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When solitude accelerates disengagement: The moderating role of positive solitude in the relationship between organizational ostracism and job embeddedness

Hande Tasa
İstanbul Aydin University
Gökçe Özkılıçcı
gokce.ozkilicci@fbu.edu.tr

Fenerbahçe University

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Hande Tasa [a] and Gökçe Özkılıççı[b]*

[a]*Department of Psychology, İstanbul Aydin University, İstanbul, Türkiye;*

[b]*Department of Psychology, Fenerbahce University, İstanbul, Türkiye*

[a] Hande Tasa, Ph.D., received her B.A. in Psychology from Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University in 2007 and her M.A. in Human Resources from Marmara University in 2012. She earned her Ph.D. in Psychology from the Graduate School of Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University in 2021 with her doctoral dissertation titled "The Relationship of Diversity Climate, Managerial Attitudes, and Employee Cognitive Flexibility with Prejudices."

Her primary research interests include diversity, discrimination, social cognition, and organizational behavior. Dr. Tasa has authored articles in peer-reviewed scholarly journals, presented her work at national and international conferences, and actively serves as a reviewer for various scientific publications. She is currently a faculty member in the Department of Psychology at Istanbul Aydın University.

[b] Gökçe Özkılıççı, Ph.D., received his B.A. from Istanbul University in 2009 and his M.A. from Marmara University in 2011. He completed his Ph.D. at Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University in 2020.

His primary research interests include social psychology, political psychology, organizational behavior, and occupational health psychology, with a particular focus on political behavior, cognitive flexibility, workload, and financial stress. Dr. Özkılıççı has published extensively in peer-reviewed national and international scientific journals. He currently serves as an Assistant Professor at Fenerbahçe University.

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Abstract

Organizations constitute primary social environments in which fundamental psychological needs are fulfilled. Drawing on Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, this study examines the effect of organisational ostracism on job embeddedness and investigates the comparatively underexplored moderating role of positive solitude. Data were obtained through convenience sampling from 458 non-managerial employees (312 women, 146 men; M_{age} = 34.20) with a minimum organizational tenure of one year. The hypotheses were tested using Pearson's product–moment correlation and Hayes' PROCESS macro (Model 1). The findings revealed a significant negative association between organisational ostracism and job embeddedness (r = −.258, p < .01). Moreover, positive solitude significantly moderated this relationship (F(3, 454) = 15.922, p < .001, R^2 = .095). Contrary to expectations, the detrimental effect of workplace ostracism on job embeddedness was substantially stronger for employees reporting high levels of positive solitude (b = −0.406, p < .001) than for those reporting low levels of positive solitude (b = −0.133, p < .05). These results indicate that individuals who inherently value autonomous solitude are more likely to conserve their remaining psychological and social resources by retreating into self-selected solitary states when confronted with social exclusion, instead of actively seeking reintegration and acceptance within the organization. Accordingly, rather than functioning as a protective buffer, positive solitude appears to operate as a catalyst that amplifies and accelerates organizational disengagement in the context of workplace ostracism. This study offers distinctive theoretical and practical contributions by challenging the widely held assumption that positive solitude is uniformly protective within organizational behavior settings.

Keywords: Organizational ostracism, Job embeddedness, Positive solitude, Conservation of resources theory.

Introduction

Organizations are not merely sites of economic production; they constitute critical social environments wherein individuals fulfill fundamental human needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Consequently, organizational effectiveness and competitive advantage increasingly rely on social capital—the aggregate of actual and potential resources accessed and mobilized through relational networks (Akbaş, 2024; Bourdieu, 1986). Systematic exclusion from these networks severely threatens both individual and collective functioning. Specifically, organizational ostracism—defined as the experience of being

ignored, excluded, or marginalized in the workplace (Williams, 2002)—thwarts four fundamental psychological needs: belongingness, self-esteem, perceived control, and a sense of meaningful existence (Williams, 2009). By depriving employees of vital social and personal resources, ostracism disrupts critical collaborative processes like knowledge sharing while heightening psychosocial risks such as workplace stress.

