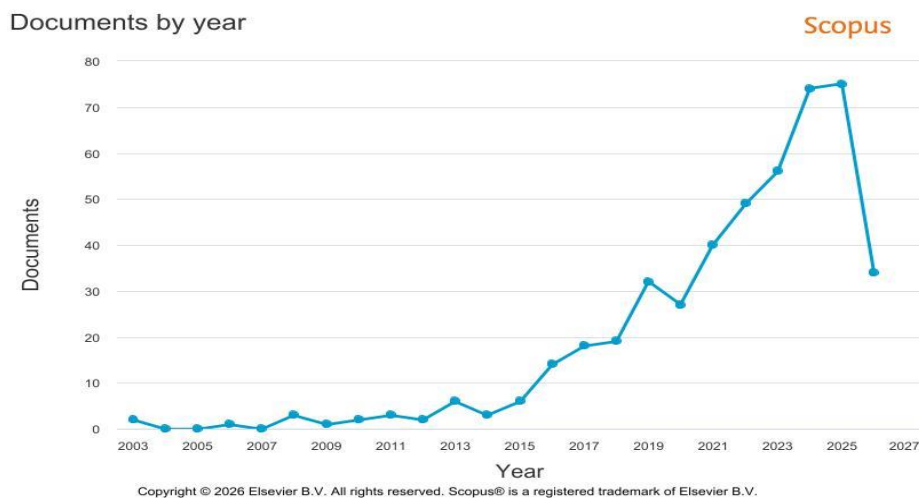


Figure 2. Documents by year, 2003–2026 (Scopus)

The number of publications was few and far between 2003 and 2014, with no more than three-four documents published annually, which is consistent with the early stages of the field before and immediately after the Workplace Ostracism Scale (Ferris et al., 2008) was developed. From 2015 onward, output rises steeply from 6 documents in 2015 to 32 in 2019

before a modest dip to 27 in 2020. This resumes, and then increases markedly, from 2021 (40 documents) until 2023 (56), reaching a maximum of ~74–75 documents in both 2024 and 2025, before dropping to 34 in 2026. This drop reflects only partial-year coverage, the search was conducted in June 2026, rather than an actual decline in scholarly interest.

4.2 Document Type

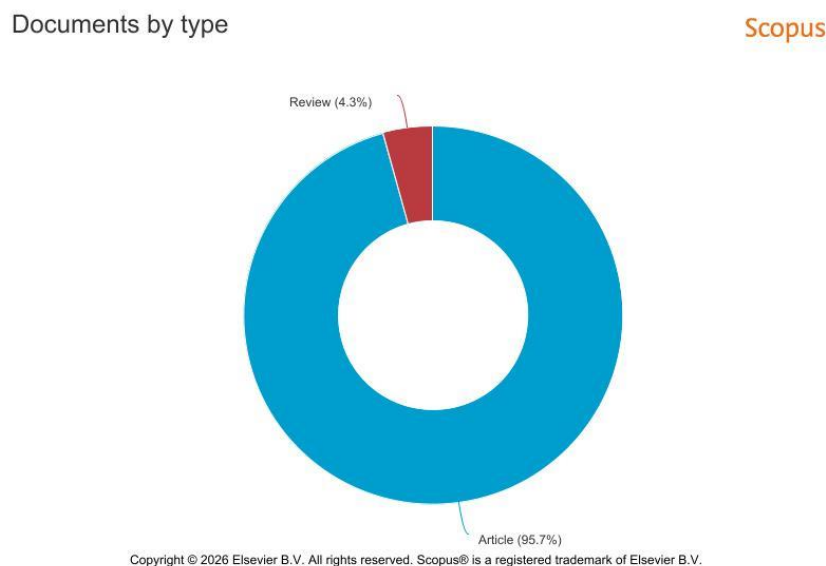


Figure 3. Documents by type (Scopus)

Articles are overwhelmingly the predominant type of paper (95.7%), a small number of which are review (4.3%). This distribution shows that most studies conducted in the field are aimed at developing and testing empirical evidence in individual studies, while there are relatively few

studies which aim to synthesize and integrate the existing knowledge and literature by systematic research. Although there is expanding evidence on the topic, the proportion of review studies is still relatively small, presenting an opportunity for further evidence

synthesis, the identification of consistent and conflicting findings, and the development of an integrated understanding of the field, including

through the use of meta-analytic studies, such as those by Howard et al. (2020).

