

THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN WORKPLACE BULLYING AND ANXIETY, STRESS, AND DEPRESSION AMONG EMPLOYEES

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Abstract: This study aimed to examine the association between workplace bullying and anxiety, stress, and depression among employees. Based on a survey of 211 employees in Hanoi, the findings indicate that workplace bullying is relatively common, with 38.9% of respondents reporting experiences of workplace bullying to varying degrees. Employees across different age groups, genders, educational backgrounds, occupational fields, job positions, and employment sectors were all found to be vulnerable to workplace bullying. However, those who have recently joined an organization tend to be more likely to experience workplace bullying. Workplace bullying was found to be associated with higher levels of anxiety, stress, and depression, with potentially more severe consequences for employees who already had pre-existing mental health problems. The findings indicate that measures to foster a healthy work environment in order to protect employees' mental health are essential in the current context.

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1. Introduction

Workplace bullying is often subtle in its manifestation, yet it is so prevalent that it has been described as a “silent epidemic” (McAvoy & Murtagh, 2003). Based on a meta-analysis, Nielsen et al. (2010) estimated that approximately 15% of employees worldwide are exposed to workplace bullying. A study conducted in the United States found that 23% of employees had experienced workplace bullying (Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2007). In Vietnam, up to 40% of nurses at a hospital in Ho Chi

Minh City were victims of workplace bullying (Huong et al., 2023). Workplace bullying refers to harassment, offense, social exclusion, or negatively affecting another person's work (Einarsen et al., 2020). Workplace bullying has several characteristics: it occurs repeatedly and frequently (e.g., weekly) over a prolonged period (e.g., approximately six months); there is an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the target, making it difficult for the target to defend themselves; and it results in the target occupying an inferior position and becoming

the subject of systematic negative social acts (Einarsen et al., 2020). Maglich-Sespico et al. (2007) distinguished three forms of workplace bullying: work-related bullying, psychological/emotional bullying (person-related bullying), and physical bullying. This classification has been widely used in workplace bullying research (Barlett & Barlett, 2011). Numerous studies have shown that the most common forms are work-related bullying and psychological/emotional bullying (person-related bullying), whereas physical bullying occurs less frequently (Huong et al., 2023; Rayner & Hoel, 1997).

Workplace bullying leads to numerous adverse consequences for employees. Exposure to workplace bullying is associated with a wide range of mental and physical health problems among employees, including anxiety, stress, and depression (Barlett & Barlett, 2011). Anxiety is associated with the perception that something unsafe or dangerous is imminent or that an unpleasant and difficult-to-manage event may occur in the future (Minh et al., 2024). Meanwhile, stress is a psychological response that arises when individuals appraise environmental demands as exceeding or threatening to exceed their personal resources and coping capacity (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). According to the International Classification of Diseases, 11th Revision (ICD-11) published by the World Health Organization (WHO), depression is characterized by a depressed mood (e.g., sadness, emptiness, or irritability) or diminished interest or pleasure in everyday activities, accompanied by other cognitive, behavioural, or neurovegetative symptoms that significantly impair an individual's functioning (WHO, 2026). In addition, individuals with depression may experience difficulty concentrating, feelings of worthlessness or excessive guilt, hopelessness, thoughts related to death or suicide, sleep disturbances, changes in appetite, and reduced energy or persistent fatigue (WHO, 2026).

Anxiety, stress, and depression have serious adverse effects on employees' quality of life (O'Connor et al., 2021; Olatunji et al., 2007; Rapaport et al., 2005; Wilmer et al., 2021) and job performance (Lépine & Briley, 2011; Lerner & Henke, 2008). Therefore, clearly identifying and systematically examining the effects of workplace bullying on anxiety, stress, and depression among employees is essential for protecting employees' mental health, while also contributing to improvements in workplace culture and organizational productivity.

