

# Romantic relationships between coworkers may deteriorate workplace culture

May 31 2023

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An intimate relationship may disrupt an intimate flow of knowledge in the absence of appropriate HR policies. Credit: JacksonDavid, Pixabay, CC0 ([creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/](https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/))

Workplace ostracism refers to an employee's perception of being

excluded, ignored, or rejected in the workplace. A study published in *PLOS ONE* by Jun Qiu at the School of Nanchang, Institute of Technology, Nanchang, Jiangxi, China and colleagues suggests that romantic relationships between coworkers are associated with perceived ostracism and knowledge sabotage by other colleagues.

Workplace romance can impact employees' work-related attitudes and behaviors, such as performance outcomes and [job satisfaction](#). However, the [relationship](#) between [workplace](#) romance and workplace ostracism is unclear.

To better understand whether [romantic relationships](#) between coworkers can lead them to ostracize others, social science researchers conducted a multisource, time-lagged research design to collect data from service sector employees in Pakistan.

They administered questionnaires to participants every eight weeks, three times, ultimately collecting responses from 343 individuals for a response rate of 69%. The [surveys](#) questioned participants about their relationship status, and attempted to measure workplace ostracism, such as being ignored at work, as well as knowledge sabotage, for example, a coworker supplying the wrong information or document. After collecting the final surveys, researchers analyzed the data using statistical software.

The researchers found that romantically involved [coworkers](#) were associated with feeling ostracized and sabotaged by other employees who may view their relationship unfavorably. However, future studies are needed to determine the generalizability of the experiment as the participants were all employed in Pakistan's service sector, which could be confounded by cultural variables.

Additionally, the researchers did not state how many of the 343 individuals were currently involved in a workplace romance. Gender

may also play a role in perceived ostracism. Future studies should also consider examining whether perceived ostracism increases after a workplace relationship ends.

According to the authors, "Though workplace romance should be a cornerstone of organizational interventions, a review of existing literature accentuates that only a few organizations maintain a workplace romance policy. Workplace romance is a committed and consensual relationship among two members and can have a range of implications on the constructive spectrum too. Organizations should conduct interpersonal training, which helps employees discern acceptable versus unacceptable behaviors in the workplace."

The authors add, "An intimate relationship may disrupt an intimate flow of knowledge in the absence of appropriate HR policies."

**More information:** Jun Qiu et al, Intimate but not intimate: The perils of workplace romance in fostering knowledge sabotage, *PLoS ONE* (2023). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0285837](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0285837)

Provided by Public Library of Science

Citation: Romantic relationships between coworkers may deteriorate workplace culture (2023, May 31) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-05-romantic-relationships-coworkers-deteriorate-workplace.html>

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