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Social exclusion at work and suicidal ideation: investigating the social pain and psychological pain pathways at work

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ABSTRACT

Social exclusion at work – the denial of social connections in the work domain – is a driver of poor performance and well-being for employees. Answering calls to better understand the antecedents of employee mental health, we propose suicidal ideation as an extreme but critically important outcome of social exclusion at work. We test a framework that integrates the interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide and psychache theory of suicide, while differentiating between passive isolation and active ostracism. We hypothesise that passive isolation and active ostracism relate to suicidal ideation via the mediators of thwarted interpersonal needs (representing the social pain pathway) and perceived job insecurity (representing the psychological pain pathway). Across two studies, we find support for the mediating effect of thwarted interpersonal needs and partial support for the mediating effect of perceived job insecurity at the between-person level; however, the results do not support our hypotheses at the within-person level over a daily or monthly timeframe. Our results demonstrate that the integrative framework is useful for understanding the effect of workplace interactions on suicidal ideation, and they indicate that suicidal ideation stems from chronic exclusion rather than relatively short-term upticks. We conclude with insights to encourage the study of suicidal ideation in organisational research.

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The average employed adult spends most of their waking life at work (Adams, 2019; Steger, 2019). Given the value society places on work, it can become a key vector for well-being or distress. Work can provide purpose, a sense of empowerment, and fulfil social needs (Bliese et al., 2017; Cropanzano et al., 2023). In contrast, work can also result in stress and burnout with downstream effects on mental illness and, sometimes, suicide (Follmer & Follmer, 2021; Howard et al., 2022). Suicide is the 12th leading cause of death in the US (American Foundation for Suicide Prevention [AFSP], 2023), with 1.2 million US adults attempted suicide (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2021), with 45,979 ultimately dying by suicide in 2020 (Center for Disease Control [CDC], 2022). This is more than the number of people

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who died by motor vehicle incidents (United States Department of Transportation [USDOT], 2022) and homicides (CDC, 2022). Beyond the tragic effects on family and friends, suicide or suicide attempts also profoundly impact the workplace, causing distress among coworkers with ripple effects for organisational functioning (CDC, 2023). Such a tragic outcome has profound effects on families, workplaces, and communities.

Although there is growing awareness around the impact of work on employees' mental health broadly (Rosado-Solomon et al., 2023), our understanding of organisational risk factors for suicide is lagging. Indeed, most of this work is conducted in the suicidology literature, which emphasises immediate mechanisms associated with suicide (e.g. suicidal ideation) and occupational influences (e.g. exposure to lethal means) (Chu et al., 2017; Kang et al., 2019; Stanley et al., 2016). Less attention has been paid to the interpersonal and social dynamics in the workplace and the costs of social exclusion despite mounting evidence. We define social exclusion at work as the intentional or unintentional denial of social connections in the work domain. Recent frameworks integrating theories of suicide within the context of work (e.g. Follmer & Follmer, 2021; Howard et al., 2022) have also identified social exclusion as a key antecedent of suicidal thoughts and actions, underscoring their importance (Follmer & Follmer, 2021; Howard et al., 2022). Empirically, the research that has been done lacks precision temporal dynamics (Bennett et al., 2023). Research designs rarely measure the same construct(s) multiple times, making it impossible to disentangle the effects of short- versus long-term isolation. Consequently, our knowledge is incomplete, resulting in only a partial understanding of risk factors and warning signs of suicidal ideation.

We answer calls to study the ways that work impacts vulnerable employees, including their mental health generally (Colella & Santuzzi, 2024; Follmer & Jones, 2018; Rosado-Solomon et al., 2023) and suicide specifically (Howard et al., 2022). To do so, we integrate the interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide (Ribeiro & Joiner, 2009) and psychache theory of suicide (Schneidman, 1998) to test Howard et al.'s (2022) work-specific framework over a monthly timeframe. We argue that exclusion at work – measured by both passive isolation and active ostracism – results in thwarted interpersonal needs and perceived job insecurity. These two paths explain how exclusion can result in suicidal

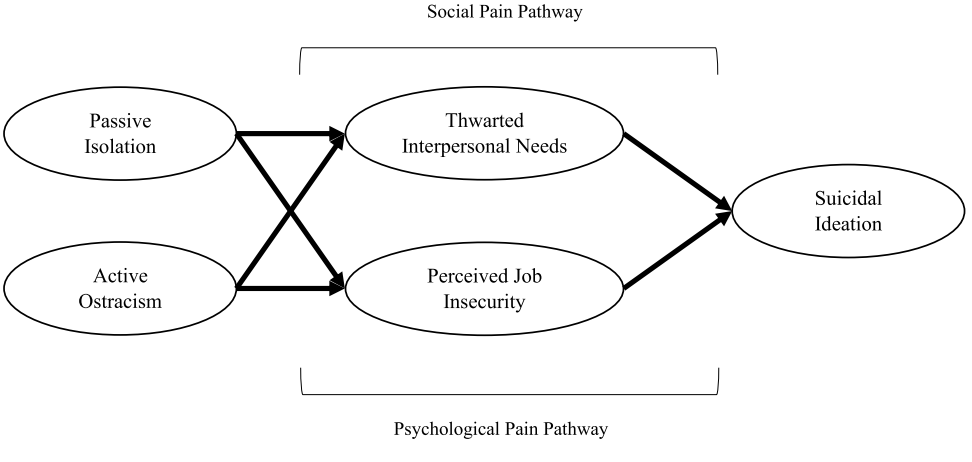

Figure 1. Model tested in current article.

ideation (Figure 1), which is the development of the desire for suicide (Van Orden et al., 2010). We focus on suicidal ideation because research has identified it as a critical antecedent of suicide that is frequently observed and significantly related to detrimental work outcomes such as performance (Follmer & Follmer, 2021).

We contribute to theory by testing the boundary conditions of exclusion at work by examining an extreme negative outcome – suicidal ideation. While prior work has identified exclusion's detrimental effects on emotional exhaustion and psychological well-being (Howard et al., 2020), it remains unclear *just how detrimental* such exclusion can be. Our results provide a rigorous comparison of the predictive power of both theories, shedding light on whether both theories are equally supported – or if one holds more promise in the work domain. We further contribute to the exclusion literature by considering whether *attributions about exclusion* have distinct effects on suicidal ideation. We propose that employees' views of whether social exclusion is the result of "getting lost in the mix" (passive isolation) or deliberate exclusion (active ostracism) (Howard et al., 2020; Williams & Nida, 2017) might matter more than the experience of exclusion itself. That is, people may develop suicidal ideations because they feel either inconsequential or actively disliked, rather than solely due to exclusion itself. In contrast, if both relate to suicidal ideation, exclusion itself may be the critical risk factor for suicidal ideation, regardless of its attribution. Extant research has shown that exclusion is associated with negative outcomes, but it has not fully investigated whether all forms of exclusion yield similar or equal consequences (Ferris et al., 2017; O'Reilly et al., 2015).