Vietnam is a developing country with an abundant labour force, reaching 53.6 million people in 2025, of whom approximately 9 million were employed in the country's two largest cities, Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (National Statistics Office, 2026). However, previous studies have shown that many Vietnamese employees are exposed to workplace bullying (Diep et al., 2019; Huong et al., 2023; Khang & Ninh, 2023; Quan, 2025a, 2025b;

Tam & Ha, 2023). This not only has adverse effects on employees' quality of life (Khang & Ninh, 2023; Quan, 2025a, 2025b), job satisfaction and work engagement (Diep et al., 2019; Khang & Ninh, 2023; Quan, 2025a, 2025b; Tu & Hue, 2023), but also subsequently affects organizational performance (Tam & Ha, 2023). Nevertheless, research on workplace bullying in Vietnam remains limited and has primarily focused on aspects such as work-related stress, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment, while relatively little attention has been paid to the relationship between workplace bullying and other forms of psychological distress among employees. The present study seeks to provide additional empirical evidence on this issue in the Vietnamese context. Specifically, the study surveyed employees in Hanoi regarding their experiences of workplace bullying, identified demographic factors associated with exposure to workplace bullying, and examined the relationship between workplace bullying and employees' anxiety, stress, and depression.

2. Literature review on the association between workplace bullying and employees' anxiety, stress, and depression

Several studies conducted internationally and in Vietnam have demonstrated an association between workplace bullying and employees' anxiety, stress, and depression. Nielsen and Einarsen (2012) reviewed 54 cross-sectional studies and 13 longitudinal studies published between the 1990s and 2011 and concluded that workplace bullying is associated with mental health problems, including anxiety, post-traumatic stress, and depression. Verkuil et al. (2015) synthesized evidence from 42 cross-sectional studies and 21 longitudinal studies published between 1999 and 2015 among the general working population, excluding studies involving targets of workplace bullying receiving treatment in specialized clinical settings, and confirmed this relationship. Similarly, Conway et al. (2021) reviewed more recent evidence on the association between workplace bullying and anxiety, stress, and depression.

While early studies were conducted primarily in Europe and North America, several more recent studies have been carried out in Asia. For example, Nauman et al. (2019) surveyed 211 medical residents in Lahore, Pakistan; Robert (2018) surveyed 250 bank employees in Lahore, Pakistan; Chowdhury et al. (2022) surveyed 1,264 nurses in the Dhaka and Sylhet regions of Bangladesh; and Lee et al. (2022), using data from 55,201 Korean workers obtained from the Korean Working Conditions Survey, all reported an association between workplace bullying and anxiety, stress, and depression among employees.

Studies conducted in Vietnam have shown that workplace bullying increases job-related stress and reduces work commitment among librarians and museum staff

(Quan, 2019, 2025). However, research on workplace bullying in Vietnam has primarily been conducted within individual organizations or specific occupational groups. Therefore, caution is warranted when generalizing these findings (Khang & Ninh, 2023; Huong et al., 2023). In addition, studies in Vietnam have focused mainly on job-related stress and have yet to examine other effects of workplace bullying on employees' mental health, nor have they quantified these effects. Accordingly, there is a clear need for research across a broader range of occupations and for studies that quantify the effects of workplace bullying on different dimensions of employees' mental health, including anxiety, stress, and depression. The present study seeks to address these research gaps.

3. Data and research methods

3.1. Data

Primary data were collected through a survey of employed individuals aged 18–60 years who were working in agencies, organizations, and enterprises in Hanoi. The questionnaire was administered online. A convenience sampling method was employed to recruit participants. A total of 240 questionnaires were returned; however, 29 responses were excluded because the respondents reported residing in provinces or cities other than Hanoi or did not specify their place of residence. The final analytical sample therefore consisted of 211 valid responses.

The questionnaire included items covering:

- Respondents' demographic characteristics, including age, gender, province/city of residence, educational attainment, occupation, tenure with their current organization, job position (employee, team leader, department manager or above), and employment sector (public sector, private sector, or foreign-invested sector).

- Workplace bullying was assessed using the Negative Acts Questionnaire–Revised (NAQ-R). This instrument was developed by Einarsen, Hoel, and Notelaers (2009) as a revised version of the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ) originally developed by Einarsen and Raknes (1997) to measure experiences of workplace bullying across three dimensions: work-related bullying, person-related bullying, and physically intimidating bullying. The NAQ-R comprises 22 negative acts. For each item, participants were asked to indicate how often they had experienced the behavior, using a five-point scale ranging from never (1 point), occasionally (2 points), monthly (3 points), weekly (4 points), to daily (5 points). Workplace bullying was classified into three categories: not bullied (≤ 32 points), occasionally bullied (33–44 points), and victims of workplace bullying (≥ 45 points). The study used a Vietnamese translation prepared by the research team with consultation from faculty members of the Faculty of Psychology, VNU University of Social Sciences and Humanities.

