

# Beyond Inclusion: An Empirical Study of Religious Minorities' Perceptions Towards Idiosyncratic Deals and Workplace Ostracism

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## Abstract

*Fairness in the workplace is a key component of organizational justice. However, disparities in the granting of Idiosyncratic deals (I-deals) can lead to a perception of injustice among bystanders. These perceived inequities can trigger negative emotional and behavioral responses, such as malicious envy and workplace ostracism. This study investigates the relationship between co-worker perception of other employees' I-deals and workplace ostracism, with serial mediation considering perceived I-deals differentiation and malicious envy. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected from 330 employees across 26 departments within the Government of Balochistan, Pakistan. Religious minority groups were chosen as participants in this study with the perception of purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was utilized to test the relationships that were proposed. The findings demonstrate that perceptions of inequality in the allocation of I-deals ignite the process of social comparisons, boost an ill feeling of envy, and eventually culminate in ostracism in the workplace. The results emphasize the essence of fair and transparent human resource practices in reducing these negative organization aspects. Enhancing equity in assigning I-deals enables the organization to practice inclusiveness at the workplace, which improves the well-being of employees and social cohesion. The study fits the overall discussion on workplace fairness, social exchange processes, and relationships between different groups and other goals, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), namely SDG 10, that are related to inequality reduction, and SDG 16, which promotes peace, justice, and stable institutions.*

**Keywords:** Idiosyncratic deals; perceived I-deals differentiation; malicious envy; workplace ostracism; SDGS.

**JEL Classification:** M12, J71, D63, M14, J78

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## 1. Introduction

Quality assurance is key to economic development as well as social welfare (ESCAP, 2019). Global disparities in employment are however increasing and this places a considerable strain on sustainable development. The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 10 of the United Nations is called Reduced Inequalities, and it attempts to resolve these inequalities through the encouragement of the policies that would include and lead to the non-discrimination of the population. It demands equal access to economic, political and social opportunities in a way that is independent of the age, religion, ethnic, and monetary background of an individual (Küfeoğlu, 2022). In the contemporary business environment, organizations are constantly realizing that the only way they can maintain a competitive edge (Whelan & Carcary, 2011) and guarantee long-term survival (Ding et al., 2023) is regarding their knowledge assets and human resources primarily as the foundations of competitive advantage. As organizations continue to invest in high-involving HR practices, they foster an environment that not only prioritizes employee well-being but also enhances organizational performance. By creating a workplace where employees feel valued and secure, organizations are able to cultivate a more committed and productive workforce, ultimately driving both individual and collective success (Rashid et al., 2024). Consequently, organizations have adopted idiosyncratic deals (I-deals); customized work arrangements negotiated between employees and employers (Anderson et al., 2001). The implementation of this strategic initiative of personalized agreements for talent management in organizations fosters employee professional development, improves employee retention, and promotes long-term organizational success (Chengwei, 2015; Ho & Kong, 2015). The implementation of various bundles of talent development practices, including formal, job-based, relationship-based, and informal approaches, positively influences organizational effectiveness (Shah & Iqbal, 2023). Despite the benefits of I-deals, these deals do not exist in isolation as individual negotiations between employees and employers; they influence broader workplace dynamics by affecting bystanders (coworkers), whose perceptions significantly shape organizational culture (Lai et al., 2009). Since these arrangements are typically granted to selective employees, other workers who remain bystanders perceive them as preferential treatment, which can trigger concerns about fairness and inclusion (Sha & Yang, 2016). Given the central role of co-worker perceptions in workplace relationships, it becomes essential to explore how employees interpret I-deals and the subsequent impact on their emotions and behavior.

Prior research has examined how employees responded to I-deals in a negative way, for example, by disengaging with work or withdrawing from work. Similarly, the current study reveals that employees perceive interactional injustice as a stressor, which leads to emotional strains and behavioral changes. When employees perceive unfair treatment from authority figures, such as their immediate manager, they interpret the situation as a threat to their self-respect, which heightens psychological stress. This emotional tension can manifest as negative interactions with coworkers, including coworker incivility (Anis et al., 2025). However, these limitations have not yet led to significant psychological and relational consequences. Idiosyncratic deals can range

from minor job modifications to comprehensive employment agreements offering multiple benefits (Rousseau, 2005). As a result, the overall extent of their contribution remains unclear. Financial incentives, flexible work hours, professional development and specific regulations tied to particular tasks are benefits of these programs to the recipients. Whether or not coworkers evaluate them *ex-ante* (i.e. before employment) or *ex-post* (i.e. during employment) affects what they can negotiate. Following, according to Ng (2017) Wang and Wang (2022), state that inequalities in work arrangements within the workplace are viewed as leading to a list of negative outcomes like increasing turnover intentions, workplace withdrawal and counterproductive behavior. Conversely, if coworkers perceive that their colleagues are only entitled to unique work benefits I-deals, they tend to make a comparison with others, leading to various emotional feelings such as malicious envy (Campbell et al., 2017). This type of envy exceeds the envy of competition, which is one of the types of envy due to a feeling of disadvantage in relation to colleagues, as it has sufficient intensity to spoil working relations because of the disagreements and the feelings of resentment that it can bring. In addition, employees who accept unfair I-deals perceive themselves as ostracized at work, which is defined as being treated as an outsider by others in such a way that they feel ignored or excluded, socially and professionally (Ng & Feldman, 2010). Therefore, workplace ostracism destroys employee engagement, trust and collaboration (Howard et al., 2020). Therefore, this study filled a significant gap in research by investigating at how coworker perceptions of I-deals (COPEID) are related to workplace ostracism (WPO). The study focused on malicious envy and how it, associated with perceived differentiation in I-deals, affects the connection between COPEID and workplace ostracism. Using both social exchange and social comparison, this analysis explores how these ideas affect employees and the way they interact in their workplace. Furthermore, the study is designed to find out if having open and fair HR practices, called I-deals, can prevent the harmful outcomes of I-deals and support a more inclusive and effective workplace. Additionally, the attention on I-deals includes looking at the effects on horizontal inequalities, religious minorities and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) to add to the discussion on what makes an organization inclusive and equal. By examining these issues, the study offers advice that helps businesses create fair, inclusive and open HR policies designed to control the drawbacks of I-deals and boost relationships across the workplace.