Grounded in Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll, 1989), individuals exposed to ostracism frequently adopt withdrawal behaviors as a strategic response to conserve their remaining psychological and social resources. A critical construct vulnerable to this resource depletion is work embeddedness, conceptualized as the web of financial, social, and psychological ties that anchor employees to their job and organization, thereby increasing the costs and difficulty of leaving (Mitchell et al., 2001). Empirical evidence confirms that employees subjected to ostracism tend to experience organizational alienation (Deniz & Çimen, 2024), along with marked reductions in work embeddedness and organizational commitment (Ferris et al., 2008; Lyu & Zhu, 2019). Nevertheless, because these adverse consequences do not manifest uniformly across all individuals or organizational settings, important boundary conditions and moderating mechanisms must exist. In particular, the subjective meaning attributed to solitude and the cognitive-behavioral strategies individuals deploy to manage exclusion may significantly shape the extent to which ostracism erodes work embeddedness.

While solitude is traditionally conceptualized as a painful (Karnick, 2005) and distressing state arising from a perceived gap between desired and actual social relationships (Bryan et al., 2025), it also affords opportunities to direct attention toward activities and cognitions of personal relevance (Long & Averill, 2003). Within organizational contexts, solitude can be reconceptualized as a developmental resource that fosters personal growth and enhances work performance (Fullagar & Kelloway, 2009). A positive appraisal of solitude may enable employees to compensate for ostracism-induced social deficits by mobilizing internal psychological resources, thereby attenuating the negative impact of workplace ostracism on job embeddedness. By addressing the predominant focus on the negative dimensions of solitude in the literature, this study provides an alternative theoretical lens on the construct. Specifically, by examining the moderating role of positive solitude in the relationship between organizational ostracism and job embeddedness, this research aims to offer both theoretical advancements and practical organizational implications.

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

Organizational Ostracism and Job Embeddedness

Organizational ostracism denotes an employee's subjective experience of being deliberately or inadvertently ignored, excluded, or socially marginalized by colleagues in the workplace (Howard et al., 2020; Lyu & Zhu, 2019; Williams, 2002). Due to its severe impact on psychological safety, this phenomenon is often conceptualized as a form of "social death" (Li et al., 2021; Williams & Nida, 2022). By impeding the development of a cohesive social identity—a critical condition for successful organizational integration (Haldorai et al., 2020; Metz et al., 2022)—ostracism induces substantial psychological strain, including heightened stress, depressive symptoms, and feelings of loneliness (Brandt et al., 2022; Nelson, 2017). Furthermore, ostracism fundamentally undermines four core human needs: belongingness, self-esteem, perceived control, and a sense of meaningful existence (Williams, 2002; Williams, 2009). The resulting need frustration triggers automatic defensive responses and cognitive-emotional strain as individuals strive to restore or compensate for these lost resources (Meral et al., 2023). Unfavorable self-appraisals may also spark maladaptive behavioral responses—such as aggression, social withdrawal, or defiance—which reinforce group exclusion in a self-perpetuating, cyclical process (Lei et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2024).

Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) offers a stress-based framework by positioning social exclusion as a continuous depletion of valued resources. Driven to safeguard existing resources while striving to acquire new ones (Fan et al., 2025), employees facing ostracism experience salient losses across both social (e.g., social support, information sharing, network access) and personal domains (e.g., psychological energy, self-esteem, control). To attenuate further loss, individuals typically engage in defensive resource-investment strategies (Qian & Zhou, 2026). Consequently, the stress stemming from both realized depletion and the perceived threat of future losses compels employees to allocate their remaining resources toward defensive coping efforts rather than productive, task-related activities (Al-Atwi, 2017; Hobfoll, 1989; Manninen et al., 2023).

In addition to the loss of social networks resulting from organizational ostracism, the depletion of resources induced by exclusion can adversely influence work embeddedness, a construct that facilitates employees' integration into the organization and promotes job retention. Work embeddedness, as metaphorically conceptualized by Mitchell et al. (2001), denotes the constellation of connections, congruence, and commitments that anchor employees to their current position and employing organization. These anchoring forces encompass both work-related components (i.e., factors directly associated with the job, role, and organizational

culture) and non-work-related components (i.e., employees' ties to their community, broader social networks, and family life).

Collectively, these elements—encompassing social, psychological, and financial linkages—serve to embed the individual within their job, organization, and community, thereby increasing the perceived difficulty or costs associated with leaving (Heritage, 2016). Within this framework, work embeddedness is associated less with employees' affective attachment or subjective feelings toward the organization and more with contextual and predominantly objective factors (Allen et al., 2016). The construct is grounded in the perceived balance between the costs incurred by the employee and the psychological benefits obtained (Yoon et al., 2022).