4.3 Subject Area

Documents by subject area

Scopus

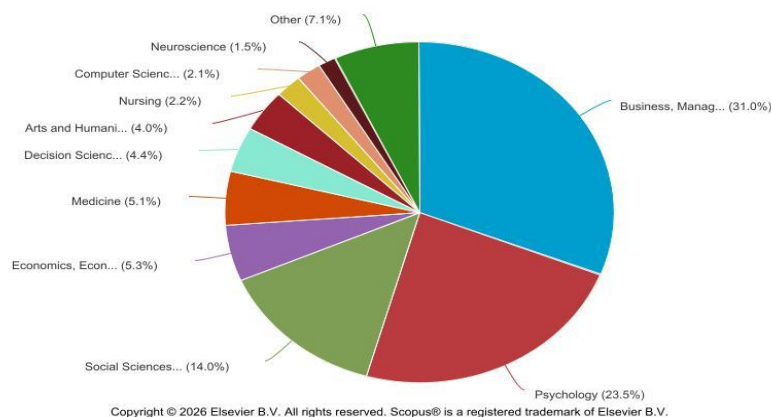


Figure 4. Documents by subject area (Scopus)

More than half of the publications are from two disciplines: Business, Management and Accounting (31.0%) and Psychology (23.5%). This is further reinforced by the presence of Social Sciences (14.0%) and Economics, Econometrics and Finance (5.3%) as well as by the presence of Medicine (5.1%), Decision Sciences (4.4%), Nursing (2.2%) and Neuroscience (1.5%) indicating a smaller but

significant stream of research activity in healthcare and clinical environments. The spread of this focus would indicate that the concept of WO is in line with the interdisciplinary, integrated understanding of ostracism expected by Robinson et al. (2013) but is conceptually grounded in organisational psychology.

4.4 Geographic Distribution

Documents by country or territory

Scopus

Compare the document counts for up to 15 countries/territories.

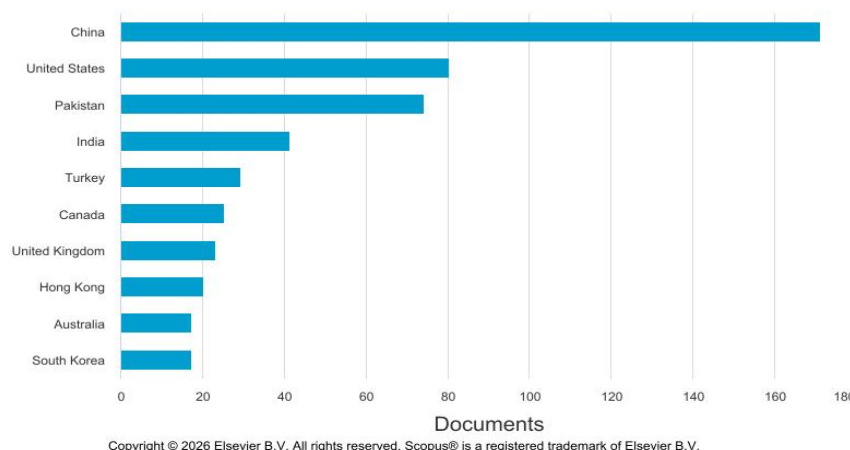


Figure 5. Documents by country or territory (Scopus, top 10)

China is the top contributor to Workplace Ostracism (WO) research with 172 publications, well ahead of the second- and third-place United States (80) and Pakistan (74). Among the

remaining top ten, India (41) is next, followed by Turkey (29), Canada (25), the United Kingdom (23), Hong Kong (20), and Australia and South Korea (17 each). The three biggest

contributors (China, the United States, and Pakistan) combined provide 326 of the 498 publications from the top ten countries/territories, or about 65.5% of the top ten output. The high number of Chinese, Pakistani, Indian, Hong Kong and South Korean