## 2. Literature Review

Researchers in human resource management and organizational behavior have focused on the connection between co-worker perception of other employees I-deals (COPEID), perceived I-deals differentiation, malicious envy, workplace ostracism and both social comparison theory and social exchange theory (Hattori et al., 2024; Marescaux et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2021). When I-deals seem to be distributed unequally, it can lead to different reactions from coworkers (Wang & Ma, 2022). Rewarding idiosyncratic deals (I-deals) to certain employees can provoke jealousy among coworkers, potentially leading to malicious envy. This may cause them to distance themselves and avoid interactions with both the recipients and the grantors of such deals (Ng & Feldman, 2010). According to social comparison theory, when individuals judge their situation

in comparison to others, unequal results can cause them to feel unhappy, while social exchange theory emphasizes the same inequality in exchanges can lead to negative results, such as being ignored or rejected (Wu et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2020). The purpose of this research is to examine the connection between COPEID and workplace ostracism and to investigate serial mediation of perceived I-deals differentiation and malicious envy.

## **2.1 Coworker Perception of Other Employees I-deals (COPEID) and Workplace Ostracism (WPO)**

Idiosyncratic deals or “I-deals”, are agreements made between employees with an organization, not just the standard employment contract (Rousseau, 2005). Employers design these arrangements to meet each worker’s individual preferences (Rosen et al., 2013). While receiving idiosyncratic deals may help employees, other workers may see it as unfair and feel isolated at work as a result (Lee et al., 2023). The comparative assessment on I-deals conducted by Marescaux et al. (2021), and Yao et al. (2020), highlights the negative side of idiosyncratic deals, indicating negative outcomes, including stress, resentment, and decreased job satisfaction. Individual response varies based on self-worth, personality, gender, ethnicity, religion and age (Liao et al., 2016; Ng & Feldman, 2010). Since I-deals affect not just recipient (employees) but also bystanders, coworkers who perceive disparities react negatively, leading to employee withdrawal, deviant behavior, and heightened workplace competition (Xiong et al., 2018). Moreover, perceived unfairness in I-deals can escalate into workplace ostracism, where employees socially exclude their peers (Lee & Hui, 2011; Ng, 2017). Studies confirm a significant relationship between coworker perception of other employees I-deals (Wang et al., 2021). A negative view of I-deals by coworkers often leads to ostracism. If I-deals are given unfairly or favor particular individuals, colleagues may feel they are treated unequally and become resentful, which can end in their ostracism (Liu et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2024). Researchers have discovered that employees usually respond less negatively if they feel that I-deals have been distributed justly (Van Waeyenberg et al., 2022). When I-deals are perceived as biased, employees may start to remove themselves from activities in the workplace (Ye et al., 2024). Moreover, those with well-defined individual moral values might turn down their colleagues’ I-deals, which potentially increases negative outcomes and fosters social exclusion (Hattori et al., 2024). When employees put effort into building trust, others might experience relative deprivation and prefer to keep them at a distance (Zhang et al., 2024). Based on this literature, the following hypothesis was proposed:

*H1*: Coworker perception of other employees I-deals (COPEID) is positively related to work place ostracism.

## **2.2 Coworker perception of other employee I-deals and Malicious Envy**

Idiosyncratic deals require substantial resource allocation, which may create a perceived resource threat among coworkers, increasing stress and envy (Campbell et al., 2017). The unequal

distribution of workplace resources, such as promotion, tasks, and compensation, influences how employees compare themselves to those benefiting from I-deals (Duffy et al., 2008). Such upward social comparison can lead to malicious envy, a negative emotional response that arises when a coworker feels disadvantaged (Pan et al., 2021). Social comparison theory suggests that low-self esteem employees are particularly susceptible to malicious envy, as coworkers frequently evaluate themselves against others (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007; Collins, 1996). This envy driven resentment may destabilize the benefits of I-deals, creating workplace tensions (Lai et al., 2009). Previous studies confirm that coworker perception of other employees' I-deals is significantly linked to malicious envy (Ding et al., 2023). Additionally, employees who perceive others as undeserving of I-deals experience intensified malicious (Garg & Fulmer, 2017). According to Hattori et al. (2024), constantly being treated less favorably than others leads coworkers to feel more envy during social comparison activities. Furthermore, Sung et al. (2024), concluded that workers who feel envious may become resentful and try to block those who receive I-deals from succeeding. In addition, Wang and Ma (2022) highlighted that workplace envy can negatively affect the way people collaborate in groups. Mao et al. (2021), also found that if employee feels deep envy toward others, it can lead them to hope the competition fails, which usually spoils the work environment. Based on this literature, the following hypothesis was proposed:

*H2: Coworker perception of other employees I-deals positively related to malicious envy.*

### **2.3 Perceived I-deals differentiation as mediator between Coworker perception of other employee I-deals on Workplace Ostracism**