Employees' perceived managerial support (Giosan, 2004), organizational fit and positive relationships with employers (Giosan, 2004; Robinson et al., 2014), as well as workplace social support (Dechawatanapaisal, 2025), have been identified as key antecedents that positively influence the level of job embeddedness. Empirical evidence indicates that higher job embeddedness across various sectors is associated with reduced turnover intentions and enhanced organizational commitment (Coetzer et al., 2019). Furthermore, job embeddedness has been found to predict a range of favorable outcomes, including improved job performance, increased organizational citizenship behavior, and greater innovation (Li et al., 2021; Ng & Feldman, 2010; Yamin, 2022).

Conversely, experiences of exclusion appear to sever workplace ties and disrupt organizational harmony. Such experiences can function as salient stressors that diminish job embeddedness by eroding employees' sense of belonging, self-esteem, and the quality of their interpersonal relationships. When the strain resulting from these losses cannot be effectively alleviated, employees are likely to reduce their level of job embeddedness in an effort to conserve scarce personal resources, such as time and energy.

H1: Organizational exclusion is negatively associated with employees' job embeddedness.

Positive Solitude, Organizational Ostracism, and Job Embeddedness

Solitude is inherently subjective, and workplace solitude constitutes a subjective psychological state that reflects an individual's perceived deficiency in social connections (Ozcelik & Barsade, 2018; Wax et al., 2022). Workplace solitude, which parallels the broader construct of solitude, can be defined as a subjectively aversive experience arising from a discrepancy

between the quality or quantity of social relationships an individual desires in the workplace and those that are actually available (Bryan et al., 2025; Gafoor, 2020). In particular, insufficient social or instrumental support has been identified as a robust predictor of solitude-related feelings; employees are prone to experience isolation when they do not receive adequate guidance or emotional support from supervisors and colleagues (Stoica et al., 2014; Wax et al., 2022). Likewise, an organisational culture in which employees' competencies, achievements, and contributions are insufficiently acknowledged tends to engender perceptions of invisibility and worthlessness, which in turn directly exacerbate experiences of solitude (Basit & Nauman, 2023; D'Oliveira & Persico, 2022).

Solitude in the workplace severely threatens both individual well-being and organizational effectiveness. At the individual level, this resource-depleting experience is linked to adverse health outcomes—such as burnout, anxiety, depression, and emotional exhaustion (Basit & Nauman, 2023; Bryan et al., 2025)—alongside reduced job satisfaction and alienation (Amarat et al., 2019). Organizationally, it impairs information sharing, task and team performance (Cheng et al., 2023; LaBella & van Knippenberg, 2024), and affective commitment, thereby driving turnover intentions, hindering career growth, and increasing employer costs (Bryan et al., 2023; Sasaki et al., 2025). Highlighting its severity, Özçelik and Barsade (2018) found that the negative impact of workplace solitude on commitment and performance is at least three times stronger than that of non-work solitude.

Conversely, literature at the intersection of organizational studies and positive psychology highlights the potential benefits of solitude as a mechanism for personal growth and enhanced performance (Fullagar & Kelloway, 2009). When properly supported, solitude fosters professional development through creativity, self-reflection, and critical self-assessment (Long & Averill, 2003).

A key distinction exists between negative "imposed solitude" and positive "chosen solitude." Positive solitude involves voluntarily spending time alone to engage in meaningful activities that foster emotion regulation, introspection, self-awareness, and psychological well-being (Chen & Liu, 2022; Ost-Mor et al., 2024; Thomas, 2023), eliciting feelings of peace, satisfaction, and relaxation (Ost-Mor et al., 2024; Shiovitz-Ezra et al., 2018).

Building on this, Sampson (2024) introduced "Autonomous Motivation for Solitude," defined as the intrinsic desire for solitude rather than avoidance driven by social anxiety or fear. For these individuals, alone time serves as a psychological resource buffering against social and organizational exclusion. Consequently, while organizational exclusion typically triggers

negative solitude (McCarthy et al., 2025), autonomously pursued positive solitude buffers against its harmful effects on psychological well-being (Sampson, 2024).