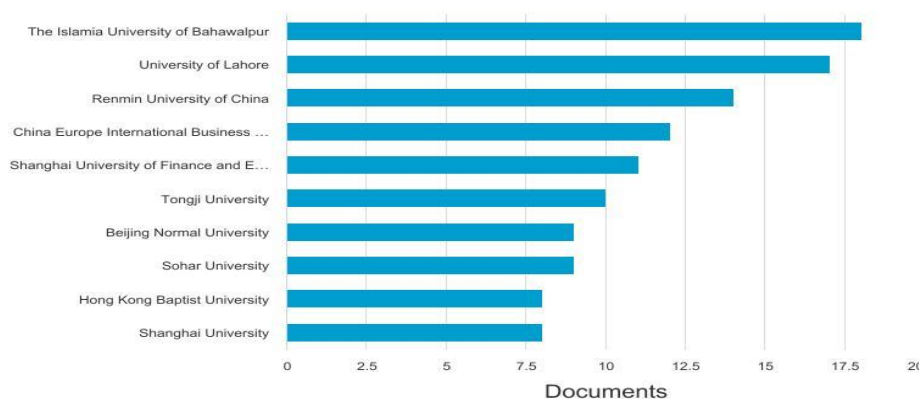
contributors exemplifies the high profile of Asian research contexts in the evolution of WO scholarship. However, the involvement of the U.S., Canada, the U.K., and Australia suggests that studies on workplace ostracism have grown in Asian and Western organizations.

4.5 Institutional Distribution

Documents by affiliation

Compare the document counts for up to 15 affiliations.

Scopus



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Figure 6. Documents by affiliation (Scopus, top 10)

Institutions with the highest number of documents on Workplace Ostracism were The Islamia University of Bahawalpur (18), and University of Lahore (17). Six institutions are affiliated with China, while China is the top country leader. There is strong institutional participation with six institutions appearing on

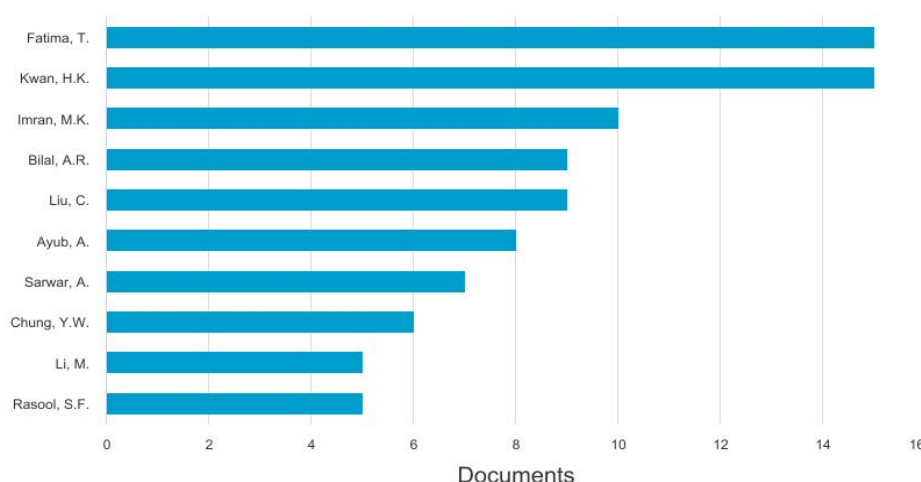
the top affiliations. Overall, the findings show a research landscape that is diverse both geographically and institutionally, with China's contribution spread across many institutions, and Pakistan's concentrated in a small number of highly productive universities.

4.6 Author Productivity

Documents by author

Compare the document counts for up to 15 authors.