- Anxiety, stress, and depression were assessed using

the 21-item Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS-21), developed by S. H. Lovibond and P. F. Lovibond (1995). The instrument consists of 21 items divided into three subscales: anxiety, stress, and depression, with each subscale comprising seven items. Participants rated the extent to which each statement applied to them using a four-point scale: did not apply to me at all (0 points), applied to me to some degree, or some of the time (1 point), applied to me to a considerable degree, or a good part of the time (2 points), and applied to me very much, or most of the time (3 points). Scores for each subscale were calculated by summing the scores of the corresponding seven items. Anxiety, stress, and depression were classified into five severity levels: normal, mild, moderate, severe, and extremely severe according to the cut-off scores presented in Table 1. Although no consensus has been reached regarding a cut-off score for the overall DASS-21, several studies have suggested a total score of 14–17 as an indicator of general psychological distress (Chin et al., 2019; Evans et al., 2022). The study employed the Vietnamese translation of the DASS-21 internally circulated by the National Institute of Mental Health, Bach Mai Hospital.

Table 1. Cut-off scores for classifying anxiety, stress, and depression severity using the DASS-21

Severity	Anxiety	Stress	Depression
Normal	0–3	0–7	0–4
Mild	4	8–9	5–6
Moderate	5–7	10–12	7–10
Severe	8–9	13–16	11–13
Extremely severe	10–21	17–21	14–21

Source: S. H. Lovibond & P. F. Lovibond (1995)

3.2. Research methods

3.2.1. Research hypotheses

Based on the literature review, the following hypotheses were developed:

- H1: Workplace bullying is associated with anxiety among employees.
- H2: Workplace bullying is associated with stress among employees.
- H3: Workplace bullying is associated with depression among employees.
- H4: Workplace bullying is associated with overall psychological distress among employees.

3.2.2. Data analysis

After data collection, the dataset was cleaned and analyzed quantitatively using Stata 16. The analysis consisted of descriptive statistics, one-way analysis of variance (one-way ANOVA) to compare levels of workplace bullying and symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress across groups of employees with different demographic characteristics (e.g., age, gender, and occupation), and regression analysis to test hypotheses

H1-H4.

The association between workplace bullying and anxiety, stress, and depression among employees was examined using the following regression model:

$$y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{NAQ-R}_i + \beta_2 \text{Gioitinh}_i + \beta_3 \text{Nhomtuoi}_i + \beta_4 \text{Hocvan}_i + \beta_5 \text{Nganhnghe}_i + \beta_6 \text{Thamnien}_i + \beta_7 \text{Vitri}_i + \beta_8 \text{Khuvuc}_i + \varepsilon_i$$

where y_i denotes the dependent variable (the anxiety score, stress score, depression score, or total DASS-21 score for individual i), NAQ-R score is the independent variable, and the control variables include demographic characteristics such as gender, age group, educational attainment, occupation, tenure with the current organization, job position, and employment sector. The β represent the regression coefficients, and ε is the random error term.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Characteristics of the study participants

The demographic characteristics of the study sample are presented in Table 2. The sample exhibited a relatively balanced gender distribution, with 44.55% of participants identifying as male, 54.03% as female, and the remaining 1.42% not reporting their gender.

Overall, the study sample was relatively young. Participants aged 18–24 years accounted for 51.66% of the sample, followed by those aged 25–35 years (29.38%), while participants aged 35 years and above represented the smallest proportion (18.96%). The participants

were generally well educated, with the vast majority holding a bachelor's degree (78.20%) or a postgraduate qualification (14.22%). Those with a high school education, vocational training, or a college diploma each accounted for fewer than 5% of the sample.

Regarding organizational tenure, participants who had worked for their current organization for less than six months and those with more than two years of tenure accounted for similar proportions of the sample (31.75% and 32.23%, respectively). By contrast, those with 6 to less than 12 months and 1 to 2 years of tenure represented approximately 20% and 13% of the sample, respectively. Most participants were employed in non-managerial positions (86.26%), whereas managerial positions were represented by only a small proportion of respondents.