Empirically, we highlight the role of time by testing our theoretical framework at both the between- and within-person levels. Doing so answers calls to incorporate time more explicitly into organisational research (Shipp & Cole, 2015) and to evaluate homology within well-being research (Sonnentag, 2015). By conducting our study, we utilise robust methods seen in the organisational sciences to provide critical theoretical and methodological insights for this essential aspect of suicide that is underdiscussed in relevant theories and frameworks (Ribeiro & Joiner, 2009; Schneidman, 1998; Van Orden et al., 2012). Practically, organisational risk factors for suicide must be understood and ultimately eliminated to foster healthier environments. Our study evaluates key social factors within organisations that can pose a risk for extreme negative psychological outcomes, like suicide, thereby expanding our scope of understanding about how deleterious such effects may be for employee wellbeing. For example, if active ostracism and passive isolation predict suicidal ideation, it demands greater urgency be placed of addressing problems of loneliness and isolation at work from managers and organisations, as an opportunity for intervention becomes impossible following a suicide death. Our work also provides organisations with a more detailed and comprehensive understanding of which social aspects require increased focus and improvement to enhance well-being.

Background

Workplaces are social institutions that yield positive and negative experiences depending on the extent to which employees are given the opportunity to interact with and be included by others (Heaphy & Dutton, 2008). Research has shown that social exclusion

at work results in worse wellbeing, workplace attitudes, and job performance (Bedi, 2021; Howard et al., 2020; Li et al., 2021). Social exclusion has been found to be more harmful than direct harassment (O'Reilly et al., 2015), indicating that poor treatment is better than no treatment at all. Employees have long been at risk of exclusions in their physical workplaces (Ferris et al., 2008), and the rise of remote work (Dua et al., 2022) makes feelings of social exclusion more likely. Work friendships have also become less common (Patel & Plowman, 2022) suggesting social connectedness at work is on the decline. In tandem, suicide deaths and attempts have been increasing at alarming rates over the last decade (AFSP, 2023). Suicide prevention specialists have increasingly called for prevention strategies that incorporate workplaces (National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention, 2020).

Organisational scholars have also emphasised workplace factors in understanding suicidal thoughts and behaviours (Follmer & Follmer, 2021; Howard et al., 2022). Recently, Howard et al. (2022) developed a framework of work and suicide that integrated multiple eminent theories of suicide to explain how workplace factors predict suicide-related outcomes, and emphasised workplace social interactions as an antecedent of suicide. The framework integrates two theories with distinct processes through which suicidal ideation occurs (Joiner et al., 2009; Van Orden et al., 2010): the interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide and the psychache theory of suicide. The interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide identifies how antecedents can influence suicidal ideation by transmitting their effects through social mechanisms, deemed the social pain pathway. The psychache theory of suicide identifies how antecedents can influence suicidal ideation by transmitting their effects through the construct of psychache, which is considered the psychological pain pathway. In the current article, we explore workplace antecedents that give way to both. We differentiate two forms of exclusion – passive isolation and active ostracism – as antecedents of social and psychological pain. Both forms are expected to predict perceptions of thwarted interpersonal needs (social pain) and job insecurity (psychological pain). By measuring both, we assess whether the source of exclusion differentially predicts suicidal ideations. We finally expect these pain mechanisms will transmit the effect of work exclusion on employees' suicidal ideation. Below, we leverage our applied framework and its associated theories to develop the hypotheses that make our model.

Social pain pathway

The interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide proposes that engaging in meaningful social connections is important for fulfilling interpersonal needs, and those who are excluded from these opportunities are likely to experience thwarted interpersonal needs (Joiner et al., 2009; Van Orden et al., 2008). This includes a lack of belongingness (loneliness and perceived absence of reciprocal care) along with perceived burdensomeness (self-hate and perceptions of being a liability to others) (Ribeiro & Joiner, 2009; Van Orden et al., 2012). According to the interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide and framework of Howard et al. (2022), these thwarted interpersonal needs represent social pain, which is a primary determinant of suicidal ideation (Joiner et al., 2009; Van Orden et al., 2010).

One source of thwarted interpersonal needs is social exclusion at work – the perception that an individual is ignored or excluded at work (Ferris et al., 2008). This exclusion can result from either passive isolation or active ostracism. When passive isolation occurs, an employee gets lost in the shuffle and is excluded from valuable interactions (Golden et al., 2008; Rudert et al., 2019). This may cause them to incur feelings of loneliness and professional isolation (Miller, 1975). In contrast, when active ostracism occurs an employee is pushed aside by their coworkers, and they "perceive they are ignored or excluded by others at work" (Ferris et al., 2008, p. 1348). Both passive isolation and active ostracism result in feeling disconnected or left out from social connections in the workplace, and both are due to acts of omission rather than commission. Yet the impetus for these two types of exclusion differs. Passive isolation is not purposefully enacted by coworkers, whereas active ostracism occurs when others wilfully exclude (Follmer & Follmer, 2021; Howard et al., 2020). In either case, individuals feel excluded from important social connections and relationships, which thwarts their interpersonal needs. Workplace isolation can impede an individual's ability to demonstrate their competence to others, to form meaningful work relationships, or to control the ways in which they are involved at work (Golden et al., 2008; Hitlan et al., 2006), thus thwarting personal needs.

At the same time, people are expected to recognise whether they are being accidentally or purposefully excluded (Howard et al., 2020; Williams & Nida, 2017). Attributions could impact whether instances of isolation are more impactful than others, but it is unclear which type of exclusion is worse. Active ostracism is among the most psychologically damaging experiences, with measurable effects even when performed by a stranger for only minutes (Hartgerink et al., 2015; Williams & Nida, 2017). Prior research has argued that active ostracism is more detrimental than more overt types of incivility, such as harassment, because it implies that the target is not worth the time of the aggressor (Ferris et al., 2017; O'Reilly et al., 2015). Passive isolation, however, may produce similarly negative outcomes, as individuals feel invisible to others or perceive that they are not relevant enough to even be within the minds of others. These attributions may cause passive isolation to be more harmful than active ostracism. Extant research, though, has focused on the detrimental effects of active ostracism rather than passive isolation, creating uncertainty regarding which form of exclusion is more detrimental. We investigate both to test whether these phenomena yield differential outcomes.

Hypothesis 1: Passive isolation (H1a) and active ostracism (H1b) are positively related to thwarted interpersonal needs.