Scopus



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Figure 7. Documents by author (Scopus, top 10)

Fatima, T. and Kwan, H.K. are jointly the most prolific authors, each with 15 documents,

followed by Imran, M.K. (10), Bilal, A.R. and Liu, C. (9 each), Ayub, A. (8), Sarwar, A. (7), Chung, Y.W. (6), and Li, M. and Rasool, S.F. (5 each). Several of these authors have shaped the field's theoretical direction rather than simply contributing volume: Kwan established the link between workplace exclusion and reduced employee creativity through diminished task resources and engagement (Kwan et al., 2018), while Fatima co-authored an early, widely cited

model establishing emotional exhaustion and defensive silence as mediating mechanisms between ostracism and interpersonal deviance (Jahanzeb & Fatima, 2018). Imran, Fatima, and Sarwar have also co-authored together — for instance, on employee performance and ostracism through a self-control lens (Imran, Fatima, Sarwar, & Iqbal, 2023) suggesting a relatively close-knit network of scholars rather than a dispersed set of independent contributors.

4.7 Funding Sponsors

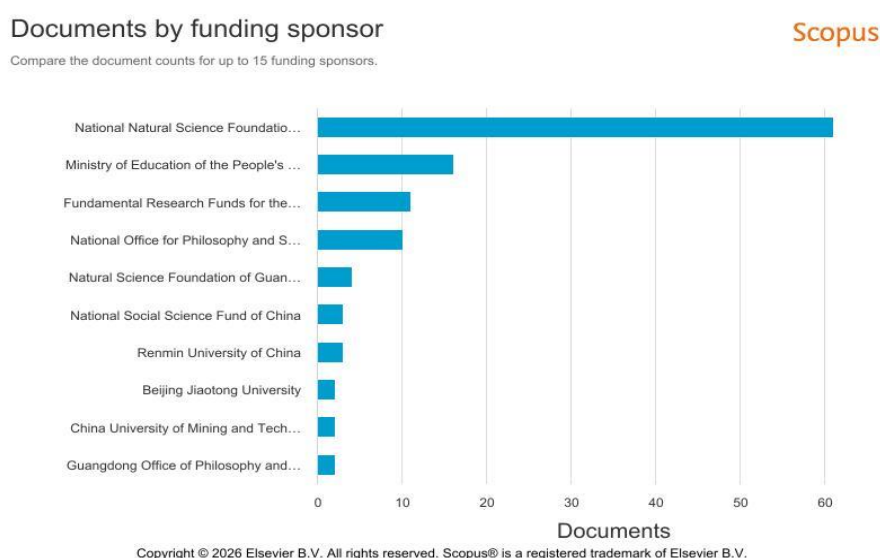


Figure 8. Documents by funding sponsor (Scopus, top 10)

Funding acknowledgements are strongly dominated by Chinese government-funded agencies. The National Natural Science Foundation of China is the leading sponsor, acknowledged in approximately 61 documents, followed by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (16), Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities (11), and National Office for Philosophy and Social Science (10). Other sponsors, including

the Natural Science Foundation of Guangdong (4), National Social Science Fund of China (3), and individual Chinese universities, make smaller contributions. Notably, the leading Pakistani institutions do not appear among the major funding sponsors, suggesting that their research output may be less dependent on large-scale competitive national funding compared with Chinese institutions.

4.8 Journal (Source) Trends

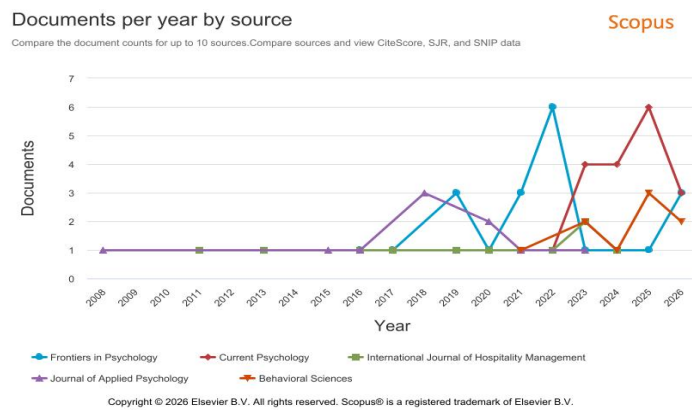


Figure 9. Documents per year by source, top 5 journals (Scopus)

The journals with the highest recent growth are Frontiers in Psychology and Current Psychology with both having 6 documents each. The Workplace Ostracism Scale was originally created and validated in the Journal of Applied Psychology by Ferris et al. (2008), revealing slightly more activity, with a maximum of 3 documents in 2018-2019. The average number of articles per year in International Journal of

Hospitality Management (2008-2026) shows consistent level of interest in WO in the hospitality and service research field. Behavioral Sciences is a newer, but growing, outlet, dating back to 2021 and growing to 3 documents in 2025. Overall, it appears that there has been a shift from basic research to more widespread and varied publication channels over the last few years.