Most participants were employed in the private sector (65.88%), while 25.59% worked in the public sector and 5.69% in the foreign-invested sector. The largest occupational group comprised employees working in science, engineering, and technology (30.81%), followed by those in finance, business, and management (18.01%), and education and office administration and services (both 14.69%).

Overall, the sample was predominantly composed of young, university-educated employees, most of whom were either newly employed or had more than two years of organizational tenure, and the majority held non-managerial positions.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of the study participants

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Total		211	100
Gender	Male	94	44.55
	Female	114	54.03
	Other/Not reported	3	1.42
Age group	18-24 years	109	51.66
	25-35 years	62	29.38
	Over 35 years	40	18.96
Educational attainment	High school education or vocational training	10	4.74
	College diploma	6	2.84
	Bachelor's degree	165	78.2
	Postgraduate qualification	30	14.22
Organizational tenure	Less than 6 months	67	31.75
	6 to less than 12 months	40	18.96
	1-2 years	29	13.74
	More than 2 years	68	32.23
	Not reported	7	3.32

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Job position	Employee	182	86.26
	Team leader	14	6.64
	Department manager or above	9	4.27
	Not reported	6	2.84
Employment sector	Public sector	54	25.59
	Private sector	139	65.88
	Foreign-invested sector	12	5.69
	Not reported	6	2.84
Occupation	Science, engineering, and technology	65	30.81
	Healthcare	17	8.06
	Finance, business, and management	38	18.01
	Education	31	14.69
	Office administration and services	31	14.69
	Other	29	13.74

Source: Authors' calculations based on the survey data.

4.2. Reliability assessment of the measurement scales

Table 3 presents the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the measurement scales and their subscales. All Cronbach's

alpha values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2010), indicating that the scales and subscales demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency.

Table 3. Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients for the measurement scales and their subscales

Scale or Subscale	Cronbach's Alpha	Scale or Subscale	Cronbach's Alpha
NAQ-R	0.969	DASS-21	0.958
Work-related bullying	0.913	Anxiety	0.871
Person-related bullying	0.955	Stress	0.909
Physically intimidating bullying	0.809	Depression	0.900

Source: Authors' calculations based on the survey data.

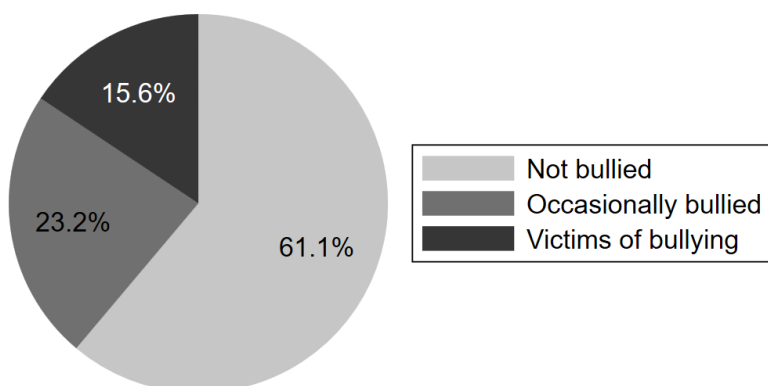
4.3. Workplace bullying

4.3.1. Prevalence of workplace bullying and types of bullying

Figure 1 illustrates the extent to which the study participants experience workplace bullying.

Encouragingly, more than 60% of participants reported not experiencing workplace bullying. However, 38.9% had experienced workplace bullying to varying degrees, with 23.2% classified as occasionally bullied and 15.6% identified as victims of workplace bullying.

Figure 1. Distribution of participants by level of exposure to workplace bullying



Source: Authors' calculations based on the survey data.

