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# THE ROLE OF EMPLOYEE STRESS IN WORKPLACE BULLYING AND ITS EFFECT ON ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE- A STUDY ON BANGLADESHI WORKPLACE

Md Mehedi Hasan\*, Farzana Shafin, Noushin Akter

American International University-Bangladesh
\*Corresponding Author Email: mehedi.hasan717@gmail.com

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#### **ABSTRACT**

The workplace is an environment that can cause stress and lead to bullying. This study focuses on exploring the relationship between employee stress, workplace bullying, and organizational performance in the Bangladeshi workforce. The study uses qualitative research methods, including open-ended interviews and focus groups, to gather rich data from employees who have experienced or witnessed workplace bullying. The findings reveal that work overload and personal factors, such as age, gender, and education level, are common causes of employee stress in Bangladeshi workplaces. Moreover, employee stress plays a significant role in the occurrence of workplace bullying, making employees more vulnerable to bullies who target those showing signs of weakness, such as anxiety, depression, or disengagement from work. The study also shows that workplace bullying negatively affects employee job satisfaction, motivation, absenteeism, anxiety, stress, and depression, leading to a decline in productivity and employee morale. Additionally, cultural factors, such as a collectivist culture emphasizing loyalty to the group and respect for authority, contribute to workplace bullying in the Bangladeshi workforce.

#### KEYWORDS

 $work place\ bullying,\ employee\ stress,\ organizational\ performance,\ Bangladeshi\ work force,\ qualitative\ research,\ cultural\ factors.$ 

#### 1. Introduction

Workplace stress and bullying are significant problems affecting organizations worldwide, including Bangladesh. Stress is a natural response to demands or pressures at work that can manifest in various physical and psychological symptoms. However, when stress becomes chronic and prolonged, it can lead to severe health problems such as depression, anxiety, and cardiovascular diseases. Similarly, workplace bullying is a pervasive issue that can cause physical and mental harm to employees, leading to decreased job satisfaction and increased turnover rates. Workplace stress and bullying are often interrelated, with bullying behavior contributing to increased stress levels among employees. Bullying can take many forms, including verbal and physical abuse, social isolation, and exclusion. Employees who experience bullying may feel powerless and helpless, leading to decreased job satisfaction, low selfesteem, and a sense of isolation. In Bangladesh, the issue of workplace stress and bullying is prevalent, with limited research exploring the effects these problems on organizational performance. Bangladesh's workforce faces unique challenges, including low wages, poor working conditions, and limited access to resources, making it more vulnerable to workplace stress and bullying. Moreover, the country's cultural and societal norms often condone aggressive and coercive behavior, making it challenging to address workplace bullying. The negative impact of workplace stress and bullying on organizational performance is welldocumented. Organizations with a high incidence of stress and bullying experience increased absenteeism, turnover, and decreased productivity, which can have significant financial implications. understanding the relationship between workplace stress, bullying, and organizational performance is crucial for developing effective interventions and policies that promote employee well-being and organizational performance. Organizational psychologists have developed several theoretical frameworks to explain the relationship between workplace stress, bullying, and organizational performance. For example, the job demands-resources model posits that job demands and resources interact to influence employee well-being and work-related outcomes. When job demands exceed job resources, employees experience high levels of stress, leading to negative outcomes such as decreased job satisfaction and increased absenteeism. Similarly, the social exchange theory posits that social interactions in the workplace can influence employee well-being and job-related outcomes. Workplace bullying can disrupt social exchanges and reduce employee well-being, leading to negative outcomes such as decreased job satisfaction and increased turnover. Previous studies have explored the relationship between workplace stress, bullying, and organizational performance in Bangladesh, but there is still limited research on this topic. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by investigating the relationship between workplace stress, bullying, and organizational performance in the Bangladeshi context. Workplace stress and bullying are significant issues affecting organizational performance in Bangladesh. Addressing these problems requires an understanding of the complex relationship between stress, bullying, and organizational performance. Through this study, we hope to contribute to the literature on this topic and provide insights that can inform interventions and policies aimed at promoting employee wellbeing and organizational performance.

Despite the prevalence of stress and bullying in the Bangladeshi workforce, few studies have explored their effects on organizational performance. Therefore, this study seeks to address the following research questions:

• What is the relationship between employee stress and workplace bullying in the Bangladeshi workplace?

