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MEASURING BULLYING AT WORK IN URUGUAY WITH THE NEGATIVE ACTS QUESTIONNAIRE-22

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Abstract. The Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ-R) has been widely used to measure workplace bullying across different occupational sectors, including healthcare and education, and in a variety of countries. This study reports the results of the validation of the NAQ-R for Uruguay. The first step in this initial effort to study workplace bullying in Uruguay involved defining it as a situation in which one or more individuals persistently perceive themselves as being exposed to negative acts by one or more people over time, while experiencing difficulties defending themselves against such actions. Workplace bullying has been associated with serious consequences for individuals and the organization, including psychological and physical health problems, economic and social difficulties, deteriorated work environments, and organizational costs. Data collection with the 22-item NAQ-R began in 2004, and the first analyses were conducted with a sample of 226 employees in administrative, technical, and service positions in Montevideo. The Uruguayan-Spanish version of the NAQ-R showed good internal consistency (Cronbach alpha = .88). Exploratory factor analysis using Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation yielded a six-factor solution. However, a subsequent fixed three-factor analysis, consistent with previous studies, identified personal bullying, work-related bullying, and physical intimidation as dimensions, with satisfactory results. These findings partially support the theoretical structure of the NAQ-R while also suggesting potential inconsistencies in its factorial composition. Additionally, the results highlight the instrument's robustness and its ability to capture diverse forms of workplace bullying. The exploratory analysis yielded a structure different from the theoretically expected model. Therefore, further research is needed to determine whether the identified factors can be consistently replicated across different samples and cultural contexts.
Keywords: workplace bullying, NAQ-R 22, Spanish validation, Uruguay.

Introduction

In 2019, the International Labour Organization (ILO) adopted Convention No. 190 on violence and harassment in the world of work and called on member states to ratify it. Uruguay was the first country to do so. Additionally, the government launched the *National Commitment to Life, Health and Safety at Work*[1]. - Within this framework, it is essential to have instruments to assess and monitor psychosocial risks and workplace violence.

When discussing violence in organizations, reference is made to actions or processes that cause discomfort or harm to those who experience or witness them through their operation or effect (Franco, 2019). Workplace bullying can be understood as a process of intimidation characterized by abusive or aggressive behavior that, whether directly or indirectly, deliberately or unintentionally, is experienced as humiliating and offensive and causes severe stress to the person affected. As a result, individuals often experience feelings of powerlessness and inferiority that hinder their ability to confront the situation and defend themselves effectively. These practices obstruct work processes, create widespread discomfort in the workplace, and cause severe harm to both individuals and organizations. Workplace bullying is a multicausal phenomenon shaped by the organization of work and the socio-affective, cultural, and economic conditions of a given context (Einarsen, Raknes, 1997; Franco, 2015; Glambek et al., 2018).

The original *Negative Acts Questionnaire* (NAQ) was developed in Norway in the early 1990s (Einarsen et al., 1994) and was later adapted in English (Hoel et al., 1999). The original version contained 29 items, which were subsequently refined by Einarsen and colleagues into a 22-item revised version: the *Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised* (NAQ-R) (Einarsen, Hoel, 2001). The NAQ-R includes 22 items describing different forms of negative workplace behaviors. These behaviors refer to acts that may occur among individuals in the same work environment and can, at times, be part of everyday workplace interactions. However, such behaviors become forms of workplace violence when they occur repeatedly, systematically, and persistently over time, targeting one or more individuals often. The behaviors or actions included in the scale are summarized as follows: 1) concealment of information; 2) humiliation, ridicule or contempt in relation to tasks; 3) orders for work below the level of competition; 4) changing responsibilities for more trivial or unpleasant ones; 5) spreading rumors about the person; 6) being ignored, excluded or not talking to the person until they feel invisible; 7) insulting or offending with comments about the person, their attitudes or their private life; 8)

[1] https://www.gub.uy/presidencia/comunicacion/noticias/gobierno-lanzo-compromiso-nacional-vida-salud-seguridad-trabajo

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receiving shouting or being the object of spontaneous anger; 9) intimidating behaviors such as being pointed with a finger, invasion of personal space, pushing, not being allowed to pass or aggressive looks; 10) receiving details or hints from others that suggest leaving their job; 11) continually or exaggeratedly remind you of mistakes and failures; 12) being ignored or receiving a hostile reaction when expressing or approaching someone; 13) receiving persistent criticism about their work and effort; 14) being ignored or not taken into account in their opinions, views or initiatives; 15) receiving practical jokes from people with whom you do not get along; 16) assign unattainable tasks or objectives; 17) having been accused of something, receiving allegations against him; 18) being overly supervised in their work; 19) being pressured not to claim something to which he is entitled (temporary sick leave, vacations, settlement of expenses, etc.); 20) being the subject of numerous jokes and sarcasm; 21) being exposed to an excessive workload; 22) receiving threats of violence or physical abuse. These items are complemented with a self-labeling question at the end of the scale that assesses the respondent's perception of being bullied *(victimization).*

Various studies conducted over the years have reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.87 to 0.93, demonstrating the questionnaire's high reliability. In addition, significant correlations with variables related to the work environment and the worker's health support its construct validity (Franco, 2015; Buunk et al., 2017).