4.9 Keyword co-occurrence network

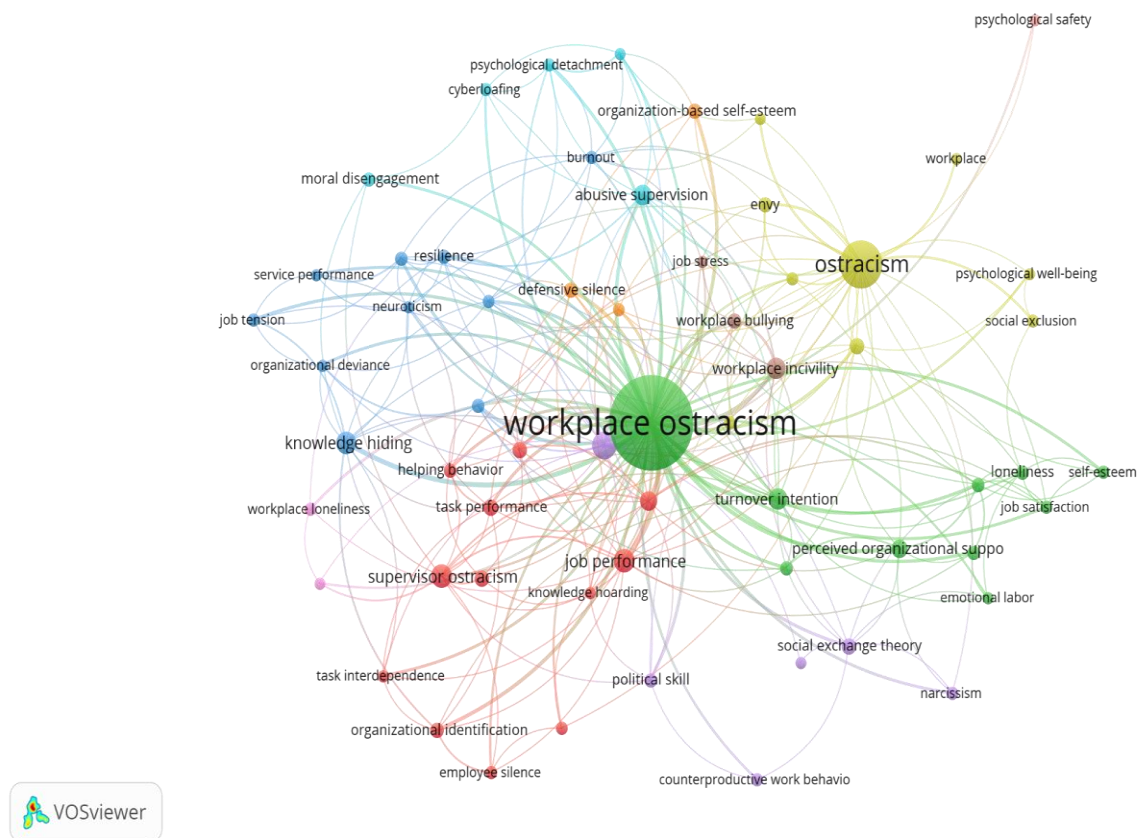


Figure 10. Keyword co-occurrence network (VOSviewer)

The keyword network also highlights two key

words, "workplace ostracism" and "ostracism,"

that are the most significant in the map, and that reflect the field's core constructs. This is surrounded by five different clusters. The longest of these links between individual traits and withdrawal behaviors of knowledge hiding and defensive silence has 8–10 terms. A second group of comparable size outlines disengagement processes from abusive supervision which include psychological detachment, cyberloafing, and burnout. The third cluster centered around "ostracism" encompasses envy, job stress, workplace bullying, and psychological safety. A fourth cluster links ostracism to organizational

outcomes including job satisfaction and intention to quit the organization, where the strongest link is with perceived organizational support. A 5th, smaller group of smaller nodes single out "supervisor ostracism" as a separate node associated with task performance and employee silence away from the general ostracism node. Some terms are also at the periphery (narcissism, social exchange theory, political skill, counterproductive work behavior), with only 1–2 links each, suggesting that these terms were not very well integrated in the general framework of the field's core terms when the search was performed in June 2026.