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- How does workplace bullying affect organizational performance in the Bangladeshi workplace?
- What are the implications of the findings for workplace health and safety and organizational effectiveness in the Bangladeshi workplace?

The purpose of this study is to fill the gap in the literature by providing insight into the relationship between stress, bullying, and organizational performance in Bangladesh. This study contributes to the field of organizational psychology by providing a better understanding of the impact of stress and bullying on organizational performance. It also has practical implications for workplace health and safety, as the findings can inform interventions and policies aimed at reducing stress and bullying in the workplace. Finally, this study is significant for the Bangladeshi workforce, as it sheds light on issues that can improve their well-being and productivity. The scope of this study is limited to the Bangladeshi workforce. The study's limitations include potential biases due to self-reported data and the use of a cross-sectional design. To address these limitations, the study will use rigorous quality control measures and acknowledge the limitations in the discussion section.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Stress and Bullying in the Workplace

Stress and bullying have become increasingly prevalent in the workplace and are known to have detrimental effects on both employees and organizations. Stress, which is defined as an individual's physiological and psychological response to a perceived threat or demand, can be caused by a variety of factors within the workplace, such as workload, lack of control, and interpersonal conflict (Mustafa et al., 2015). Workplace bullying, on the other hand, is characterized by repeated and intentional behaviors that harm, intimidate, or humiliate an individual or group and can take various forms, such as verbal abuse, social exclusion, and physical aggression (Pheko, 2018). The job demands-resources model (Lesener et al., 2019) and the social exchange theory (Chernyak-Hai & Rabenu, 2018) provide insight into how stress and bullying impact individual outcomes. The job demands-resources model posits that high job demands and low job resources lead to increased stress and negative outcomes, whereas high job resources mitigate the negative effects of high job demands (Shevchuk et al., 2018). The social exchange theory suggests that when individuals perceive that they are not receiving adequate support from their organization or colleagues, they are more likely to experience stress and negative outcomes (Nazir et al., 2018). There is empirical evidence linking stress and bullying to negative outcomes, such as decreased job satisfaction, increased absenteeism, and turnover (Steele et al., 2020). Employees who experience high levels of stress may also suffer from physical and mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression (Xiao et al., 2020). Similarly, workplace bullying can cause emotional distress, lower self-esteem, and reduced work engagement (Anasori et al., 2021). In summary, stress and bullying are significant issues in the workplace that can have negative effects on individual well-being and organizational performance. It is important for organizations to identify and address the root causes of stress and bullying to mitigate their negative effects.

# 2.2 Organizational Performance

Organizational performance is crucial to the success and sustainability of any business or organization. It is a broad concept that encompasses various aspects of the organization, including financial performance, productivity, and employee satisfaction. Measuring organizational performance can help identify areas for improvement and determine the effectiveness of strategies and initiatives aimed at achieving the organization's goals (Alrowwad et al., 2020). Financial performance is one key indicator of organizational performance. It involves assessing the organization's financial health, profitability, and growth potential. Financial performance indicators may include revenue growth, profit margin, return on investment, and shareholder value. Organizations may also use financial ratios, such as debt-to-equity ratio or current ratio, to assess their financial position (Mehralian et al., 2018; Platonova et al., 2018). Productivity is another important aspect of organizational performance. It refers to the organization's ability to produce goods or services efficiently and effectively. Productivity indicators may include measures such as output per employee, sales per employee, or units produced per hour. Improving productivity can help organizations reduce costs, increase revenue, and enhance their competitiveness (Abualoush et al., 2018; Leitão et al., 2019; Taouab & Issor, 2019). Employee satisfaction is a critical aspect of organizational performance. Satisfied employees are more engaged, productive, and committed to their work, which can lead to improved organizational performance. Employee satisfaction can be measured through surveys, focus groups, or other feedback mechanisms (Al-dalahmeh et al., 2018; Sahni, 2019). Organizations may also use indicators such as employee turnover, absenteeism, or job satisfaction to assess employee satisfaction levels. Organizational culture, leadership, and employee well-being are factors that can influence organizational performance (Chiedu et al., 2022). A positive organizational culture characterized by open communication, teamwork, and a shared vision can enhance employee engagement and productivity. Effective leadership can help create a supportive and motivating work environment that fosters employee well-being and satisfaction (Gabel-Shemueli et al., 2019). Employee well-being, including physical, emotional, and mental health, is essential for maintaining a productive and engaged workforce (Haddon, 2018). In summary, organizational performance is a multifaceted concept that encompasses various aspects of an organization, including financial performance, productivity, and employee satisfaction. Measuring organizational performance can help identify areas for improvement and determine the effectiveness of strategies aimed at achieving the organization's goals. Factors that influence organizational performance include organizational culture, leadership, and employee well-being.

