

USU Research Shows Feeling Ostracized at Work Negatively Impacts Families

07/31/2019

New research from Utah State University's Jon M. Huntsman School of Business indicates 66% of employees experience some form of ostracism at work, which can create a significant negative impact on both the employee and the employee's family.

"When a person feels ostracized at work, he or she is even more likely to feel emotionally exhausted by their job than someone who has experienced really egregious behaviors like sexual harassment or an abusive boss," said Merideth Thompson, management department professor at USU's Huntsman School. "If your supervisor yells at you, at least it signals you're worth the time and energy. But feeling unnoticed in meetings or being the only person sitting alone in the office lunchroom signals you aren't. You begin to wonder what's wrong with you or whether you're intentionally being overlooked."

Because people tend to ruminate more on feeling ignored or snubbed at work, it can create psychological distress that crosses over into home life, Thompson said.

Thompson and colleagues at Baylor University, Temple University and Texas State University authored an article entitled *The Cost of Being Ignored: Emotional Exhaustion in the Work and Family Domains*, which was recently published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*.

Their research shows that of the respondents who said they had experienced some form of workplace ostracism, 68% reported feeling burned out at home. Interestingly, 82% of their spouses reported that the worker engaged in family undermining at home (e.g., acting in an unpleasant or angry manner when they came home from work, or taking out work frustrations on family members). What's more, 70% of those spouses indicated that they then felt burned out by family life.

"We've learned through this study and others that work and family life are completely interwoven; when a person feels ostracized at work, it's contagious," Thompson said. "They're more likely to feel dissatisfied with their job, which triggers them act out toward their family. This leads to their spouse also feeling unhappy in their home life, potentially causing the spouse to take out those frustrations at their own workplace."

Although ostracism flies under the radar in most organizations, companies can take extra steps to prevent it. Managers should be aware of how they treat others and the culture they model, Thompson said. Preventing ostracism could also be integrated into organizational policies, for example, considering collegiality and respect as part of the recruiting, onboarding and performance appraisal processes.