Psychological pain pathway

The psychache theory that people experience a state more dire than poor mental well-being alone when lacking essential needs – they experience psychache (Holden et al., 2001; Schneidman, 1998). Psychache shares similarities with depression, but is such a severe feeling of anguish that it may even produce sensations of soreness and physical pain (Howard et al., 2022; Schneidman, 1998). Further, psychache theory does not identify which essential needs must be withheld for psychache to occur; although lacking lower-order needs is thought to produce psychache. The theory has been applied to argue that the lack of safety and security, such as unstable living arrangements, can

produce anxiety, stress, and depression that cumulatively produce psychache (Holden et al., 2001; Pachkowski et al., 2019; Schneidman, 1998).

Perceived job insecurity is one condition that threatens employees' perceptions of safety, increasing precarity in their lives and those they provide for (Shoss, 2017; Vander Elst et al., 2016). Job insecurity refers to an employee's expectations about the permanence of their work situation (Glambek et al., 2014; Lin et al., 2021), and it is characterised by persistent feelings of uncertainty about one's future in their organisation (Sverke et al., 2002). Job insecurity is distinct from job loss, and employees can perceive job insecurity even when job loss has not occurred. Individuals may perceive threats to their job security, and these threats can result in feelings of powerlessness to change one's situation or to maintain employment (Greenhalgh & Roseblatt, 1984). Threats that influence job insecurity include macro-level (e.g. economy), individual-job related (e.g. skills), and interpersonal factors (e.g. bullying).

Consistent with our interest in social exclusion, research has supported that overt, hostile bullying behaviours can increase perceptions of job insecurity (Glambek et al., 2014; Park & Ono, 2017) due to damaged career prospects, diminished professional networks, punitive workloads, and reduced psychological and physical wellbeing. Yet interpersonal interactions at work need not be overt (Shin & Hur, 2019; Wilson et al., 2020). Instead, workers who experience exclusion may lack opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge or competence (Golden et al., 2008), receive necessary feedback to aid job performance (Wang et al., 2021), and network with influential individuals within their organisation (Al-Atwi, 2017; Cooper & Kuland, 2002). Because these individuals feel detached from peers or supervisors, they may perceive their connection to their organisation to be more tenuous, as they lack important social interactions and reciprocal feedback that are important for feelings of job security (Park & Ono, 2017). Thus, we propose that exclusion at work is positively related to perceptions of job insecurity, and we again assess both passive isolation and active ostracism to determine whether exclusion itself or the perceived intent of the exclusion produces these feelings of job insecurity.

Hypothesis 2: Passive isolation (H2a) and active ostracism (H2b) are positively related to perceptions of job insecurity.

Associations with suicidal ideation

Thwarted interpersonal needs and job insecurity have been shown to affect employees' performance, extra-role behaviours, physical health, and psychological wellbeing (Bedi, 2021; Howard et al., 2020; Lin et al., 2021). Yet, we do not fully understand the scope of their impact, including their associations with serious psychological outcomes such as suicidal ideation. Drawing from the interpersonal theory of suicide, we suggest that thwarted interpersonal needs are a primary contributor to the development of suicidal ideation. The relation of thwarted interpersonal needs and suicidal ideation has been supported across studies (Chu et al., 2017; Hill et al., 2015), and we expect this relation to operate consistent with previous findings.

The interpersonal theory suggests that people have an inherent need to feel socially connected and believe that they are not a burden (Joiner et al., 2009; Van Orden et al., 2008). When these two conditions are met, people feel that they are interpersonally

bonded and valued by ones that they care about. When unmet, however, people feel that they are unloved and unmissed by others if not around. They may even feel that others would prefer for them to no longer be present in their lives (Joiner et al., 2009). These caustic feelings are believed to eventually influence those suffering from thwarted interpersonal needs to consider suicide, causing a positive relation between thwarted interpersonal needs and suicidal ideation. We posit:

Hypothesis 3: Thwarted interpersonal needs positively relate to suicidal ideation.

Given the critical role that employment plays in financial and social stability, when future employment status is called into question, it undoubtedly has a negative effect on psychological wellbeing (Glambek et al., 2014; Lin et al., 2021; Vander Elst et al., 2014). But job insecurity may lead to more serious psychological outcomes than previously recognised. We suggest that the psychache theory of suicide can elucidate the relation of perceived job insecurity with a particularly insidious outcome – suicidal ideation (Holden et al., 2001; Schneidman, 1998).

As mentioned above, the psychache theory of suicide proposes that people experience psychache when they lack essential needs (Howard et al., 2022). When people experience job insecurity, they feel chronic threats to their lower order needs of safety and security. Perhaps even more detrimental, they may feel that they are causing threats to the safety and security of those they care about, such as a spouse or children. Over time, the depression, anxiety, and stress caused by these chronic feelings may cumulatively evolve into feelings of psychache. The associated perceptual narrowing may also cause those experiencing psychache to believe that their behaviours are relatively ineffective, resulting in a detrimental reciprocal effect wherein psychache is worsened because fewer behaviours are performed to alleviate these feelings. Those experiencing threats to their lower-order needs due to job insecurity may gradually develop greater thoughts of suicide as an avenue to address their psychache. We therefore posit that perceived job insecurity positively relates to suicidal ideation.

Hypothesis 4: Perceived job insecurity positively relates to suicidal ideation.

We integrate our proposals to suggest that passive isolation and active ostracism influence suicidal ideation via two separate explanatory mechanisms. The social pain pathway suggests that exclusion influences suicidal ideation via the mediator of thwarted interpersonal needs. The psychological pain pathway suggests that exclusion influences suicidal ideation via the mediator of perceived job insecurity. Therefore, we hypothesise:

Hypothesis 5: Thwarted interpersonal needs mediate the relations of (a) passive isolation and (b) active ostracism with suicidal ideation.

Hypothesis 6: Perceived job insecurity mediates the relations of (a) passive isolation and (b) active ostracism with suicidal ideation.

In the hypotheses above, we suggest that these effects occur both within and between persons. We believe that these relations describe changes people experience over time, but we also believe that these relations describe differences between people. For instance, we expect that weeks when people experience greater active workplace ostracism, they will subsequently feel greater thwarted interpersonal needs. At the same time, people

who experience greater active workplace ostracism tend to also feel greater thwarted interpersonal needs than others. Extant theorising on these constructs is not conclusive enough, however, to suggest specific temporal lags for these effects, and it is unclear whether the within-person example above would unfold over the course of days, weeks, months, or even years. For this reason, we initially performed a pilot study that utilised a daily diary design to assess whether these within-person effects emerge when the time lags occur across days. The results of this pilot study are provided in Supplemental Material A, and they demonstrated that effects were significant at the between-person level, but not at the within-person level. We utilise the results of this pilot study to inform the design of Study 1, as the dynamics between exclusion and ostracism appear to occur in longer than daily timespans. Thus, we assess whether these within-person effects emerge when the time lags are across weeks in our primary study.