#### 2.3 Stress, Bullying, and Organizational Performance in Bangladesh

The relationship between stress, bullying, and organizational performance is an important area of study in the context of Bangladesh, where the workforce faces unique challenges. The low wages, poor working conditions, and limited access to resources in the country can contribute to high levels of stress among employees. Additionally, the prevalence of workplace bullying can exacerbate the negative effects of stress on individual well-being and organizational performance. Despite the high levels of stress and bullying in Bangladeshi workplaces, there have been few studies that have investigated the relationship between these issues and organizational performance. One study conducted in Bangladesh found that job stress was negatively associated with job satisfaction and organizational commitment among employees (Yang & Islam, 2021). This suggests that stress can have a negative impact on individual outcomes, which can in turn affect organizational performance. Another study found that workplace bullying was positively associated with turnover intention and negatively associated with job satisfaction among Bangladeshi nurses (Chowdhury et al., 2022). These findings highlight the negative impact of workplace bullying on individual outcomes and suggest that it can also have a detrimental effect on organizational performance. Given the limited research on the relationship between stress, bullying, and organizational performance in Bangladesh, further investigation is needed to fully understand this complex issue. It is important to identify the specific factors that contribute to stress and bullying in Bangladeshi workplaces and to explore the potential mechanisms through which these issues can impact organizational performance. By gaining a better understanding of this relationship, organizations in Bangladesh can take steps to address these issues and improve the health and well-being of their employees, as well as enhance their overall performance.

### 2.4 Methodology

The chosen research design for this study was qualitative. It was used to explore the role of employee stress in workplace bullying and its effect on organizational performance in Bangladeshi workplaces. Qualitative research was deemed appropriate for this study because it allowed for an in-depth exploration of the experiences and perspectives of participants. The study gathered rich data through open-ended interviews and focus groups, which provided insights into the complex relationships between stress, bullying, and organizational performance. The justification for using qualitative research was that it allowed for a deeper understanding of the experiences and perspectives of the participants, which can be difficult to capture with quantitative research methods. Additionally, qualitative research was well-suited for exploring the cultural context of workplace bullying, which was particularly relevant in the Bangladeshi context. The participants in the study were employees working in Bangladeshi workplaces who had experienced workplace bullying or had witnessed it happening to others. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling, which involved recruiting individuals who were readily available and willing to participate in the study. Participants were of diverse genders, ages, and educational backgrounds, and worked in a variety of industries and job roles.

Data was collected through in-depth interviews and focus groups with participants. The interviews were conducted in Bengali or English, depending on the participant's preference, and were audio-recorded with the participant's permission. The focus groups were conducted in Bengali and were audio-recorded. The data collected through the interviews and focus groups was transcribed and translated into English for analysis. The

data collection instruments for the study were semi-structured interview guides and focus group discussion guides. These guides were developed based on the research questions and were pilot-tested with a small group of participants to ensure that they were clear and effective in eliciting the information needed. Participants were asked to complete a consent form before the interviews or focus groups began. The interviews were conducted in a private location, such as a meeting room or office, and lasted approximately 45-60 minutes. The focus groups were conducted in a larger meeting room and lasted approximately 90-120 minutes. All audio recordings were transcribed and translated into English, and the transcripts were checked for accuracy before being used for analysis.

#### 2.5 Findings

The study focused on exploring the role of employee stress in workplace bullying and its effect on organizational performance in Bangladeshi workplaces. Through qualitative research methods such as open-ended interviews and focus groups, the study gathered rich data that provided insights into the complex relationships between stress, bullying, and organizational performance. This section presents the results and findings of the study in detail.

#### 2.5.1 Role of Employee Stress in Workplace Bullying

The study found that employee stress was a significant factor in the occurrence of workplace bullying in Bangladeshi workplaces. Participants reported that work overload was a common cause of stress, which in turn made them more vulnerable to workplace bullying. Employees who were unable to cope with high levels of stress were more likely to be targeted for bullying by their colleagues or superiors. Participants reported that bullies often targeted those who showed signs of weakness, such as being anxious, depressed, or disengaged from work. The study also found that personal factors such as age, gender, and education level played a role in the relationship between stress and workplace bullying. Younger employees and those with less education were more likely to experience high levels of stress, which in turn made them more vulnerable to workplace bullying. Female employees also reported experiencing more stress and bullying than their male counterparts, particularly in maledominated workplaces.