Individuals aim to satisfy their needs and/or remove conditions that hinder the fulfilment of those needs. Accordingly, in situations involving social exclusion—specifically, when the need for relatedness is threatened—work immersion may function as a compensatory mechanism for the loss of social approval. A central determinant in this process is whether solitude is construed as an expression of the need for autonomy. That is, when individuals interpret solitude as a context for self-liberation that attenuates the adverse consequences of ostracism, they may allocate greater cognitive and behavioral resources to work-related activities in which they can exhibit and validate their competencies.

H2: Positive solitude moderates the association between organizational ostracism and job embeddedness.

Method

Research Population and Sample

The study population comprised employees aged 19–65 years who had been employed at the same company for more than one year and did not occupy managerial positions. Through convenience sampling, a total of 458 employees (312 men and 146 women) were recruited. Their tenure ranged from 12 to 432 months ($\overline{x}$ = 66.29, SD = 68.70). The mean age of the participants was 34.20 ± 9.64 years. The sociodemographic characteristics of the participants are summarized in Table 1.

Ethical considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the American Psychological Association Code of Ethics and the Declaration of Helsinki, and received approval from the Social and Human Sciences Research and Publication Ethics Committee of İstanbul Aydın University (Approval No: 2025/11, dated 16.10.2025).

Table I INSERT HERE

Data Collection Tools

Data were collected from participants via Google Forms using the Sociodemographic Information Form, the Organizational Ostracism Scale, the Job Embeddedness Scale, and the Positive Solitude Scale.

Sociodemographic Information Form: Within the scope of the study, participants were asked to report their age, gender, educational attainment, industry of employment, total years of work experience, job title, and income level.

Organizational Ostracism Scale: Employees' perceptions of organizational ostracism in Türkiye were assessed using the scale developed by Abaslı and Özdemir (2019), which was adapted from the "Workplace Exclusion" scale by Ferris et al. (2008). The instrument consists of 14 items rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Abaslı and Özdemir (2019) reported an internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's α) of .95. In the present study, the internal consistency coefficient was calculated as α = .94.

Positive Solitude Scale: Positive solitude was measured using the scale adapted into Turkish by Kaşıkcı and Zaferoğlu Kaşıkcı (2021). This instrument comprises 9 items rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale. The original adaptation study reported an internal consistency coefficient of α = .81, whereas the internal consistency coefficient obtained in the current study was α = .91.

Job Embeddedness Scale: Job embeddedness was measured using the Job Embeddedness Scale developed by Crossley et al. (2007) and adapted into Turkish by Kesen and Akyüz (2016). The scale consists of 7 items rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale, with Item 6 reverse-coded. Kesen and Akyüz (2016) reported a reliability coefficient of α = .91; in the present study, the internal consistency coefficient was determined to be α = .94.

Findings

For the assessment of univariate normality, the kurtosis and skewness coefficients were examined and found to fall within the interval of ±1.5 (Table 2). Visual inspection of the box plots indicated the absence of outliers. On this basis, the data were judged to approximate a normal distribution (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013), thereby justifying the application of parametric statistical procedures.

Table II INSERT HERE

A Pearson product–moment correlation analysis was performed to investigate the associations among the study variables. The results indicated that job embeddedness was significantly and negatively associated with organizational exclusion ($r = -0.258$, $p < .01$) and significantly and positively associated with positive solitude ($r = 0.175$, $p < .01$) (see Table 3).

Table III INSERT HERE

PROCESS Macro Model 1 was employed to investigate the moderating effect of positive solitude. The results of the moderation analysis indicated that the moderating role of positive solitude in the relationship between organizational exclusion and job embeddedness was statistically significant, $F(3, 454) = 15.922$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .095$ (see Table 4).

Table IV INSERT HERE

Under conditions characterized by low levels of positive solitude, the effect of organizational exclusion on job embeddedness was relatively weak ($b = -0.133$, $p < .05$), whereas under conditions of high positive solitude, this negative predictive relationship was substantially stronger ($b = -0.406$, $p < .001$; Table 5). The simple slopes corresponding to this interaction effect are depicted in Figure 1.

Table V INSERT HERE

Figure I INSERT HERE

The analytical results indicate that, rather than attenuating the adverse impact of workplace ostracism, positive solitude amplifies the tendency for job embeddedness to diminish in response to ostracism. In other words, employees exhibiting high levels of positive solitude appear to be more susceptible to organizational disengagement—as reflected in reduced job embeddedness—when they experience ostracism in the workplace.