The mean frequency of the different negative acts ranged from 1.21 to 2.00, indicating that these behaviors occurred only occasionally overall (Table 4). The most frequently reported form of bullying is a person-related bullying behavior, whereby employees are assigned tasks that do not correspond to their designated roles and responsibilities but instead involved duties outside their job responsibilities (mean = 2.00). Nevertheless, work-related bullying behaviors appeared to be more widespread overall, with

relatively consistent mean scores that were generally higher than those for person-related or physically intimidating bullying (all >1.50). Physically intimidating bullying had the lowest mean score (1.21), suggesting that physical intimidation rarely occurred in the workplace. In contrast, being shouted at or being the target of spontaneous anger was relatively more common (mean = 1.63), representing the most frequently reported behavior within the physically intimidating bullying dimension.

Table 4. Prevalence of different forms of workplace bullying

No.	Item	Mean	SD	Rank
Work-related bullying				
1	Someone withholding information which affects your performance.	1.92	0.94	2
3	Being ordered to do work below your level of competence	1.88	1.04	4
14	Having your opinions ignored.	1.78	0.91	6
16	Being given tasks with unrealable deadlines.	1.90	0.99	3
18	Excessive monitoring of your work	1.55	0.92	10
19	Pressure not to claim something to which by right your are entitled (e.g. sick leave, holiday entitlement, travel expenses)	1.50	0.93	12
21	Being exposed to an unmanageable workload.	1.83	1.02	5
Person-related bullying				
2	Being humiliated or ridiculed in connection with your work.	1.45	0.83	15
4	Having a key areas of responsibility removed or replaced with more trivial or unpleasant tasks	2.00	1.06	1
5	Spreading of gossip and rumours about you	1.56	0.93	9
6	Being ignored or excluded.	1.46	0.86	13
7	Having insulted or offensive remarks made about your person, attitude or your private life	1.43	0.88	16
10	Hints or signals from others that you should quit your job.	1.41	0.84	17
11	Repeated reminded of your errors or mistakes.	1.61	0.83	8
12	Being ignored or facing hostile reaction when you approach	1.55	0.86	10
13	Persistent criticism of your errors or mistakes.	1.46	0.85	13
15	Practical jokes carried out by people don't get along with	1.35	0.77	18
17	Having allegations made against you	1.33	0.76	19
20	Being subject to excessive teasing and sarcasm	1.32	0.74	20
Physically intimidating bullying				
8	Being shouted at or the target of spontaneous anger	1.63	0.94	7
9	Intimidated behaviours such as finger-pointing, invasion of personal space, shoving, blocking your way	1.23	0.62	21
22	Threats of violence or physical abuse or actual abuse	1.21	0.63	22

Source: Authors' calculations based on the survey data.

4.3.2. Individual characteristics associated with workplace bullying

A one-way analysis of variance (one-way ANOVA) was conducted to examine the associations between individual characteristics and workplace bullying. The results indicated no statistically significant differences in the level of workplace bullying across groups defined by gender, age, educational attainment, occupation, job position, or employment sector. The only demographic characteristic that showed a statistically significant association was organizational tenure, with employees who had recently joined their current organization reporting higher levels of workplace bullying than those with longer tenure ($p < 0.05$) (Table 5).

Table 5. One-Way ANOVA results for workplace bullying

Variable	F Statistic	p-value
Gender	0.65	0.525
Age group	0.93	0.394
Educational attainment	0.71	0.548
Occupational field	0.21	0.993
Organizational tenure	3.06	0.018
Job position	0.87	0.458
Employment sector	0.55	0.648

Source: Authors' calculations based on the survey data.

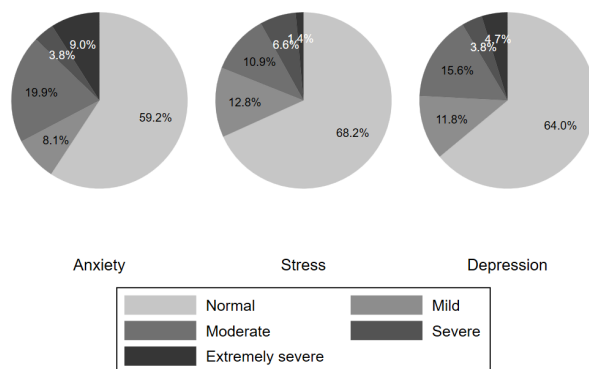
4.4. Anxiety, stress, and depression among employees

4.4.1. Prevalence of anxiety, stress, and depression

Figure 2 illustrates the prevalence of anxiety, stress, and depression at different severity levels among the survey participants. The majority of respondents exhibited normal mental health status, with the proportion ranging from 59.2% to 68.2%, depending on the specific mental health domain. Overall, anxiety was slightly more

prevalent than stress and depression. Specifically, 40.8% of participants reported anxiety ranging from mild to extremely severe, compared with 31.8% for stress and 36.0% for depression. The proportion of participants reporting extremely severe anxiety (9.0%) was also higher than that for extremely severe stress (1.4%) and extremely severe depression (4.7%).