Methods

Participants and procedure

We collected data via a panel design with measurement occasions separated by six weeks. By doing so, we tested whether our model was supported at the between-person and within-person levels when measurement occasions are separated by a longer time span. Participants (49% female, 62% white, $Age_M = 36.54$, $Age_{SD} = 10.72$) were recruited from Prolific for monetary compensation (IRB Approval Number: 2201506233; blinded for anonymous peer review). Research has supported the validity of results obtained via Prolific when best practices are adopted (Aguinis et al., 2021; Stanton et al., 2022), which we followed. To be included, participants had to be at least 18 years of age, employed 20 or more hours per week, and a resident of the US. We used a time-separated research design, and we removed those that failed more than one of ten attention checks ($n = 7$).

All waves of data collection included all measures. Participants enrolled via Prolific and completed the first survey ($n = 489$). Six weeks after the first, participants completed a second survey ($n = 442$). Six weeks after the second, participants completed a third ($n = 421$). Our primary analyses were restricted to those who completed at least two waves ($n = 449$). Based on prior simulation studies, our sample size was sufficient to reliably interpret our analyses with the largest requirements for adequate statistical power (Preacher et al., 2007).

Measures

Active Ostracism. We used the 10-item scale developed by Ferris et al. (2008) (e.g. "Others left the area when you entered") ($\alpha = .95$). The response format ranged from 1 (Never) to 7 (Always).

Passive isolation. We applied the seven-item measure of Golden et al. (2008), which asks the frequency that participants feel isolated at work from 1 (Rarely) to 5 (Most of the Time). Of these seven items, three could be interpreted as active ostracism. We performed an exploratory factor analysis on the isolation and active ostracism scales together using principal axis factoring and direct oblimin rotation (Howard, 2016;

Howard, 2023). The two-factor solution indicated that these three items indeed cross-loaded into the active ostracism-factor, and they were removed from further analyses. The final factor solution produced items that strongly loaded onto their primary factor (>.58) with weak cross-loadings (<.32) and suitable reliability ($\alpha = .86–.88$). An example item was, "I miss face-to-face contact with coworkers." The average Cronbach's alpha of these four items across the three days was .87.

Thwarted interpersonal needs. We used the 15 item Interpersonal Needs Questionnaire (Van Orden et al., 2012) (e.g. "These days, I think the people in my life wish they could be rid of me") (average $\alpha = .95$). Participants responded from 1 (Not at All True for Me) to 7 (Very True for Me).

Perceived job insecurity. We used the three-item subscale of the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire-III (e.g. "Are you worried about becoming unemployed") (average $\alpha = .80$). The response format ranged from 0 (To a Very Small Extent) to 100 (To a Very Large Extent).

Suicidal ideation. We used the four-item measure from the General Health Questionnaire 28 (Watson et al., 2001) (e.g. "Have you recently found the idea of taking your own life kept coming to your mind?") (average $\alpha = .95$). Participants responded to two items on a scale of 1 (Not at All) to 4 (Much More than Usual) and two items on a scale of 1 (Definitely Not) to 4 (It Definitely Has).

Demographic characteristics. We measured five demographic characteristics to assess their potential relevance as control variables: age, gender, race, hours worked per week, education, and managerial status. Participants were asked to indicate their age and hours of work per week, and they were asked to select the most relevant option from a list for the variables of gender, race, and education (Table 1). For managerial status, we asked participants to provide their current job title. We matched each participant's job title with the appropriate O*Net code, enabling the determination of whether each job title was classified as management.

Analyses

We first assessed whether our collected demographic characteristics significantly related to our studied constructs. Correlations were calculated for continuous demographic characteristics; t-tests were calculated for dichotomous demographic characteristics; and ANOVAs were calculated for categorical demographic characteristics. For any systematic effects on our exogenous variables, we then included the demographic characteristic as a control variable in our analyses. As detailed below, education and work hours produced significant effects, and therefore these two characteristics were included as control variables in all analyses; however, it should be noted that all substantive conclusions remained unchanged if these control variables were not included in our analyses. We tested our hypotheses with a random intercept lagged panel structural equation model (RILP-SEM) (Hamaker et al., 2015; Mulder & Hamaker, 2021; Usami, 2021). This approach separates between-person and within-person variance in panel data via latent variable modelling, enabling researchers to test effects at both levels and provide more robust assessments of potential casual effects. Data, code, output, and materials are available at [https://osf.io/94wdu/?view_only = a2efa3681a734990944c852de516740a]. Analyses were conducted using AMOS v27.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of sample.

	Frequency	Unintentional Isolation	Active Ostracism	Thwarted Interpersonal Needs	Perceived Job Insecurity	Suicidal Ideation
Gender	–	$t = .60$, $p = .55$	$t = -.13$, $p = .90$	$t = .14$, $p = .89$	$t = .33$, $p = .74$	$t = -.36$, $p = .72$
Female	240 (49%)	2.11 (.90)	1.59 (.97)	2.26 (1.18)	1.90 (.96)	1.37 (.69)
Male	247 (51%)	2.16 (.93)	1.58 (.86)	2.28 (1.22)	1.92 (.93)	1.34 (.69)
Other	1 (0%)	–	–	–	–	–
Age	–	$r = -.12$, $p = .01$	$r = -.09$, $p = .06$	$r = -.18$, $p < .01$	$r = .01$, $p = .86$	$r = .06$, $p = .17$
Mean	36.54	–	–	–	–	–
Standard Deviation	10.72	–	–	–	–	–
Race	–	$F = .90$, $p = .47$	$F = 3.78$, $p < .01$	$F = 2.17$, $p = .08$	$F = 1.33$, $p = .27$	$F = 1.71$, $p = .16$
White	301 (62%)	2.09 (.92)	1.55 (.82)	2.18 (1.18)	1.84 (.90)	1.30 (.62)
Asian or Pacific Islander	71 (15%)	2.22 (.89)	1.33 (.73)[a]	2.15 (1.03)	1.93 (1.16)	1.35 (.65)
Black	63 (13%)	2.11 (.96)	1.77 (.93)	2.54 (1.50)	2.10 (1.02)	1.56 (.96)
Latino/a	37 (8%)	2.29 (.94)	1.78 (.85)[a]	2.43 (1.05)	2.09 (.87)	1.41 (.62)
Other	15 (3%)	2.35 (.78)	2.14 (1.43)	3.01 (1.57)	2.11 (.95)	1.60 (.72)
Hours of Work / Week	–	$t = 1.60$, $p = .11$	$t = .43$, $p = .67$	$t = 3.65$, $p < .01$	$t = 3.22$, $p < .01$	$t = 2.39$, $p = .02$
≥35	415 (85%)	2.11 (.91)	1.58 (.88)	2.19 (1.15)	1.86 (.92)	1.33 (.64)
<35	68 (15%)	2.30 (.93)	1.63 (.79)	2.76 (1.39)	2.25 (1.04)	1.54 (.92)
Education	–	$F = 1.14$, $p = .35$	$F = 4.67$, $p < .01$	$F = 4.84$, $p < .01$	$F = 2.95$, $p = .03$	$F = 8.01$, $p < .01$
High School	93 (19%)	2.19 (1.00)	1.76 (1.01)[ab]	2.65 (1.42)[ab]	2.01 (1.01)[a]	1.54 (.86)[a]
Undergraduate	263 (54%)	2.09 (.89)	1.55 (.84)	2.22 (1.15)	1.94 (.99)[b]	1.34 (.68)[b]
Master's	97 (20%)	2.24 (.96)	1.61 (.87)	2.11 (1.02)[a]	1.84 (.77)	1.27 (.55)[c]
Doctorate	20 (4%)	2.14 (.86)	1.28 (.37)[a]	1.73 (.70)[b]	1.48 (.58)[ab]	1.05 (.22)[abc]
Other	15 (3%)	1.84 (.73)	1.29 (.43)[b]	2.60 (1.61)	1.96 (1.05)	1.45 (.62)
Occupation	–	$t = -.52$, $p = .60$	$t = .39$, $p = .70$	$t = 1.50$, $p = .13$	$t = -.48$, $p = .63$	$t = 1.81$, $p = .07$
Management	104 (22%)	2.17 (.97)	1.55 (.79)	2.12 (1.08)	1.94 (.97)	1.25 (.57)
Non-Management	371 (78%)	2.12 (.90)	1.59 (.88)	2.32 (1.23)	1.89 (.93)	1.39 (.72)