Discussion and conclusion

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the interrelationships among job embeddedness, organizational ostracism, and positive solitude, with particular emphasis on elucidating the moderating role of positive solitude in the association between organizational ostracism and job embeddedness. The empirical results demonstrate that the variables are significantly related in the theoretically anticipated directions; however, the construct of positive solitude is especially salient for the unique lens it provides in interpreting intraorganizational social dynamics and individual well-being.

Consistent with prior research, the findings confirm a statistically significant negative relationship between organizational ostracism and job embeddedness, as excluding or ignoring employees directly erodes their emotional and cognitive attachment to work (Lyu & Zhu, 2019). Grounded in COR Theory, social exclusion depletes psychological resources and restricts coworker support, impairing work performance (Xia et al., 2019), fostering emotional

exhaustion (Lee & Ashforth, 1996), and instilling doubts about personal competence (Williams, 2009). Consequently, ostracized employees—seeking to avoid an aversive environment—possess little motivation to re-engage with rejectors (Ferris et al., 2008; Li et al., 2021; Singh & Srivastava, 2021), leading to heightened counterproductive behaviors and organizational withdrawal (Ferris et al., 2009). These dynamics are further corroborated by evidence linking workplace loneliness and solitude-related stress to reduced job embeddedness, performance, and commitment (Jung et al., 2021; Sasaki, 2024).

The study's key contribution lies in elucidating the regulatory function of positive solitude, revealing that when individuals high in positive solitude experience exclusion, their job embeddedness declines more rapidly and steeply than those with low positive solitude. When confronted with workplace exclusion, self-sufficient individuals who derive satisfaction from solitude prefer withdrawing into comfortable solitary spaces rather than expending effort to rebuild social acceptance. While LaBella and van Knippenberg (2024) suggest dissatisfied employees might compensate by investing more in work tasks or organizational identity, those high in positive solitude detach rather than adopt compensatory strategies. Aligning with Bryan et al. (2023), who conceptualized workplace solitude as a multidimensional construct, these individuals interpret exclusion not as a crisis of social deprivation, but as evidence of organizational incompatibility, thereby lowering psychological barriers to severing organizational ties.

Alternatively, motivation for solitude among ostracized employees may serve concurrently as an avoidance strategy and an emotional recovery mechanism (Ren & Evans, 2021; Ren et al., 2021), pointing to a bidirectional dynamic wherein a preference for solitude is misinterpreted by peers, thereby eliciting further ostracizing behaviors. Furthermore, low organizational commitment and a diminished sense of belonging foster broader social disconnection (Ayazlar & Güzel, 2014; Wax et al., 2022; Yilmaz, 2008), prompting defensive social withdrawal and introverted behavior (Cheng et al., 2023). Together, these processes suggest that experiences of ostracism can engender a self-perpetuating cycle of social isolation, driving individuals toward deeper solitude and sustained disengagement from the organization.

In summary, the findings of this study indicate that positive perceptions of solitude do not invariably exert a protective effect; when combined with experiences of ostracism, they may instead operate as a catalyst that diminishes employees' organizational embeddedness. Employees who construe their solitary experiences in a positive manner may, following an

adverse event such as ostracism, distance themselves from organizational networks and from the organization as a whole as a strategy to conserve personal and psychological resources.

Given that this investigation employed a correlational design with data obtained through convenience sampling, inferences regarding causality and the generalizability of the results are necessarily constrained. Moreover, the study did not consider the role of emotional capital directed toward the organization or the need for relatedness in shaping these relationships. Future research should be designed to address these limitations and empirically examine the influence of these variables.

Data availability statement

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are available in the Open Science Framework (OSF) repository and can be accessed at https://osf.io/b4zmw/overview?view_only=1a3355a28a454a4cae4465fd9acf1e75

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Table I: Demographic characteristics of the sample

	f	%	*Valid %*	*Cumulative %*
Gender				
Female	312	68.1	68.1	68.1
Male	146	31.9	31.9	100.0
Education				
High school and below	89	19.4	19.4	19.4
Undergraduate	63	13.8	13.8	33.2
Bachelor's Degree	213	46.5	46.5	79.7
Graduate	93	20.3	20.3	100.0
Income				
Minimum wage	117	25.5	25.5	25.5
Twice the minimum wage	175	38.2	38.2	63.8
Three times the minimum wage	125	27.3	27.3	91.0
Four times the minimum wage or more	41	9.0	9.0	100.0
Sector				
Public	145	31.7	31.7	31.7
Private	313	68.3	68.3	100.0