Idiosyncratic deals operate within a triangular relationship involving the recipient, grantor, and bystanders, where bystanders play a pivotal role in shaping their effectiveness (Rousseau, 2005; Yang, 2020). These deals vary in content, which defines the specific terms negotiated, including job tasks, schedule flexibility, and financial rewards (Rosen et al., 2013; Rousseau et al., 2006). The perceived differentiation of I-deals arises when employees subjectively evaluate disparities in personalized agreements, shaping their understanding of workplace fairness (Saldivar & Liao, 2023). When employees inequality in I-deals distribution, they engage in social comparison, often resulting in negative emotional responses, such as workplace ostracism (Wang & Wang, 2022). Workplace ostracism occurs when employees ignore or exclude others or coworkers where interaction is socially expected (Robinson et al., 2013) Ng (2017), found that perceived inequities in I-deals content reinforce I-deals differentiation, which can lead to workplace ostracism. Additionally, studies confirm fairness perceptions directly influence exclusion levels, reinforcing the connection between COPEID, perceived I-deals differentiation and workplace ostracism (Cornelis et al., 2006; Scott et al., 2013). Zhang et al. (2020), suggest that I-deals change the way coworkers respond and these responses are very important for understanding discussions at work. Ng (2017) suggests that I-deals can make various people in groups more competitive and tend to separate them. Liu et al. (2024), reported that being mistreated leads to jealousy and ends up being ostracized. Ye et al. (2024), noted that I-deals in the workplace break harmony among

employees, causing others to be isolated. Mao et al. (2021), suggested, that social comparison supports the argument that perceived I-deals differentiation is a mediator. Based on this literature, the following hypothesis was proposed:

*H3:* Perceived I-deals differentiation significantly mediate with coworker perception of other employees I-deals on workplace ostracism.

#### **2.4 Malicious Envy as mediator between Coworker perception of other employee I-deals on Workplace Ostracism**

Coworkers actively assess their colleagues' Idiosyncratic deals (I-deals), a process known coworker perception of other employees I-deals (COPEID) (Huo et al., 2014). Rooted in social comparison and social exchange theory, employees frequently engage in upward social comparison and social exchange, evaluating themselves against peers they perceive as more privileged (Feldman & Ruble, 1981). Such comparisons and exchanges suggest envy and inadequacy, leading to workplace behaviors (Kim & Glomb, 2014). Malicious envy, a dysfunctional form of envy, arises when employees feel inferior or threatened by perceived disparities in I-deals (Reh et al., 2018; Saldivar & Liao, 2023). This emotion further intensifies workplace ostracism, as envious employees exclude or ignore the envied coworker as a coping mechanism (Smith et al., 1994; Tesser, 1986). Research confirms a strong relationship between COPEID and workplace ostracism. (Mao et al., 2021), highlighting how malicious envy serves as a bridge between coworkers' perception of other employees' I-deals and workplace ostracism. Liu et al. (2024), found that proactive workers may bring on envy from others, which can result in their colleagues ostracizing them. Furthermore, I-deals can lead to malicious envy among workers when others gain benefits from them, and it also causes coworkers to become isolated. Younis et al. (2024), investigated the ways in which workplace envy combined with organizational politics can lead to more people being ostracized, mainly through the manipulation of employees' emotions. According to Breidenthal et al. (2020), employees who display creativity may be envied by colleagues, which can lead those peers to neglect them. Furthermore, Mao et al. (2021), suggest that coworker perception of malicious envy, standing in between I-deals and ostracism, has a significant effect on this connection. Based on this literature, the following hypothesis was proposed:

*H4:* Malicious envy significantly mediates with coworker perception of other employee I-deals on workplace ostracism.

#### **2.5 Serial mediation of Perceived I-deals differentiation and Malicious Envy**

The perception of idiosyncratic deals (I-deals), among coworkers plays a significant role in shaping workplace dynamics. When employees (recipient) receive personalized work arrangements, their colleagues (bystanders) may perceive inequities, leading to reduced optimism,

dissatisfaction, or psychological distress (Ding et al., 2023). Therefore, COPEID provides a framework that examines the complex dynamics occurring in workplaces influenced by the presence of idiosyncratic deals. The fundamental notion suggested that employees react negatively when recipients are rewarded with idiosyncratic deals, potentially intensifying emotional and behavioral issues among bystanders (Greenberg et al., 2004; Kong et al., 2020). Marescaux et al. (2021), grounded their perspective in social comparison theory, suggesting that humans naturally assess and compare themselves through upward and downward comparisons. The perception of inequity whether in the grant or distribution of idiosyncratic deals, causes coworkers to perceive I-deals as unattainable or disadvantageous compared, which can provoke feelings of malicious envy among bystanders, subsequently leading to negative emotional responses (Crusius et al., 2022; Goodman & Haisley, 2007). Existing studies confirm that bystanders play a crucial role in the dynamics of I-deals, particularly in the presence of COPEID. Bystanders who perceive differentiation in I-deals are more likely to experience increased feelings of malicious envy and workplace ostracism. Bal and Boehm (2019), Lai et al. (2009), and Rofcanin et al. (2018), further concluded that bystanders' perceptions of differentiated I-deals significantly impact emotional responses and behaviors related to malicious envy and workplace ostracism. When people notice that I-deals cause some employees to be treated differently, they may feel inequity and that everyone is not treated the same (Hattori et al., 2024). As a result, some people may feel malicious envy because they believe the I-deal recipient is favored (Hussain & Mohr, 2023). Even more negative behaviors, such as shunning or exclusion, can result from malicious envy, as individuals strive to lower the status of their colleague (Zhang et al., 2024). Therefore, perceived I-deals differentiation leads to malicious envy, which in turn leads to workplace ostracism. Therefore, the following hypothesis was proposed:

*H5:* Perceived I-deals Differentiation and malicious envy serve as the serial mediators in the relationship among coworker perception of other employee I-deals and workplace ostracism.