Notes: All information above reported at Time 1. Superscripts indicate statistically significant differences in Games-Howell post-hoc test.

Results

Table 1 provides the demographic characteristics of our sample and the relation of these characteristics to our studied constructs. Table 2 provides correlations and Cronbach's alphas. Among our demographic characteristics, education level and working hours significantly related to our exogenous variables. Namely, those with a high school education reported greater levels of our mediators and outcome than those with higher education degrees, and those who worked less than 35 h per week also demonstrated greater levels of these constructs than those who worked more than 35 h per week. Based on these observations, we included control variables within our model to account for these two group differences within our sample.[1]

Table 3 provides within-person lagged effects, and Table 4 provides between-person direct and indirect effects. Model fit met traditional cutoffs ($CFI = .99$, $NFI = .98$, $RMSEA = .04$, $\chi^2/df = 1.72$) (Kline, 2015). In line with our pilot study, our effects were not statistically significant at the within-person level. No time-lagged relation (i.e. Time 1 → Time 2, Time 2 → Time 3) of passive isolation or active ostracism with thwarted interpersonal needs or perceived job insecurity was significant (all *95%C.Is.* include 0, all $ps > .05$). No time-lagged relations of thwarted interpersonal needs or perceived job insecurity with suicidal ideation were statistically significant (all *95%C.I.* include 0, all $p > .05$). None of the hypotheses regarding within-person effects were firmly supported in Study 1, as no within-person effect was supported.

Consistent with our post-hoc analyses in our pilot study, greater support was provided at the between-person level. Passive isolation significantly related to both thwarted interpersonal needs ($\beta = .47$, *S.E.* = .07, 95%CI[.29, .68], $p < .01$) and perceived job insecurity ($\beta = .24$, *S.E.* = .06, 95%CI[.11, .38], $p < .01$), and active ostracism significantly related to both thwarted interpersonal needs ($\beta = .56$, *S.E.* = .07, 95%CI[.34, .83], $p < .01$) and perceived job insecurity ($\beta = .41$, *S.E.* = .06, 95%CI[.27, .57], $p < .01$). Thwarted interpersonal needs ($\beta = .36$, *S.E.* = .02, 95%CI[.31, .41], $p < .01$) but not perceived job insecurity ($\beta = .06$, *S.E.* = .03, 95%CI[−.01, .12], $p = .10$) significantly related to suicidal ideation. The indirect effect of passive isolation on suicidal ideation was statistically significant via the mediator of thwarted interpersonal needs ($ab = .17$, *S.E.* = .04, 95%CI[.10, .25], $p < .01$) but not perceived job insecurity ($ab = .01$, *S.E.* = .01, 95%CI[−.00, .03], $p = .10$). The indirect effect of active ostracism on suicidal ideation was significant via the mediator of thwarted interpersonal needs ($ab = .20$, *S.E.* = .05, 95%CI[.12, .30], $p < .01$) but not perceived job insecurity ($ab = .02$, *S.E.* = .01, 95%CI[−.00, .05], $p = .10$).

Post-hoc analyses

We performed three sets of post-hoc analyses to probe our effects. First, we assessed whether passive isolation produced stronger effects than active ostracism at the between-person level. We calculated bootstrapped estimates of the differences in the analogous direct and indirect effects between the two predictors, which provides a statistical significance test. None of these difference calculations were statistically significant (all 95%C.I. include 0, all $ps > .05$), indicating that the between-person direct and indirect effects of passive isolation and active ostracism were not significantly different from each other.

Table 2. Correlations and Cronbach's alphas.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1.) UI T1	(.86)														
2.) AO T1	.36	(.94)													
3.) TIN TI	.40	.41	(.95)												
4.) PJI T1	.26	.35	.41	(.79)											
5.) SI T1	.22	.33	.58	.36	(.95)										
6.) UI T2	.73	.31	.38	.25	.22	(.86)									
7.) AO T2	.28	.81	.42	.38	.33	.32	(.95)								
8.) TIN T2	.34	.38	.87	.40	.54	.40	.45	(.95)							
9.) PJI T2	.22	.33	.37	.79	.37	.28	.40	.40	(.81)						
10.) SI T2	.21	.29	.52	.33	.81	.24	.36	.58	.41	(.95)					
11.) UI T3	.67	.23	.34	.25	.17	.71	.27	.31	.28	.21	(.88)				
12.) AO T3	.19	.75	.36	.40	.24	.21	.78	.35	.38	.30	.30	(.96)			
13.) TIN T3	.33	.35	.83	.43	.63	.35	.42	.83	.42	.62	.38	.42	(.95)		
14.) PJI T3	.24	.25	.40	.76	.33	.26	.30	.38	.73	.34	.31	.33	.44	(.81)	
15.) SI T3	.23	.26	.54	.34	.76	.25	.33	.54	.39	.77	.30	.32	.73	.38	(.94)

Notes: All correlations above .08 are statistically significant at .05 level. All correlations above .11 are statistically significant at .01 level. Cronbach's alphas listed on diagonal. UI = Unintentional Isolation, AO = Active Ostracism, TIN = Thwarted Interpersonal Needs, PJI = Perceived Job Insecurity, SI = Suicidal Ideation, T1 = Time 1, T2 = Time 2, T3 = Time 3.