4.10 Country Citation Network

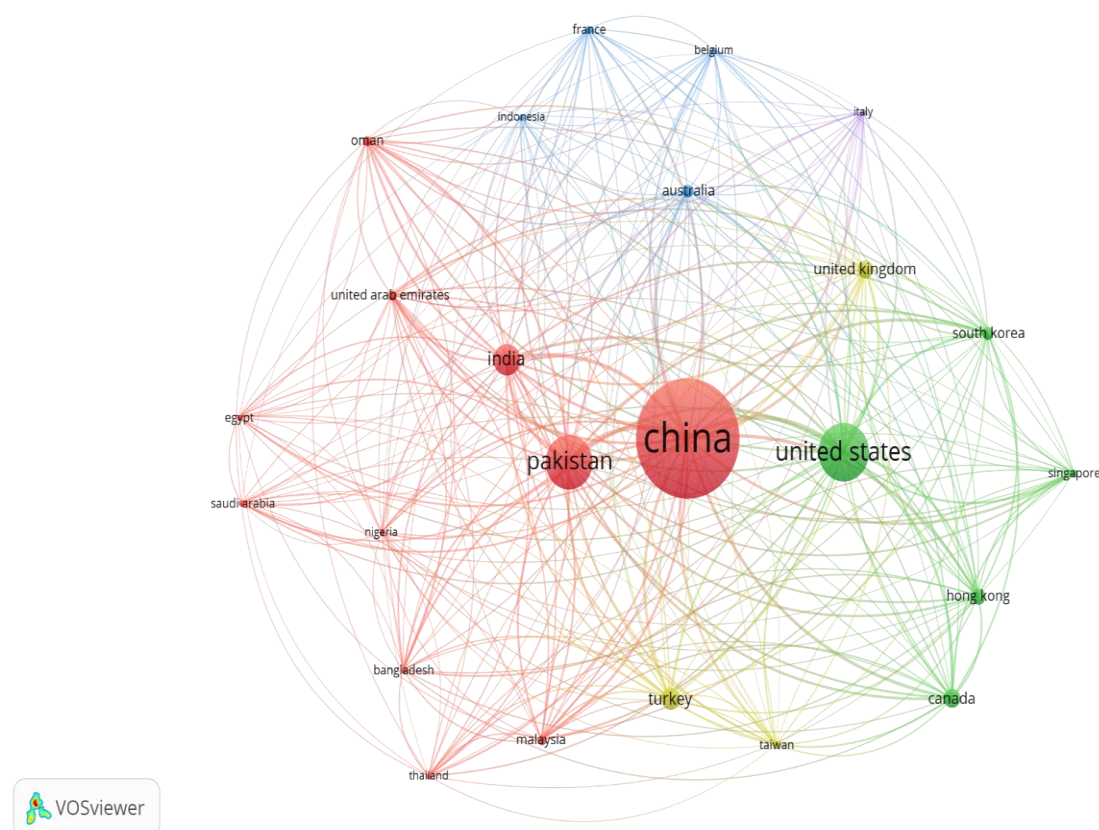


Figure 11. Country citation network based on bibliographic coupling (VOSviewer)

China is the central node and largest node in the network, suggesting the highest overall citation linkage between China and all other countries in the field, followed by the United States and Pakistan. The network is structured around four main clusters: South Asia–Middle East (China, Pakistan, India), a developed-economy cluster

(United States), a smaller Turkey–Taiwan cluster, and a European cluster (France, Belgium, Australia), with Italy positioned at the intersection of the clusters. The location and size of China in all four clusters suggest a dominant role as a 'transitional country' that serves as a link between distinct regional

citation communities.