## Theoretical Framework

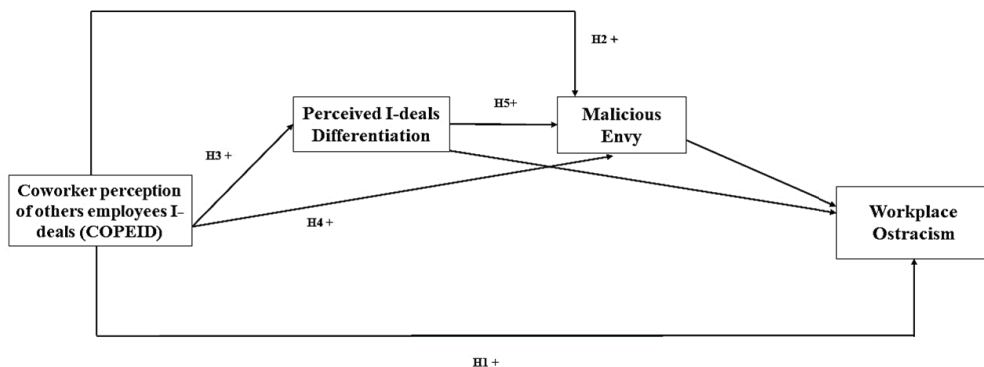


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This study aimed to validate the causal relationship among variables established by existing theories rather than exploring new phenomena. Therefore, a quantitative research design aligned with a positivist philosophy, the study employed a deductive approach to examine the relationship among co-worker perception of other employees I-deals (COPEID), perceived I-deals differentiation (PIDD), malicious envy (ME), and workplace ostracism (WPO). Grounded in social comparison and social exchange theory, hypotheses were formulated and tested using a survey-based strategy. A cross-sectional approach was applied, collecting data at a single point in time from a targeted sample.

#### **3.2 Data Collection**

The study employed a primary data collection approach, as data related to COPEID, PIDD, ME, WPO were not publicly accessible. A structured self-reported questionnaire was used, consisting of five sections: (i). demographic information, (ii). Coworker perception of other employees I-deals, (iii). perceived I-deals differentiation (flexibility, schedule tasks, financial rewards, and location) (iv). Malicious envy, and (v). workplace ostracism. The study collected data from religious minorities employed working in various government departments across Balochistan, Pakistan. These departments were categorized into the key sectors: Administration and Governance, including the Board of Revenue, Chief Minister Inspection Team, and others; Public Service and Health, covering health, social welfare, agriculture, and environmental departments; Finance and Economics, including finance, commerce and energy sectors; Law Enforcement and Security, represented by police and prosecution departments; Culture and Media, involving tourism and information, and printing sectors; Infrastructure and Public Works, including transport, irrigation and housing departments; and Women and Minorities, covering women development and minority affairs. To overcome the potential social desirability bias and common method variance (CMV), procedural remedies were implemented. Additionally, Harman's single-factor test was conducted to statistically assess CMV, with findings reported in the results section.

#### **3.3 Measures and Instrument**

The instruments used to measure the key constructs in this study, including co-worker perception of other employees I-deals (COPEID), perceived I-deals differentiation, malicious envy, and workplace ostracism. COPEID were measured using a 6-items, 7-point Likert scale developed by (Ng & Feldman, 2010). Perceived I-deals differentiation was assessed through a 16-items, 5-point Likert scale from (Rosen et al., 2013). The malicious envy was also measured using the four-item scale of (Lange et al., 2018). Lastly, workplace ostracism was measured using

a ten-item scale adapted from (Ferris et al., 2008). Both scales utilized a seven-point Likert scale. These validated scales ensure the reliability and consistency of the constructs under investigation.

### 3.4 Sampling

Perceived unfairness in sharing resources is a main reason for workplace ostracism, particularly when horizontal inequalities exist (Stewart et al., 2009). Religion, ethnicity and race in a culture may intensify feelings of exclusion, which makes it more difficult to measure the influence of the workplace on employees (Munir et al., 2022). This study investigates struggles of religious minorities employed in 26 departments of Government of Balochistan, Pakistan, as required under the Protection of the Rights of Religious Minorities Act, 2020 which considers Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, Parsis, Baha'is, Buddhists and followers of any other religion, besides Islam, to be religious minorities. Likewise, Iqbal et al. (2025), this study also considered the public sector for the population of the study. As the study group is unique and difficult to reach, a non-probability sampling method was considered best for this research. Individuals needed to fulfil certain predetermined qualifications linked to the research question (Palinkas et al., 2015). This approach is especially appropriate when researchers wish to highlight a specialized group with meaningful properties, for example, religious minorities struggling in the workplace. Since people who experienced religion-based workplace ostracism were the key participants, the sampling method made the data useful and meaningful. Along with all other approaches, snowball sampling was also employed.

The selection of maximum participants was supported by snowball sampling, as participants helped select others fitting the study requirements and making the sample size and diversity better (Tong et al., 2007). This approach worked well for including members of religious minorities since they are often hard to reach with the normal sampling methods used elsewhere. Although purposive and snowball sampling do not allow for generalizing findings, they were important for this study given the situation. In their work (Field, 2013), it is noted that using enough subjects for non-probability sampling increases its accuracy and dependability. Thus, the study identified 330 participants, which was considered sufficient to analyze the three main predictors of workplace ostracism. Using these approaches, this study responded to the issues with non-probability sampling without compromising on the sample's usefulness.

### 3.5 Research Analysis

The study examines the impact of co-worker perception of other employees I-deals (COPEID) on workplace ostracism (WPO), with perceived I-deals differentiation (PIDD), and malicious envy (ME), as serial mediators. Data from 330 employees were analyzed using PLS-SEM, chosen for its ability to assess latent variables, direct and indirect effects, and model robustness. Reliability and validity were ensured through Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, AVE, and the Fornell-Larcker criterion. Structural model strength was evaluated with R2, effect

sizes, and the model fit indices. The findings offer insights into workplace ostracism among religious minorities in government departments of Balochistan, Pakistan.

## 4. Results & Analysis

This section analyzes the data, starting with descriptive statistics, followed by measurement and relationship model assessments.

### 4.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 3, provides a demographic analysis provides a comprehensive overview of the 330 respondents, highlighting diversity in age, gender, religion, department, job position, employment duration, and education level.