Source: Authors own work

Table II: Descriptive statistics

	N	*Min.*	*Max.*	$\bar{x}$	*ss*	*Kur.*	*Skew.*	*α*
Organizational Ostracism	458	14.00	43.00	19.20	7.01	1.306	.875	.94
Positive Solitude	458	14.00	45.00	36.48	6.87	-.640	-.040	.91
Job Embeddedness	458	7.00	35.00	23.93	6.90	-.169	-.566	.94

Source: Authors own work

Table III: Relationships among the variables

Variable	*n*	$\bar{X}$	*SS*	1	2
Organizational Ostracism	458	19.20	7.01	-	
Positive Solitude	458	36.48	6.87	-.258**	-
Job Embeddedness	458	23.93	6.90	-.258**	.175**

**$p < .01$

Source: Authors own work

Table IV: Moderating effect of positive solitude in the relationship between organizational ostracism and job embeddedness

Variable	***B***	**SE**	**t**	**p**	**LLCI**	**ULCI**
Constant	11.181	4.986	2.242	.025	1.38	20.98
Organizational Ostracism	0.414	0.230	1.800	.073	-0.04	0.87
Positive Solitude	0.475	0.135	3.528	.001	0.21	0.74
OO × PS (Interaction)	-0.018	0.006	-2.832	.005	-0.03	-0.01

Dependent variable: Job Embeddedness
OO: Organizational Ostracism, PS: Positive Solitude
Source: Authors own work

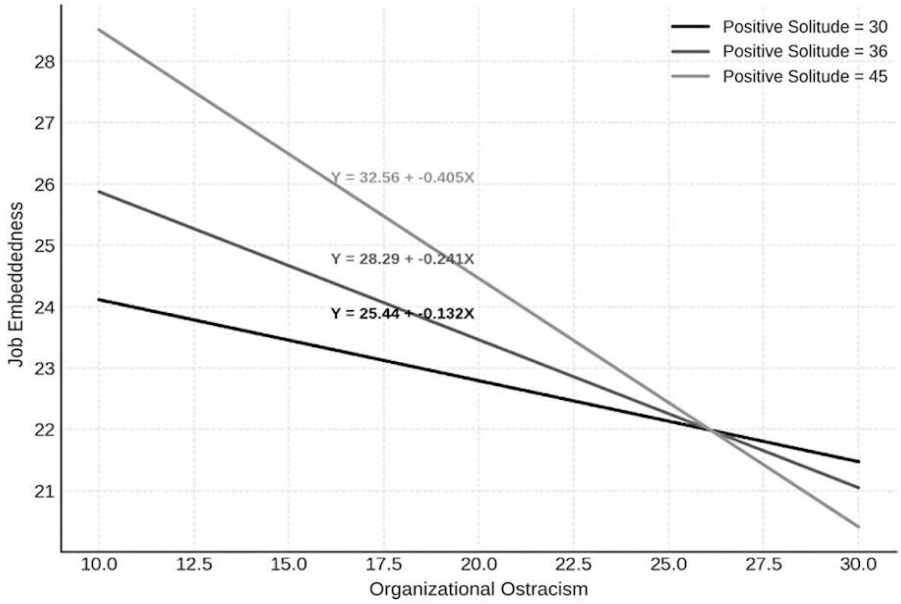
Table V: The predictive role of organizational ostracism at low, average, and high levels of positive solitude

Level of Positive Solitude	***B***	**SE**	**t**	**p**	**LLCI**	**ULCI**
30 (low)	-0.133	0.056	-2.376	.018	-0.24	-0.02
36 (average)	-0.242	0.046	-5.269	<.001	-0.33	-0.15
45 (high)	-0.406	0.079	-5.163	<.001	-0.56	-0.25

Dependent variable: Job Embeddedness

Source: Authors own work

Figure I: The predictive efficacy of the interaction between organizational ostracism and positive solitude in explaining variance in job embeddedness



Note. *The graph shows the effect of organizational ostracism on job embeddedness at low (-1 SD ≈ 30), medium (mean ≈ 36), and high (+1 SD ≈ 45) levels of positive solitude.*

Source: Authors own work