One employee shared how workplace bullying made them dread going to work every day and caused significant stress. "I started to dread going to work every day. I didn't want to face my bully or deal with the stress of the situation"

Table 1: Role of Employee Stress in Workplace Bullying and Its Effect on Organizational Performance in Bangladeshi Workplaces	
Categories	Findings
Causes of employee stress in Bangladeshi workplaces	Work overload and personal factors such as age, gender, and education level.
Effects of workplace bullying on the victim	Decreased job satisfaction, reduced motivation, increased absenteeism, anxiety, stress, and depression.
Effects of workplace bullying on organizational performance	Negative impact on productivity, employee morale, and the organization's reputation.
Cultural factors contributing to workplace bullying	Collectivist culture emphasizing loyalty to the group and respect for authority, and hierarchical nature of many workplaces in Bangladesh.
Strategies to address workplace bullying	Creating a supportive and inclusive work environment to avoid workplace bullying.

This table presents the key findings of a study that explored the relationship between employee stress, workplace bullying, and organizational performance in Bangladeshi workplaces. Through qualitative research methods such as open-ended interviews and focus groups, the study found that work overload and personal factors such as age, gender, and education level were significant causes of employee stress, making them more vulnerable to workplace bullying. Workplace bullying had negative effects on both the victim and the organization, including decreased job satisfaction, reduced motivation, increased absenteeism, anxiety, stress, and depression. The study also identified

cultural factors that contributed to the occurrence of workplace bullying, such as the collectivist culture and hierarchical nature of many Bangladeshi workplaces. The findings suggest that creating a supportive and inclusive work environment can help prevent workplace bullying and promote a healthy work environment.

#### 2.5.2 Effect of Workplace Bullying on the Victim

Participants who had experienced workplace bullying reported a range of negative consequences, including decreased job satisfaction, reduced motivation, and increased absenteeism. Victims of bullying also reported feeling anxious, stressed, and depressed, which affected their overall wellbeing. The study found that workplace bullying had long-lasting effects on the victim, even after the bullying had stopped. Participants reported feeling traumatized by their experiences and struggling to trust others at work

Respondent stated that "I felt helpless and trapped. I was already so stressed from work, and then being bullied on top of that made it unbearable".

#### 2.5.3 Effect of Workplace Bullying on Organizational Performance

The study found that workplace bullying had negative effects on organizational performance. Participants reported that bullying affected productivity, employee morale, and the overall reputation of the organization. Employees who were bullied were less motivated to work and were more likely to take time off work due to illness or stress. The negative effects of workplace bullying also extended to other employees who witnessed the bullying, as it created a toxic work environment and affected their morale and productivity.

One participant mentioned "Bullying is not just about one person being mean to another. It's a systemic issue that affects everyone in the organization."

Table 2: Factors Affecting Workplace Bullying and Organizational Performance in Bangladeshi Workplaces	
Factors	Description
Employee Stress	Work overload and personal factors such as age, gender, and education level increase vulnerability to workplace bullying.
Workplace Bullying	Negative effects on the victim including decreased job satisfaction, reduced motivation, and increased absenteeism.
	Negative effects on the organization, such as decreased productivity, employee morale, and reputation damage.
Cultural Factors	Collectivist culture and hierarchical nature of workplaces make it difficult for employees to speak out against bullying.
Organizational Response	Creation of a supportive and inclusive work environment, and implementation of strategies and policies to address bullying.

The table 2 summarizes the key findings from the study on the factors affecting workplace bullying and organizational performance in Bangladeshi workplaces. The study found that employee stress was a significant factor in the occurrence of workplace bullying, with work overload and personal factors such as age, gender, and education level increasing vulnerability to bullying. Workplace bullying had negative effects on both the victim and the organization, including decreased job satisfaction, reduced motivation, increased absenteeism, decreased productivity, and damage to the organization's reputation. Cultural factors such as the collectivist culture and hierarchical nature of workplaces made it difficult for employees to speak out against bullying. The study highlights the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive work environment and implementing strategies and policies to address workplace bullying in Bangladeshi workplaces.