Table 1  
*Descriptive Statistics*

<b>Demographic variable</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>Age</b>	20-29 Years	88	26.7	2	5	3.41	1.11
	30-39 Years	93	28.2				
	40-49 Years	74	22.4				
	50-59 Years	75	22.7				
<b>Gender</b>	Male	163	49.4	1	2	1.51	0.5
	Female	167	50.6				
<b>Religion</b>	Hinduism	78	23.6	1	5	1.98	0.81
	Christianity	204	61.8				
	Sikhism	37	11.2				
	Baha'i Faith	11	3.3				
<b>Department</b>	Health Department	120	36.4	1	19	8.62	3.58

*Table to be continued...*

<b>Demographic variable</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
	School Education Department	80	24.2				
	Police Department	60	18.2				
	Other Departments ( $\leq$ 5% each)	70	21.2				
<b>Job Position (BPS)</b>	BPS 6-10	28	8.5	2	4	3.54	0.65
	BPS 11-15	95	28.8				
	BPS 16-18	207	62.7				
<b>Employment Duration</b>	Less than 1 year	68	20.6	1	5	2.96	1.4
	1-3 years	64	19.4				
	4-6 years	70	21.2				
	7-10 years	68	20.6				
	More than 10 years	60	18.2				
<b>Education</b>	Matriculation	72	21.8	1	4	2.55	1.03
	High / Intermediate	65	19.7				
	Bachelor's degree	132	40				
	Master's degree	61	18.5				

*N=330, SD: Standard Deviation.*

Table 1, summarizes the demographic statistics of the study sample (n = 330), providing insights into age distribution, gender distribution, religious affiliation, job positions, employment duration, and educational qualifications. The age varied from 20-59 years (M = 3.41, SD = 1.11), with most respondents aged 30-39 years (28.2%). Religious representation included Christianity (61.8%), Hinduism (23.6%), Sikhism (11.2%), and Baha'i Faith (3.3%) (M = 1.98, SD = 0.81). The highest proportion of the respondents belonged to the health department (36.4%), followed by the school education (24.2%), and the police department (18.2%) (M = 8.62, SD = 3.58). Moreover, in terms of job positions, the majority of respondents held BPS 16-18 designations (62.7%), followed by BPS 11-15 (28.8%), and BPS 6-10 (8.5%) (M = 3.54, SD = 0.65). The respondents' employment duration varied with (21.2%) having 4-6 years of experience, while (18.2%) had over 10 years of experience in their relevant departments (M = 2.96, SD = 1.4). Educational qualifications ranged from matriculation (21.8%) to master's degrees (18.5%), with (40%) holding bachelors' degrees (M = 2.55, SD = 1.03).

## 4.2 Common Method Bias Analysis

Table 2

### *Common Method Bias*

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	18.699	38.160	38.160	18.699	38.160	38.160

*Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.*

Harman's single-factor test was conducted using Principal component analysis to assess common method bias (CMB) (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The first unrotated principal component accounted for 38.16% of the total variance, remaining below the 50% threshold. These results indicate that CMB is unlikely to be a significant concern in this study.

## 4.3 Measurement Model Assessment

### 4.3.1 *Reliability and Validity Assessment*

Table 3

### *Reliability and Validity Assessment*

Items	<i>A</i>	Indicator Reliability	<i>A</i>	CR	AVE
<b>COPEID1</b>	0.809	0.654			
<b>COPEID2</b>	0.83	0.689			
<b>COPEID3</b>	0.887	0.787			
<b>COPEID4</b>	0.847	0.717			
<b>COPEID5</b>	0.782	0.612			
<b>COPEID6</b>	0.847	0.717			

*Table to be continued...*

Items	$\lambda$	Indicator Reliability	$\alpha$	CR	AVE
<b>COPEID</b>			<b>0.932</b>	<b>0.933</b>	<b>0.696</b>
ME1	0.856	0.733			
ME2	0.786	0.618			
ME3	0.780	0.608			
ME4	0.811	0.658			
<b>ME</b>			<b>0.883</b>	<b>0.884</b>	<b>0.654</b>
<b>PIDD1</b>	0.768	0.590			
<b>PIDD2</b>	0.786	0.618			
<b>PIDD3</b>	0.783	0.613			
<b>PIDD4</b>	0.802	0.643			
<b>PIDD5</b>	0.799	0.638			
<b>PIDD6</b>	0.819	0.671			
<b>PIDD7</b>	0.746	0.557			
<b>PIDD8</b>	0.744	0.554			
<b>PIDD9</b>	0.762	0.581			
<b>PIDD10</b>	0.812	0.659			
<b>PIDD11</b>	0.74	0.548			
<b>PIDD12</b>	0.821	0.674			
<b>PIDD13</b>	0.785	0.616			
<b>PIDD14</b>	0.85	0.723			
<b>PIDD15</b>	0.784	0.615			
<b>PIDD16</b>	0.758	0.575			
<b>PIDD</b>			<b>0.963</b>	<b>0.963</b>	<b>0.617</b>
<b>WPO1</b>	0.817	0.667			
<b>WPO2</b>	0.877	0.769			
<b>WPO3</b>	0.852	0.726			
<b>WPO4</b>	0.863	0.745			
<b>WPO5</b>	0.86	0.740			
<b>WPO6</b>	0.883	0.780			
<b>WPO7</b>	0.847	0.717			
<b>WPO8</b>	0.824	0.679			
<b>WPO9</b>	0.813	0.661			
<b>WPO10</b>	0.852	0.726			
<b>WPO</b>			<b>0.963</b>	<b>0.963</b>	<b>0.721</b>

Note:  $\lambda$ : Factor loading,  $\alpha$ : Cronbach's alpha, CR: Composite Reliability ( $\rho_A$ ), AVE: Average Variance Extracted.

Table 3, represents the results for each construct and its respective indicators, and Figure 2 illustrates the factor loadings of the constructs. All construct demonstrated strong reliability and validity. Co-worker perception of other employees I-deals (COPEID) had factor loading between 0.782-0.887, with Cronbach’s alpha ( $\alpha = 0.932$ ), CR ( $\rho_A = 0.933$ ), and AVE = 0.696 confirming convergent validity. Perceived I-deals differentiation (PIDD) showed factor loadings 0.704-0.850,  $\alpha = 0.963$ , CR = 0.963, and AVE = 0.617. Malicious Envy (ME) had factor loadings of 0.708-0.856,  $\alpha = 0.833$ , CR = 0.884, and AVE = 0.654. Workplace ostracism (WPO) exhibited factor loadings of 0.813-0.883,  $\alpha = 0.963$ , CR = 0.963, and AVE = 0.721. All values exceeded the recommended thresholds of 0.70 for reliability (Hair et al., 2022), and 0.50 for AVE (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), confirming the robustness of the constructs for further analysis.