Table 3. Within-person lagged effects.

		Thwarted Interpersonal Needs (T2)				Job Insecurity (T2)				Suicidal Ideation (T2)			
		β	*SE*	*p*	95% CI	*β*	*SE*	*p*	95% CI	*β*	*SE*	*p*	95% CI
Time 1	Unintentional Isolation	−.07	.07	.46	[−.53, .23]	−.04	.08	.72	[−.23, .19]	–	–	–	–
	Active Ostracism	.22	.11	.20	[−.11, 1.45]	.14	.10	.43	[−.36, .44]	–	–	–	–
	Thwarted Interpersonal Needs	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	.02	.08	.85	[−1.13, .27]
	Job Insecurity	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	−.06	.06	.42	[−.25, .09]
		Thwarted Interpersonal Needs (T3)				Job Insecurity (T3)				Suicidal Ideation (T3)			
		β	*SE*	*p*	95% CI	*β*	*SE*	*p*	95% CI	*β*	*SE*	*p*	95% CI
Time 2	Unintentional Isolation	−.04	.05	.60	[−.19, .10]	.03	.07	.83	[−.18, .18]	–	–	–	–
	Active Ostracism	−.03	.08	.81	[−.31, .20]	−.22	.10	.24	[−.59. .17]	–	–	–	–
	Thwarted Interpersonal Needs	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	.04	.07	.57	[−.15, .35]
	Job Insecurity	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	.09	.06	.22	[−.07, .29]

Notes: Auto-regressive effects and control variables were included in the model, but not shown here for parsimony. Results are available from the first author upon request.

Table 4. Between-person effects.

	Thwarted Interpersonal Needs				Job Insecurity				Suicidal Ideation			
	β	*SE*	*p*	95% CI	*β*	*SE*	*p*	95% CI	*β*	*SE*	*p*	95% CI
Unintentional Isolation	.47	.07	<.01	[.29, .68]	.24	.06	<.01	[.11, .38]	–	–	–	–
Active Ostracism	.56	.07	<.01	[.34, .83]	.41	.06	<.01	[.27, .57]	–	–	–	–
Thwarted Interpersonal Needs	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	.36	.02	<.01	[.31, .41]
Job Insecurity	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	.06	.03	.10	[−.01, .12]
Indirect Effects									*ab*	*SE*	*p*	95% CI
Unintentional Isolation → Thwarted Interpersonal Needs → Suicidal Ideation									.17	.04	<.01	[.10, .25]
Unintentional Isolation → Job Insecurity → Suicidal Ideation									.01	.01	.10	[−.00, .03]
Active Ostracism → Thwarted Interpersonal Needs → Suicidal Ideation									.20	.05	<.01	[.12, .30]
Active Ostracism → Job Insecurity → Suicidal Ideation									.02	.01	.10	[−.00, .05]

Notes: Control variables were included in the model, but not shown here for parsimony. Results are available from the first author upon request.

Second, we tested for reverse-causal effects by testing two separate time-lagged between-person models to compare the directionality of our between-person effects (Zyphur et al., 2020). The first model matched our theoretical rationale: antecedents (passive isolation and active ostracism) at Time 1 predicted mediators (thwarted interpersonal needs and perceived job insecurity) at Time 2, and mediators at Time 2 predicted the outcome (suicidal ideation) at Time 3. The second model tested the reverse-causal effect: the outcome at Time 1 predicted mediators at Time 2, and mediators at Time 2 predicted antecedents at Time 3. The model fit of the first model (AIC = 70, BIC = 156) was better than the model fit of the second model (AIC = 81, BIC = 159), providing supported for our proposed directionality of between-person effects.

Third, an alternative but similar model could be constructed to explain the relation of our studied variables based on Joiner's interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide (Joiner et al., 2009; Ribeiro & Joiner, 2009; Van Orden et al., 2010). This model suggests that the two dimensions of thwarted interpersonal needs, thwarted belongingness and perceived burdensomeness, are immediate antecedents of suicidal ideation, and more distal antecedents transmit their effects via these two dimensions. In the context of the current article, it could be argued that the effects of passive isolation, active ostracism, and job insecurity impact suicidal ideation via the mediating effects of thwarted interpersonal need's two dimensions, thwarted belongingness and perceived burdensomeness. We tested this alternative model utilising the same analytical approach of our primary analyses. Model fit met traditional cutoffs (*CFI* = .98, *NFI* = .97, *RMSEA* = .06, χ^2/df = 2.82) (Kline, 2015), but not as well as our primary model. At the within-person level, no time-lagged relation of passive isolation or active ostracism with thwarted belongingness and perceived burdensomeness was significant (all 95%C.Is. include 0, all *ps* > .05). Only one of four time-lagged relations of thwarted belongingness or perceived burdensomeness with suicidal ideation was statistically significant (all 95%C.I. include 0, all *ps* > .05), which was the direct effect of perceived burdensomeness at Time 1 on suicidal ideation at Time 2 (β = .15, *S.E.* = .04, 95%CI[.01, .27], *p* = .03).

Consistent with our primary model at the between-person level, passive isolation significantly related to both thwarted belongingness (β = .47, *S.E.* = .08, 95%CI[.26, .69], *p* < .01) and perceived burdensomeness (β = .23, *S.E.* = .06, 95%CI[.09, .40], *p* < .01); active ostracism significantly related to both thwarted belongingness (β = .43, *S.E.* = .08, 95% CI[.17, .80], *p* < .01) and perceived burdensomeness (β = .29, *S.E.* = .06, 95%CI[.09,

.40], $p < .01$); and job insecurity related to both thwarted belongingness ($\beta = .44$, *S.E.* = .06, 95%CI[.29, .60], $p < .01$) and perceived burdensomeness ($\beta = .35$, *S.E.* = .05, 95% CI[.21, .46], $p < .01$). Perceived burdensomeness ($\beta = .55$, *S.E.* = .04, 95%CI[.42, 1.04], $p < .01$) but not thwarted belongingness ($\beta = -.00$, *S.E.* = .02, 95%CI[−.20, .08], $p = .99$) significantly related to suicidal ideation. The indirect effect of passive isolation on suicidal ideation was statistically significant via the mediator of perceived burdensomeness (*ab* = .13, *S.E.* = .10, 95%CI[.04, .27], $p < .01$) but not thwarted belongingness (*ab* = −.00, *S.E.* = .10, 95%CI[−.10, .04], $p = .99$). The indirect effect of active ostracism on suicidal ideation was significant via perceived burdensomeness (*ab* = .16, *S.E.* = .11, 95%CI[.04, .33], $p < .01$) but not thwarted belongingness (*ab* = −.00, *S.E.* = .10, 95% CI[−.13, .04], $p = .94$). The indirect effect of job insecurity on suicidal ideation was significant via perceived burdensomeness (*ab* = .19, *S.E.* = .11, 95%CI[.10, .35], $p < .01$) but not thwarted belongingness (*ab* = −.00, *S.E.* = .10, 95%CI[−.10, .04], $p = .99$). This model replicates our prior findings in terms of the role social exclusion plays in impacting suicidal ideation. Further, we show that job insecurity does indeed play a role in employees' suicidal ideation, but that this insecurity only has influence through the more proximal mechanism of perceived burdensomeness in line with the Joiner model. Finally, the results show that when thwarted interpersonal needs are broken into smaller sub-dimensions, perceived burdensomeness is the stronger antecedent of suicidal ideation.