Figure 2. Prevalence of anxiety, stress, and depression in the study sample



Source: Authors' calculations based on the survey data.

4.4.2. Individual characteristics associated with workplace bullying

Table 6 presents the results of the one-way ANOVA, in which the dependent variables were the DASS-21 anxiety, stress, and depression scores, and the independent variables were the employees' demographic characteristics. The results indicated no statistically significant differences in stress or depression scores across groups defined by gender, age, educational attainment, occupational field, job position, or employment sector. Only two demographic variables showed a statistically significant association with anxiety levels: age group and tenure with the current organization. Specifically, younger employees and those who had recently joined the organization reported higher levels of anxiety than older employees and those with longer organizational tenure.

Table 6. One-Way ANOVA results for anxiety, stress, and depression

Variable	Anxiety		Stress		Depression	
	F Statistic	p-value	F Statistic	p-value	F Statistic	p-value
Gender	2.05	0.131	0.16	0.849	0.57	0.564
Age group	6.31	0.002	1.22	0.298	0.81	0.448
Educational attainment	0.70	0.556	0.43	0.732	0.56	0.639
Occupational field	0.87	0.550	0.28	0.98	0.40	0.932
Organizational tenure	4.26	0.003	1.47	0.212	1.75	0.141
Job position	1.00	0.395	0.79	0.503	0.73	0.537
Employment sector	0.21	0.888	0.14	0.934	0.95	0.416

Source: Authors' calculations based on the survey data.

4.5. Associations between workplace bullying and anxiety, stress, and depression among employees

Table 7 presents the results of the ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models. The dependent variables were the anxiety score (Column 1), stress score (Column 2), depression score (Column 3), and the total DASS-21 score, representing overall psychological distress (Column 4). The independent variable was the NAQ-R score, which reflects the level of workplace bullying experienced by employees. Demographic characteristics were included in the models as control variables. The models demonstrated relatively good explanatory power for employees' anxiety, stress, and depression. Specifically, 39% of the variance in employees' anxiety scores was explained by the model (Model 1, $R^2 = 0.39$). Similarly, the models explained 37%, 41%, and 42% of the variance in employees' stress scores, depression scores, and total DASS scores, respectively (Models 2, 3, and 4). The residuals of all regression models were approximately normally distributed, indicating that the models were valid and reliable inferences could be made.

4.5.1. Association between workplace bullying and anxiety among employees

The results indicate that higher levels of workplace bullying are associated with higher levels of anxiety among employees. Specifically, each one-point increase in the NAQ-R score is associated with a 0.15-point increase in the anxiety score ($p < 0.01$). When the NAQ-R score increases from 0 to the sample mean of 34.36, the predicted anxiety score is 5.15. This indicates that an employee who experiences no workplace bullying (NAQ-R = 0) is expected to have an anxiety score of 0, whereas exposure to workplace bullying at the sample's

average level is associated with an anxiety score of 5.15, corresponding to a moderate level of anxiety.

4.5.2. Association between workplace bullying and stress among employees

Workplace bullying was also significantly associated with stress among employees. Each one-point increase in the NAQ-R score was associated with a 0.18-point increase in the stress score ($p < 0.01$). At the sample mean NAQ-R score of 34.36, workplace bullying was associated with an increase of 6.18 points in the stress score. This implies that an employee with a stress score of zero in the absence of workplace bullying would still remain below the threshold for mild stress, even when exposed to workplace bullying at the average level observed in the sample. However, the impact of workplace bullying may be considerably greater for employees who already experience certain levels of stress. For example, an employee who is already experiencing mild stress could be expected to progress to the severe stress category when exposed to workplace bullying at the average level observed in the sample.