MEASUREMENT MODEL-FACTOR LOADINGS

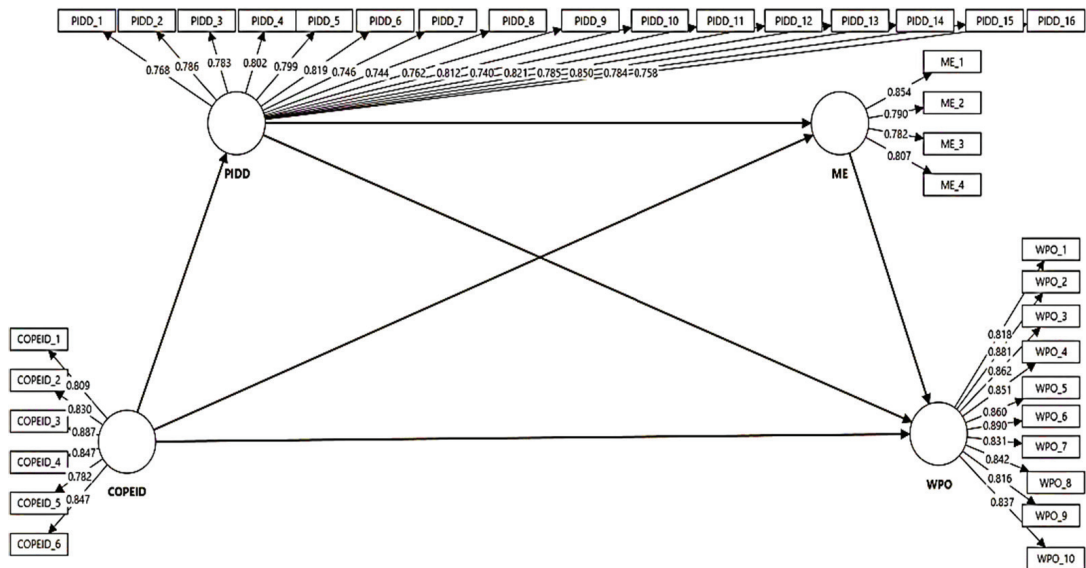


Figure 2: Measurement Model-Factor Loadings

4.4 Discriminant Validity Analysis

The HTMT values of the construct were summarized in Table 4, and discriminant validity was evaluated using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratios of correlations. Following Henseler et al., (2015), an HTMT value below 0.90 indicates acceptable discriminant validity. While a stricter threshold of 0.85 is recommended for conceptually similar constructs. The HTMT values as follows: COPEID and ME (0.695), COPEID and PIDD (0.626), COPEID and WPO (0.687), ME and PIDD (0.698), ME and WPO (0.693), and PIDD and WPO (0.611) confirming, adequate discriminant validity.

Table 4  
*Heterotrait-Monotrait*

Construct	COPEID	ME	PIDD	WPO
<b>COPEID</b>	-			
<b>ME</b>	0.695	-		
<b>PIDD</b>	0.626	0.689	-	
<b>WPO</b>	0.687	0.639	0.611	-

Table 5  
*Fornell-Larcker Criterion*

Construct	COPEID	ME	PIDD	WPO
<b>COPEID</b>	0.834			
<b>ME</b>	0.696	0.809		
<b>PIDD</b>	0.628	0.69	0.786	
<b>WPO</b>	0.689	0.639	0.612	0.849

$N = 330, p < .05.$

Discriminant validity was further evaluated using the Fornell-Larcker criterion, which compares the square root of the AVE for each construct with its correlation with other constructs. The results in Table 5, summarized that COPEID (0.834), ME (0.809), PIDD (0.786), and WPO (0.849) exhibited AVE values greater than their correlations with other variables, supporting adequate validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Correlation analysis indicated significant positive relationship among constructs, with COPEID positively associated with ME ( $r = 0.696, p < .05$ ), PIDD ( $r = 0.628, p < .05$ ), and WPO ( $r = 0.689, p < .05$ ). This suggests that perception of I-deals strengthen malicious envy and workplace ostracism. Furthermore, ME was significantly related to PIDD ( $r = 0.690, p < .05$ ), and WPO ( $r = 0.640, p < .05$ ), supporting its role in perceived I-deals differentiation, and workplace ostracism. Lastly, PIDD relationship with WPO ( $r = 0.612, p < .05$ ), highlights the impact of perceived I-deals inequities on workplace ostracism.

#### 4.5 Structural Model

The path coefficients ( $\beta$  values) represent the strength and direction of relationships between constructs. A bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples was conducted to assess significance. Table 6, summarizes the direct, indirect; and mediating effects.

Table 6  
*Path Analysis & Mediation Effects*

Direct Effect	Original Sample ( $\beta$ )	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SDEV)	T-Statistic	P-Value
<b>COPEID → WPO</b>	0.412	0.410	0.063	6.585	.001
<b>COPEID → ME</b>	0.434	0.434	0.053	8.173	.001
<b>Indirect Effect</b>					
<b>COPEID → PIDD → WPO</b>	0.132	0.133	0.041	3.253	.001
<b>COPEID → ME → WPO</b>	0.09	0.09	0.032	2.619	.004
<b>COPEID → PIDD → ME → WPO</b>	0.054	0.054	0.021	2.629	.004

$N = 330, p < .001^{**}, p < .005^{**}$ .