Discussion

Our results demonstrated that both active ostracism and passive isolation significantly relate to suicidal ideation through thwarted interpersonal needs at the between-person level, supporting a link between social workplace experiences and suicide. In contrast to expectations, the indirect effect via perceived job insecurity was not supported. Our results did support these relations at the between-person level but not the within-person level, whether tested over the course of days or months. Collectively, our results suggest that more chronic, between-person levels of exclusion and thwarted interpersonal needs drive suicidal ideation, compared to fluctuations in these factors within-person. These results provide many implications for research and practice.

Theoretical implications and future research directions

Exclusion and suicidal ideation. Our results demonstrated that perceptions of exclusion in the workplace have serious consequences for employees, namely in the form of greater suicidal ideation. Prior research has shown that exclusion negatively affects psychological wellbeing (Ferris et al., 2017; Howard et al., 2020; O'Reilly et al., 2015; Williams & Nida, 2017), but the extent of these effects has not been fully considered. Because passive and active exclusion may appear relatively benign and neither behaviour is illegal, organisations may not monitor these behaviours nor take action to minimise them. However, our results demonstrate that even low-level exclusion behaviours can have serious, permanent consequences for employee wellbeing and continued existence. Our results expand the scope of understanding regarding *just how* detrimental exclusion is for employee wellbeing and increase the urgency for organisations to assess and address exclusion when it occurs.

Because both passive isolation and active ostracism significantly related to our studied mediators and suicidal ideation, and indirect effects were comparable in strength, it appears that the general experience of being excluded matters more than the perceived intentionality of the exclusion – that is, whether it is attributed as passive versus active. This finding encourages the use of exclusion theories to study work and suicide, but it discourages differentiating types of exclusion to understand suicidal ideation. Future work could instead investigate whether attributions of dissimilar behaviours explain their relations with suicidal ideation. For instance, O'Reilly et al. (2015) found that active ostracism is more harmful to employee well-being than harassment, which they proposed was due to the victim's perception of the behaviour. Similar dynamics may occur for suicidal ideation, and isolation may be more damaging than other social phenomenon such as aggression or bullying.

Social pain and psychological pain pathways and suicidal ideation. The two theories of suicide we draw from relied on distinct underlying mechanisms. Results indicated that the social pain pathway through thwarted interpersonal needs was a more consistent mediator than the psychological pain pathway of job insecurity. This suggests that the interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide (Joiner, 2005) is relevant to understanding suicidal ideation among employees. Indeed, the interpersonal-psychological theory emphasises social connection as a proximal antecedent of suicide ideation. Future researchers should consider applying the broader proposals from this theory to understand the relation of work and suicide.

Our samples consisted of working adults who were mostly full-time employees. While they vary in their perceived job insecurity, they do have some baseline level of security given that they are employed. As such, their level of lower-order need fulfilment may not be critically low enough for it to result in suicidal ideation (Hall & Nougaim, 1968; Lefkowitz et al., 1984). Instead, it may be primarily through unemployment that people experience a lower-order need deficiency that leads to suicidal ideation (Amiri, 2022; Milner et al., 2013). For this reason, social pain may play a more dominant role for employees, but psychological pain may play a more dominant role for those without employment or precariously employed.

Further, as the relation of work and suicide has been almost exclusively studied outside the organisational literatures, many prominent theories of work have yet to be integrated into this research stream. Our results encourage the application of interpersonal-focused theories because the social pain pathway (e.g. thwarted interpersonal needs) was more reliable than the psychological pain pathway (e.g. job insecurity). Notably, sociometer theory proposes that a person's self-esteem is a gauge of their beliefs about how others perceive them (Leary et al., 1995), and it has been repeatedly applied to understand the workplace dynamics of active ostracism (Ferris et al., 2015; Peng & Zeng, 2017). Future researchers can adapt this work to identify more distal antecedents of suicidal ideation via the mediators of active ostracism and thwarted interpersonal needs such as poor voice quality (Ng et al., 2022).

Levels of analysis and suicidal ideation. We tested our model at both the within and between person level across two studies with distinct timeframes (days vs. weeks) (including our pilot study). Based on consistent support for the model at the between-person but not within-person level, suicidal ideation may stem from more chronic and pervasive isolation. The relations between our studied variables may develop over the

course of years rather than days or months, but they may also occur when people habitually experience isolation across multiple workplaces. Therefore, researchers should apply theory that corresponds to longer timespans, such as lifespan development, as well as utilise research designs that can detect potential changes in variables over the course of years, such as the use of archival data.

Practical implications

Modern research and practice on suicide prevention have increasingly focused on upstream prevention methods (Horowitz et al., 2024; Wilcox et al., 2025). Both researchers and practitioners now recognise that it is more effective to intervene before a person enacts suicide-related behaviours, such as when the person first starts having thoughts of suicide. Additionally, there is a significant opportunity for upstream suicide prevention by including organisations and managers in outreach, education, and support processes (Chu et al., 2017; Follmer & Follmer, 2021; Kang et al., 2019; Stanley et al., 2016). Organisations can train their managers to identify warning signs of psychological distress and improve their procedural knowledge to better connect employees in need with available resources, and managers can strive to create inclusive environments that serve a dual purpose. Inclusive environments can help employees to feel welcome and connected to others, reducing the overall likelihood of ostracism and ultimately suicide. They can also enable at-risk employees to communicate their feelings with others, allowing these employees to receive help before circumstances progress further. In turn, organisations should invest in resources that support employee mental health including insurance that covers psychological treatment, access to employee assistance programmes, and providing time off to attend to mental health needs. Organisations should also scan the work environment to identify individuals or workgroups that might be prone to experiencing exclusion at work – such as remote employees – to ensure intentional outreach and connection.