5. Discussion

This section returns to each research question posed in Section 2 and interprets the corresponding results in light of the wider workplace ostracism literature.

RQ1. What is the annual publication trend of workplace ostracism research?

Over the last decade, the number of publications has more than doubled and the field of WO has moved from being a specialized area to a mainstream one in organisational behaviour research. The single visible drop (2019 to 2020) happens at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is documented to have impacted non-pandemic-related academic research generally (Raynaud et al., 2021; Myers et al., 2020) particularly methods of data collection, such as employee surveys and access to organiser, that rely on field work. The apparent drop in 2026 may be attributed to indexing delay of articles rather than loss of scholarly interest, because the empirical study of the indexing timelines revealed that only about 91% of articles are indexed within 10 weeks of publication; with a median delay of about 36 days and some articles taking much longer (Adeosun, 2024). This results in a significant portion of the production from a full calendar year being outside the indexed corpus when retrieved, creating a down curve that is not to be interpreted as a decrease in research interest.

RQ2. Which subject areas and document types dominate workplace ostracism publications?

The focus of output on Business, Management and Accounting (31.0%) and Psychology (23.5%) coexists with a significant proportion in Social Sciences, Economics, Medicine, Decision Sciences and Nursing, suggesting that the cross-disciplinary and integrative treatment recommended for the field's foundational review (Robinson, O'Reilly, & Wang, 2013) has been partially realised. The 95.7%-article-to-4.3%-review ratio also indicates that this field is largely in a data-generating stage with sufficient space for more integrative or systematic-review papers to follow.

RQ3. Which countries and institutions lead in

publishing workplace ostracism research?

China, the United States, and Pakistan lead country-level output, while institutional productivity is led by two Pakistani universities ahead of a broader cluster of Chinese institutions. Because cultural values such as individualism and collectivism are known to moderate how ostracism is experienced and how targets respond to it (Li, Xu, & Kwan, 2021), this concentration matters beyond simple output counts: it indicates where the field's evidence base is thickest, and by the same logic where it is thinnest. Regions and organisational contexts outside this core (for example, WO among educators in Indian higher education) represent clear opportunities for cross-cultural replication and extension rather than duplication of an already well-covered context.

RQ4. Which authors have contributed most to workplace ostracism research?

Fatima, T. and Kwan, H.K. are the field's most prolific contributors, and their work, along with that of Imran, Bilal, Liu, Ayub, and Sarwar, has shaped several of the theoretical mechanisms emotional exhaustion, defensive silence, reduced creativity that now recur throughout the literature (Kwan et al., 2018; Jahanzeb & Fatima, 2018). For scholars new to the WO literature, these authors represent a practical entry point for citation tracing and literature-review scoping, in the same way that the Journal of Applied Psychology functions as the field's methodological reference point through its publication of the original Workplace Ostracism Scale (Ferris et al., 2008).

RQ5. Which funding sponsors support workplace ostracism research?

The overwhelming dominance of Chinese state funding bodies led by the National Natural Science Foundation of China indicates that a substantial share of the empirical WO literature has been produced under structured, competitively funded national research programmes. The fact that the highly productive institutions identified in RQ3 do not show up as the leading funding sponsors suggests a possible asymmetry in research infrastructure, namely that the field could be well institutionalized but without large scale institutional funding, and

lends further support to the broader observation that funding infrastructure is one marker, but not the only marker, of a field's institutionalisation (Donthu et al., 2021).

RQ6. Which journals are the primary outlets for workplace ostracism research? The construct was first established in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* by the original Workplace Ostracism Scale (Ferris et al., 2008) and there is early but relatively weak and diminishing growth in recent years in that journal, with the majority of growth since the original scale appearing in the journals *Frontiers in Psychology* and *Current Psychology*. The change also marks a centralisation of the field from the basic psychology outlet, the defining outlet of the construct, towards the new journals that published new WO articles with larger volumes and quicker turnaround, which is important for scholars in the field considering where to send their new WO articles.