#### 4.6 Path Analysis and Mediation Effects

Path analysis confirmed that co-worker perception of other employees I-deals (COPEID) has a significant positive impact on workplace ostracism ( $\beta = 0.412, t = 6.585, p < .001$ ), with a moderate effect size ( $f^2 = 0.177$ ), and explaining 54.5% of its variance ( $R^2 = 0.545$ , adjusted  $R^2 = 0.541$ ). Similarly, COPEID significantly influences malicious envy (ME) ( $\beta = 0.434, t = 8.173, p < .001$ ), with a medium to large effect size ( $f^2 = 0.278$ ), and explained 59% of the variance in ME ( $R^2 = 0.590$ , adjusted  $R^2 = 0.588$ ). Mediation analysis further revealed that COPEID indirectly affects WPO through perceived I-deals differentiation (PIDD) ( $\beta = 0.132, t = 3.253, p < .001$ ), explaining 39.4% of the variance in the PIDD ( $R^2 = 0.394$ , adjusted  $R^2 = 0.392$ ). Additionally, COPEID indirectly impacts WPO with ME ( $\beta = 0.09, t = 2.169, p < .004$ ), highlighting that malicious envy intensified by perceptions of unfair I-deals can contribute to workplace ostracism. The serial mediation effect ( $\beta = 0.054, t = 2.629, p < .004$ ), further supports that perceived differentiation of I-deals fosters malicious envy, which in turn leads to workplace ostracism. Effect sizes indicate a strong influence of COPEID on ME ( $f^2 = 0.258$ ), and a moderate impact of ME on WPO ( $f^2 = 0.039$ ). These findings emphasize the role of perceived fairness in workplace relationships, demonstrating how differential treatment in I-deals can escalate into negative workplace behaviors such as ostracism.

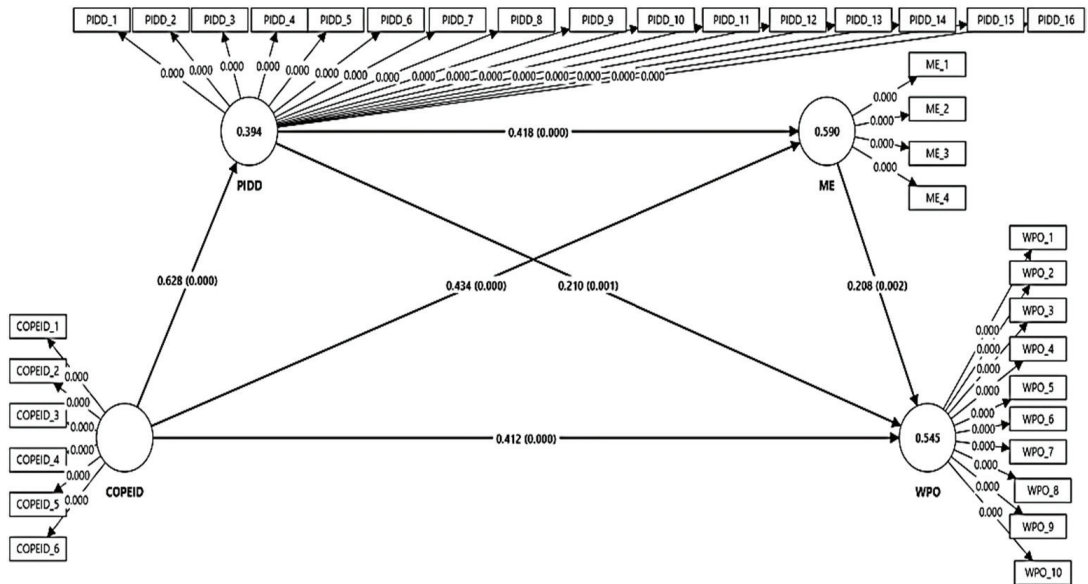


Figure 3: Structural Model

### 4.7 Assessment of Model Fit

Table 7  
Model FIT Indices

Fit Index	Value	Criteria	Interpretation
SRMR	0.029	< 0.08	Good fit
CFI	0.987	≥ 0.95	Good fit
RMSEA	0.026	≤ 0.05	Excellent fit
RMSEA (CI)	0.109 - 0.033	(Confidence Interval)	Excellent fit
NFI	0.932	≥ 0.90	Good fit

The model exhibited a strong fit to the data, as summarized in Table 7 by model fit indices: SRMR = 0.029 (< 0.08), CFI = 0.987 (≥ 0.95), RMSEA = 0.026 (≤ 0.05) with a confidence interval of 0.109 - 0.033, and NFI = 0.932 (≥ 0.90). These values are in sequence with a defined level of goodness of fit, such that they validate and confirm the robustness of these values in describing the latent relationships.

## 5. Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine the relations of coworkers’ perception of other employees’ I-deals (COPEID), perception of I-deals differentiation (PIDD) to other workplace

dynamics: malicious envy (ME), and workplace ostracism (WPO). As such, this study is built upon previous research carried out to examine the perceptions of religious minorities in the workplace (working towards SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth; SDG 9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure) (Bhatti & Malik, 2024; Bhatti et al., 2024) and therefore, relates to SDG 10: Reduced inequalities. This is the reason that the current study emphasizes enlightening inclusive organizational practices that consider the problems specific to acknowledging religious minority groups. The results indicate that when a coworker perceives that I-deal is unevenly allocated, unfair perceived I-deal distribution and perceived I-deals differentiation in I-deals lead to malicious envy and workplace ostracism. Results findings (H1) validated that the other employee I-deals (COPEID) perceived by coworkers have a direct relationship with workplace ostracism (WPO). Further, the findings here are consistent with the previous research of Kong et al. (2020), and Ng and Feldman (2010), demonstrates that unfair or preferential I-deals might result in the feeling of ostracism in the workplace. When such other people have preferential personalized work arrangements, one feels a perception of unfairness, social exclusion, and isolation at work among people with whom they work. Furthermore, this inequity can cause resentment, which results in workplace ostracism (Ng, 2017; Sweeney, 1990). The study also confirmed (H2) establishing that COPEID is positively and significantly related to malicious envy (ME). Employees who perceive an unfair distribution of I-deals experience envy, which, when malicious envy in nature, fosters resentment and leads to workplace rigidities (Ding et al., 2023; Garg & Fulmer, 2017; Buunk & Gibbons, 2007). The perceptions of workplace inequity, particularly concerning in the grant of I-deals can intensify the feeling envy among bystanders through social comparison (Schneider & Ingram, 1993).