# 2.5.4 Cultural Factors Contributing to Workplace Bullying

The study identified several cultural factors that contributed to the occurrence of workplace bullying in Bangladeshi workplaces. Participants reported that the collectivist culture in Bangladesh, which emphasizes loyalty to the group and respect for authority, made it difficult for employees to speak out against bullying or report it to their superiors. Participants reported feeling that reporting bullying would be seen as disloyal or disrespectful to their superiors. Additionally, the hierarchical

nature of many Bangladeshi workplaces meant that employees felt powerless to challenge bullying behavior from their superiors.

They stated that "In our culture, it's seen as disrespectful to question authority or challenge someone who is higher up. So, even if we see bullying happening, we often don't speak out".

A manager shared their perspective on creating a supportive and inclusive work environment and avoiding workplace bullying as they know how damaging it can be for employees.

As a manager, I make it a priority to create a supportive and inclusive work environment. I know how damaging workplace bullying can be, and I don't want my employees to experience that.

In conclusion, the findings of this study highlighted the complex interplay between employee stress, workplace bullying, and organizational performance. The study found that employee stress was a significant factor in workplace bullying and that workplace bullying had negative effects on both the victim and the organization. The study also identified cultural factors that contributed to the occurrence of workplace bullying in Bangladeshi workplaces, such as the collectivist culture and hierarchical nature of many workplaces. The findings of this study can inform the development of strategies and policies to address workplace bullying and promote a healthy work environment in Bangladesh and other similar contexts.

## 3. DISCUSSION

The study explored the relationship between employee stress, workplace bullying, and organizational performance in Bangladeshi workplaces. Qualitative research methods such as open-ended interviews and focus groups were used to gather data on the complex relationships between stress, bullying, and organizational performance. The study found that work overload and personal factors such as age, gender, and education level were significant causes of employee stress, making them more vulnerable to workplace bullying. The victims of bullying reported a range of negative consequences, including decreased job satisfaction, reduced motivation, increased absenteeism, anxiety, stress, and depression. Workplace bullying had negative effects on organizational performance, affecting productivity, employee morale, and the organization's reputation. The study identified cultural factors that contributed to the occurrence of workplace bullying, such as the collectivist culture and hierarchical nature of many Bangladeshi workplaces. Creating a supportive and inclusive work environment can help prevent workplace bullying and promote a healthy work environment. The findings suggest that organizations need to address the root causes of employee stress and take steps to prevent workplace bullying. Organizations should promote a culture of respect and inclusion, where employees feel safe and supported. They should also provide training to managers and employees on how to recognize and address workplace bullying. Policies and procedures should be put in place to address bullying and provide support to victims. Organizations should also ensure that they provide resources and support to employees who are experiencing stress. This includes providing access to counseling and other support services. The study highlights the need for organizations to take workplace bullying seriously and recognize the negative impact it has on employees and the organization. Organizations should view preventing and addressing workplace bullying as a critical component of their business strategy. By promoting a supportive and inclusive work environment and addressing the root causes of employee stress, organizations can improve employee well-being, productivity, and organizational performance.

# 4. CONCLUSION

The study explored the complex relationships between employee stress, workplace bullying, and organizational performance in Bangladeshi workplaces. Through qualitative research methods such as open-ended interviews and focus groups, the study found that work overload and personal factors such as age, gender, and education level were significant causes of employee stress, making them more vulnerable to workplace bullying. Workplace bullying had negative effects on both the victim and the organization, including decreased job satisfaction, reduced motivation, increased absenteeism, decreased productivity, and damage to the organization's reputation. Cultural factors such as the collectivist culture and hierarchical nature of workplaces contributed to the occurrence of workplace bullying, making it difficult for employees to speak out against it. The findings of the study suggest that creating a supportive and inclusive work environment can help prevent workplace bullying and promote a healthy work environment. Organizational strategies and policies should be put in place to address workplace bullying, and employers should provide support and resources for employees who have experienced bullying. Additionally, there is a need to raise awareness about the negative impacts of workplace bullying and encourage employees to speak out against it. The study has important implications for both researchers and practitioners in the field of organizational psychology. Future research can build on these findings to explore the effectiveness of different strategies and policies to prevent workplace bullying and promote a healthy work environment. Practitioners can use the findings to design and implement effective interventions to address workplace bullying and support employees who have experienced it. By creating a safe and supportive work environment, organizations can improve employee well-being, productivity, and overall organizational performance.

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