RQ7. What are the dominant keyword co-occurrence patterns in workplace ostracism research, and which countries show the strongest citation linkages within the field?

The keyword network comprises of five themed clusters (individual characteristics and withdrawal behaviours: neuroticism, knowledge hiding; disengagement from supervisor mistreatment: psychological detachment, burnout; constructs related to ostracism: envy, job stress, workplace bullying; organisational outcomes: turnover intention, job satisfaction, perceived organisational support, and a separate sub-theme on supervisor ostracism related to task performance and employee silence). Narcissism, political skill, and counterproductive work behavior appear only as peripheral, weakly connected terms, pointing to underdeveloped strands of the field that could see further attention.

The country-level citation network reveals that China is the most important and well-connected node, followed by the United States and Pakistan. Four regional clusters are identified: South Asia – Middle East (China, Pakistan, India); developed-economy (United States); smaller Turkey – Taiwan; and European (France, Belgium, Australia). China has the

largest link with all four clusters, playing a predominant role as a bridge country in the field.

In broad terms, individual, relational, and organizational mechanisms of ostracism are the foundation for the field, its source is increasingly studied, and the field's geographic core and bridge is China.

6. Limitations and Future Research Directions

6.1 Limitations

There are some limitations that should be noted in the interpretation of the results of this study. First, the search strategy was primarily based on the term "Workplace Ostracism" which could have limited the identification of relevant studies that explore similar experiences and phenomena by using different terms (e.g. workplace exclusion, social exclusion at work, employee exclusion, or perceived exclusion). The retrieved data might not, therefore, constitute the whole set of data for the literature on workplace ostracism. Second, only the Scopus database was used in the study. Scopus covers a wide range of disciplines, but its indexing methods vary from other databases, such as Web of Science and Google Scholar. Thus, the publications which are not indexed in Scopus might not have been captured. Thirdly, the analysis covers partial-year results for 2026, and the numbers of publications for that year may be revised upwards as more results continue to be indexed.

6.2 Future Research Directions

Future studies could overcome these drawbacks by using a wider and more extensive search that includes a combination of keywords and related concepts to workplace ostracism. Boolean search strings and multilingual search terms can possibly further enhance the literature retrieval of relevant literature in various geographical and linguistic contexts. It is recommended that future studies examine the possibility of integrating Scopus with other databases like Web of Science and other important references in order to have a better database coverage and comparison. In addition, future studies might benefit from the use of co-citation or co-

authorship network analysis methods, such as VOSviewer, Bibliometrix or CiteSpace, to further understand the intellectual and social history of the study of workplace ostracism. Long-term or ongoing research, involving periodic updates to the data set beyond the 2026 time frame, may also reveal new trends in research and in the field over time. Finally, findings from the bibliometric analysis might be supported by systematic reviews and qualitative content analysis to review the theories, methodologies, contexts, measurement approaches, and empirical findings associated with the quantitative findings. This holistic perspective would lead to a deeper understanding of the development, current status and future research potential of workplace ostracism scholarship.

7. Conclusion

This bibliometric analysis of 467 Scopus-indexed articles and reviews confirms that workplace ostracism has developed into a mature and rapidly growing stream of organisational behaviour research, anchored primarily in Business, Management, and Psychology, and disproportionately driven by scholarship from China and Pakistan. Returning

to the seven research questions posed at the outset, the evidence base remains overwhelmingly empirical rather than integrative, is concentrated among a relatively small set of highly productive authors, institutions, journals, and funding bodies, and is expanding at a rate that shows no sign of genuine slowdown once partial-year and pandemic-era artefacts are accounted for. The keyword co-occurrence network further reveals a field organised around individual, relational, and organisational mechanisms of disengagement, with an emerging emphasis on identifying the source of ostracism, while the country citation network confirms China as the field's central bridging node linking otherwise distinct regional communities of scholarship. For doctoral and early-career researchers extending the WO literature whether into new outcome variables, new moderating mechanisms, or new organisational and cultural contexts these patterns point to clear opportunities: broadening the geographic and sectoral base of WO evidence, and contributing integrative synthesis work that the field's current review-to-article ratio suggests is still comparatively scarce.

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