Malicious envy is triggered by the perspectives of employees that some of them are being treated specially. This kind of envy can subsequently raise social conflict and thus worsen interpersonal dynamics in the workplace, such as workplace ostracism (Wang et al., 2023). (H3) The results also confirmed that the perception of other employees I-deals (COPEID) has a significantly indirect effect on workplace ostracism (WPO), through perceived I-deals differentiation (PIDD). Finally, the mediated relationship indicates that COPEID and WPO are linked less by the presence of differentiated I-deals, as much as by whether employees perceive a fair use of I-deals. In addition, if other coworkers realize that some have received I-deals, this motivates a discourse and subsequently exclusionary behavior, leading to workplace ostracism (Ng, 2017; Scott et al., 2013; Cornelis et al., 2006). In addition, the results showed that the relationship stated in (H4) indicating malicious envy significantly mediates the effect of other employees' idiosyncratic deals (COPEID) on coworkers' perceptions and workplace ostracism (WPO). Negative emotions such as malicious envy is found to be the mediator that enhances workplace ostracism.

When employees perceive I-deals as unfair, it may cause these employees to hold malicious envy and engage in exclusionary behaviors. Finally, the findings were in line with prior studies that demonstrated that malicious envy prompts peers to perceive their target as being left out of the workplace, especially if they believe that idiosyncratic deals are unfairly distributed

(Saldivar & Liao, 2023; Mao et al., 2021; Reh et al., 2018). Lastly, the study's findings also supported (H5) where PIDD and ME serially mediate the relationship between COEPID and WPO. Specifically, the serial mediation model indicates that COPEID induces PIDD, triggering malicious envy, which, in turn, results in workplace ostracism. Furthermore, these results support Fox and Spector (2005), in that PIDD leads to ME and WPO. The mediated model of I-deals perceptions reveals how perceptions of inequality lead to organizational behavior and it flows sequentially through the perceptions and how they affect interpersonal relations between employers, employees, and coworkers (Marescaux et al., 2021; Crusius et al., 2022; Saldivar & Liao, 2023). These implications are important for organization policies. Where workplace ostracism is rooted in perceived inequities, then employee morale and job satisfaction, as well as overall productivity, are put at risk. Organizations must recognize that while I-deals serve as mechanisms for employee motivation and retention, they must be implemented with transparency and fairness to prevent unintended negative consequences. Aligning with SDG 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions), organizations should foster equitable treatment and SDG 10 (Reduced inequalities), by ensuring that personalized arrangements (I-deals), do not inadvertently marginalize other employees. Policies aimed at promoting fairness, increasing communication, and managing envy-induced conflicts will contribute to healthier and more inclusive work environments.

## 6. Conclusion

This research examines the impact of coworker's perception of other employee I-deals (COPEID) on workplace ostracism. The theory supports the idea that I-deals differentiation (PIDD) serially mediates the relationship from malicious envy (ME) to workplace ostracism (WPO). Results suggest that if co-workers perceived unequal distribution of I-deals, they could develop malicious envy and start to feel excluded, changing how the workplace operates. Therefore, managers should give attention to fairness in the organization and encourage everyone to discuss justice, not just individual preferences. In addition, the study proves that unfair treatment of employees can negatively affect bystanders and ultimately change the overall organizational culture. The study found that when company policies are clear and equitable, everyone in the organization can collaborate well and ensure justice and equality.

### 6.1 Practical and managerial implications

The findings of this study have practical and managerial value by pointing out the negative effects of perceived I-deals diversity on teamwork and organizational dynamics, making a positive impact on areas such as management sciences and organizational behavior. It increases the focus on I-deals from helping single athletes to examining their impact on team and organizational environments. It appears from the study that while I-deals can increase employee motivation and productivity, they might also create negative impressions among colleagues that result in sadness, jealousy and social isolation. Such social issues can seriously affect the way teams cooperate, collaborate and feel about their workplace. The research recommends that, in I-deals, countries

should use clear practices, just and open to all. Making the guidelines for I-deals precise for managers and HR helps employees see the process as fair and encourages staff to interact more positively. Managers should frequently review I-deals to confirm they don't create conflict within teams or staff and if any problems arise, they need to be dealt with before they get out of hand. The research indicates that by strengthening training, we can help employees notice the effects of I-deals and become more thoughtful and cooperative. Practices for leading individual employees without losing the organization's cohesion and sense of teamwork have been offered.

## 6.2 Limitations and future research directions

This study investigates the relationship between coworkers' perception of other employees' I-deals (COPEID), perceived I-deals differentiation (PIDD), malicious envy (ME), and workplace ostracism (WPO). However, examining this complex relationship poses certain limitations that need to be address in future research. First, the sample was limited to 330 individuals from religious minority groups working across various departments of Balochistan. Future studies should consider other demographics and organizational context, such as the private sectors, different regions or broader population to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Second, this study used a cross-sectional research design, future research should adopt longitudinal designs to better understand how workplace dynamics evolve over time. Third, a non-probability sampling technique was used, which may have introduced sampling bias and limited the representativeness of the sample, even after conducting principal component analysis and testing for common method variance. Future studies focus on probability sampling techniques to minimize sampling bias. Additionally, incorporating potential moderating variables, such as high-power distance, organizational justice, perceived fairness, procedural justice and in-groups and out-group's dynamics could offer deeper insights into how hierarchy and fairness influence envy and social exclusion among employees. Future studies should also aim to develop and evaluate practical interventions through qualitative interviews and focus groups to help organizations to mitigate the negative outcomes associated with perceived inequalities in I-deals and envy leading workplace ostracism. By exploring HR policies, leadership strategies, organizational justice mechanisms, future research can contribute significantly to developing inclusive and equitable workplaces.

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