4.5.3. Association between workplace bullying and depression among employees

Workplace bullying was likewise significantly associated with depression among employees. Each one-point increase in the NAQ-R score was associated with a 0.18-point increase in the depression score ($p < 0.01$). At the sample mean NAQ-R score of 34.36, workplace bullying was associated with an increase of 6.18 points in the depression score. This increase would be sufficient to shift an employee with no depressive symptoms in the absence of workplace bullying into the mild-to-moderate depression range.

Table 7. Associations between workplace bullying and anxiety, stress, depression, and psychological distress among employees

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Anxiety score	Stress score	Depression score	Psychological distress (Total DASS-21 score)
NAQ-R score	0.15*** (0.03)	0.18*** (0.04)	0.18*** (0.04)	0.51*** (0.11)
Control variables	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	211	211	211	211
R^2	0.39	0.37	0.41	0.42

Notes: Robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.10$.

Source: Authors' calculations based on the survey data.

4.5.4. Association between workplace bullying and psychological distress among employees

Workplace bullying was also positively associated with overall psychological distress among employees. A one-point increase in the NAQ-R score was associated with a 0.51-point increase in the DASS-21 score ($p <$

0.01). When the NAQ-R score increased from 0 to the sample mean, the predicted DASS-21 score reached 17.52, indicating that an employee with no psychological distress in the absence of workplace bullying would experience mild psychological distress when exposed to an average level of workplace bullying.

4.6. Discussion

The study found that 38.9% of employees surveyed in Hanoi had experienced workplace bullying to varying degrees, a finding consistent with previous research conducted in Ho Chi Minh City (Huong et al., 2023). The results also corroborate earlier findings regarding the relative prevalence of different forms of workplace bullying, with work-related bullying emerging as the most common form and physically intimidating bullying the least prevalent (Huong et al., 2023).

Employees across both genders, different age groups, occupations, job positions, and employment sectors were found to be vulnerable to workplace bullying. This finding is consistent with previous studies conducted in Vietnam, which reported no evidence of an association between demographic characteristics and the risk of workplace bullying (Khang & Ninh, 2023; Diep et al., 2019). However, unlike Diep et al. (2019), the present study found that longer organizational tenure was associated with a lower likelihood of experiencing workplace bullying. This may reflect the “old-timers bully newcomers” phenomenon, whereby employees who have recently joined an organization are more likely to become targets of workplace bullying by longer-tenured colleagues.

The findings demonstrate a clear association between workplace bullying and anxiety, stress, and depression among employees. Based on the estimated regression coefficients, the average level of workplace bullying observed in this study would be expected to shift an employee with no symptoms of anxiety, stress, or depression into the moderate anxiety, mild stress, and mild-to-moderate depression ranges, respectively. These effects may be even more pronounced among employees who already have pre-existing mental health problems, such as mild stress. The observed associations between

workplace bullying and employees’ anxiety, stress, and depression are consistent with findings reported in previous studies conducted both internationally (Conway et al., 2021; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012; Verkuil et al., 2015) and in Vietnam (Quan, 2019, 2025). Moreover, the present study provides quantitative estimates of the strength of these associations.

Despite several limitations, including a relatively small sample size and the use of convenience sampling, this study highlights both the prevalence of workplace bullying and its concerning implications for employees’ mental health. These findings underscore the importance of fostering healthy work environments to protect employees’ mental well-being and enhance organizational effectiveness.

5. Conclusion

Based on a survey of 211 employees in Hanoi, the study found that workplace bullying was relatively common, with 38.9% of respondents reporting exposure to workplace bullying at varying levels. Work-related bullying was the most prevalent form, followed by person-related bullying. Physical bullying (excluding shouting and displays of anger) was rarely reported. Employees of different ages, genders, educational backgrounds, occupational fields, job positions, and employment sectors were all found to be vulnerable to workplace bullying. However, employees who had recently joined their organizations were more likely to experience workplace bullying than those with longer organizational tenure. The findings further indicate that workplace bullying is associated with higher levels of anxiety, stress, and depression among employees, with potentially more severe consequences for individuals who already experience mental health problems. Overall, the study highlights the urgent need for interventions aimed at fostering healthy work environments to protect employees’ mental health in today’s workplace.

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