Also, specific interventions are necessary after tragedy does occur, which is known as postvention (Andriessen, 2009; Jordan, 2017). Tragedies, including suicide deaths, have a powerful detrimental psychological effect on employees. Employees already at risk for suicide may be particularly susceptible to negative outcomes, especially if the tragedy was the suicide of a coworker. For this reason, it is essential to secure the services of a mental health professional to perform a postvention session with all employees, whether they indicate signs of distress or not. Some employees may hide their feelings, causing their mental well-being to suffer if not included. By performing postvention sessions, employees can work through their feelings, resulting in a better workplace with less risk for suicide. Equally important, our results underline the importance of social connections in reducing feelings of thwarted belongingness and suicidal ideation. Postvention interventions should ensure that at-risk employees are connected to others in response to a tragedy, such that they do not feel isolated or ostracised.

Limitations and future research directions

Untested Effects of Psychache. We invoked the integrative framework of Howard et al. (2022) to propose our relations, which suggests that the severance of social connections

and the development of psychache are two primary mechanisms that produce suicidal ideation. The authors further suggest, based on prior research, that the denial of essential needs may produce psychache (Holden et al., 2001; Schneidman, 1998). We assessed whether a variable that represents the denial of safety and security needs, job insecurity, may relate to suicidal ideation, which tests important proposals associated with Howard et al.'s (2022) integrative model.

We did not directly measure psychache for two primary reasons. First, adding additional variables to our model would detract from the attention that we could provide to each relation. It was more important to provide appropriate theoretical rationale and sufficiently discuss the implications of each effect, rather than to include too many variables and fail to appropriately discuss any. As our focus was on workplace predictors of suicidal ideation, it was more appropriate to include job insecurity (based on the proposals of Howard et al. [2022]) rather than the more general variable of psychache. By testing a focused model in our studies, we could provide more directed contributions to the current literature. Second, we were interested in capturing a proxy of psychache that organisations could have more direct control over. If job insecurity was found to be a significant predictor of suicidal ideation, the present investigation could offer a road map for organisations to directly intervent when felt job security may reach critical levels to ultimately reduce the possibility of suicidal ideation. Because we identified the effect of thwarted interpersonal needs as more dominant, our results suggest that organisations should instead focus on this alternative mechanism to ultimately reduce suicidal ideation – particularly through reducing instances of active ostracism and passive isolation.

At the same time, the current investigation and prior similar efforts cannot make strong claims about their applied theoretical perspectives without measuring these constructs. While our results provide evidence that job insecurity does not significantly relate to – or serve as an explanatory mechanism for – suicidal ideation, we do not provide direct insights into the role of psychache. Although our unsupported predictions were derived from its associated theory, it is possible that psychache may serve as a mediator between workplace influences and suicidal ideation. For this reason, future researchers should further explore the potential mediating chain of workplace influences, psychache, and suicidal ideation.

Untested boundary conditions. Certain factors may temper pathways to suicidal ideation via key explanatory mechanisms, including thwarted belongingness, as these effects have been initially supported in the broader literature on suicide. People differ greatly regarding their need for belongingness (Hall & Nougaim, 1968; Lefkowitz et al., 1984), and this individual difference could serve as an important boundary condition. Some people may need to feel many strong attachments to others, whereas other people may be satisfied with a small number of weak attachments. Those who have a strong need for belongingness may suffer more from thwarted belongingness, as they may derive a larger portion of their well-being and self-worth through their connections with others. On the other hand, people who do not feel much of a need for belongingness may be less affected by the severance of connections with others. Because the current article supported thwarted belongingness as an important explanatory mechanism connecting the workplace with suicidal ideation, belongingness needs may be an important boundary condition that determines who is and is not impacted by the workplace

influences of ostracism and isolation. The investigation of belongingness needs as a boundary condition is a clear step for future research. Researchers could bridge multiple streams of research on suicide, resulting in more integrative perspectives.

Further, relations outside of work may similarly serve as a boundary condition. People have multiple life domains. Although one life domain may be relatively unfulfilling, another life domain may provide great life meaning. Organisational researchers have long recognised the importance of multiple life domains in research on work/family balance, and research on suicide has recently begun to investigate these effects (Howard et al., 2022; Lin et al., 2020). These authors typically investigate an effect in a single domain, and any significant results are then tested in broader models spanning multiple domains. Future researchers should perform similar boundary-spanning research to extend the present observations. That is, future researchers should test whether satisfying connections outside of work can alleviate felt exclusion at work, perhaps tempering the pathway to suicidal ideation established in the current article. In doing so, the integration of work/family balance theory may be particularly fruitful for understanding the boundary conditions of workplace influences on suicidal ideation.

Lastly, our effects may be weaker or stronger in certain occupational contexts. Temporary employees may base little of their social well-being on workplace relations, as they may enter these positions with the understanding that any developed relationships are relatively transitory. For this reason, temporary employees may receive fewer negative impacts from isolation and ostracism. Likewise, part-time employees may be more disconnected from others at work, as they are given fewer opportunities to develop meaningful relations. These employees may be more susceptible to isolation and ostracism, as the negative impacts of these behaviours would sever the little possibility that these employees have for developing meaningful relations. Because the current article places a focus on permanent full-time employees, a clear next step for future research is to investigate these occupational contexts and similar others.

Temporal considerations. Results from both our daily diary study and panel design suggested that the detrimental effects of social exclusion occur at more chronic, between-person levels. These findings suggest that future work should test models of suicide over the course of months of years, rather than days and weeks. Authors often utilise archival data from public datasets to assess the relations of variables across long timespans. While a downside of this methodological approach is the necessity to utilise measures in the archival datasets, authors have provided templars on leveraging these public datasets to study occupational health (e.g. Ryff et al., 2015). Therefore, these future studies can assess whether our effects emerge over a longer timespan than typically able to be studied with primary data.

Conclusion

Although organisational researchers believe that work has a powerful influence on well-being, the study of work and suicide is rarely seen in the organisational literatures (Howard et al., 2022), despite the thousands of lives lost in the US alone (AFSP, 2023; CDC, 2022; SAMHSA, 2021). The current article integrated

organisational perspectives into the study of suicide by testing key elements of Howard et al.'s (2022) framework, assessing the relation of relevant organisational theory with this framework, and exploring whether the studied dynamics occur at the between- or within-person level. Our results supported that workplace passive isolation and active ostracism significantly relate to suicidal ideation via the explanatory mechanisms of thwarted interpersonal needs and perhaps perceived job insecurity, but these relations occurred at the between-person level rather than the within-person level. These findings provide a lens for future researchers to integrate organisational theory with the study of suicide, in hopes that organisational scholarship can continue to inform modern knowledge on suicide and develop upstream methods to prevent it from occurring.

Note

1. We also tested whether working hours moderated our studied relations. The moderating effect of working hours was significant for only one of twelve between-person time-lagged effects (e.g. ostractism at T1 on thwarted interpersonal needs at T2), which is not significantly more than expected by random chance alone. Therefore, work hours was determined to not systematically moderate the relations tested in the current article.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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