The NAQ-R (Einarsen et al., 2009) has been widely used to measure workplace bullying. Its broad international dissemination is supported by a substantial body of research demonstrating strong psychometric properties and successful cultural adaptation. Validation studies conducted across different countries, languages, occupational sectors, and sociocultural contexts have consistently confirmed its reliability (Cronbach's alpha above 0.91), factorial structure, and validity, making it one of the most widely used instruments in the field. The instrument generally reveals a three-factor structure: *personal bullying*, which includes behaviors related to social isolation, disrespect, and reputational damage; *work-related bullying*, which refers to aspects associated with tasks, responsibilities, rights, and deficiencies in workplace communication and information; and *physically intimidating forms of bullying*. This three-factor solution has shown good construct validity through its associations with measures of health, satisfaction, and psychosocial risks.

Table 1 provides an overview of studies conducted in different countries that support the internal consistency and concurrent validity of the NAQ-R, including studies from Japan (Tsuno et al., 2010), Greece (Kakoulakis et al., 2015), India (Gupta et al., 2017), Spain (Dujo-López et al., 2020; León-Pére et al., 2019), Indonesia (Erwandi et al., 2021), Brazil (Sá Cunha, et al., 2024; Aoki et al., 2024), Sweden (Rosander et al., 2024).

Table 1. Brief world overview of the psychometric validation of the Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised

Country/ Language	NAQ version	Sample	Factor structure	Reliability (α / ω)	Evidence of validity	Authors (year)
UK/English	NAQ-R (22 items)	Multiple samples (>5,000)	3 factors	> .90	Criterion validity; convergent validity with mental health, leadership, and work climate	Einarsen et al. (2009)
Japan	NAQ-R	1626	NAQ-R: 3 factors	.95 males, .91 females	CFA	Tsuno et al. (2010)
Greece / Greek	NAQ-R (22 items)	265 teachers	2 factors	.915	Correlation with stress, anxiety, depression, and self-esteem	Kakoulakis et al. (2015)
India / English	NAQ-R (22 items)	1,053 workers	3 factors	> .90	ROC validation; correlation with burnout, engagement, and victimization	Gupta et al. (2017)
Spain / Spanish	NAQ-R (23 items)	2,538 workers	3 factors	.91	Concurrent validity with burnout, clinical symptomatology, and coping	Dujo-López et al. (2020)
Indonesia / Indonesian	NAQ-R (22 items)	3,140 workers	3 factors	.72 - .90	Concurrent validity (K10; well-being)	Erwandi et al. (2021)

Brazil / Portuguese	NAQ-R (22 items)	10,148 teachers	2 factors	.92 - .93	Convergent with SRQ-20; good CFA fit	Sá Cunha et al. (2024)
Brazil / Portuguese	NAQ-R (20 items)	350 professional nurses	4 factors	≈ .90	Confirmed factorial validity; applicable in health	Aoki et al. (2024)
Sweden / Swedish	NAQ-R (22 items); S-NAQ	1,853 workers	NAQ-R : 2 factors; S-NAQ : 1 factor	α = high	Criterion validity; cut-off points and prevalence estimation	Rosander et al. (2024)

Note: Order by year of publication. Abbreviations: Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), Receiver Operating Characteristic (ROC), Kessler 10 (K10), Self-Reporting Questionnaire (SRQ-20)

The international literature indicates that the NAQ-R demonstrates high cross-cultural stability, which facilitates its use in comparative and multicenter studies. Although its factor structure may vary slightly across studies (e.g., two-, three-, or four-factor models), this does not appear to compromise its functionality and may reflect adaptations to the organizational and cultural contexts of each country.

The aim of this exploratory study is to examine the prevalence of workplace bullying among Uruguayan employees using the NAQ-R and evaluate its psychometric properties, including factor structure and reliability, in the Uruguayan context. In addition, the study explores the association between workplace bullying and demographic variables such as gender, age, education level, and years of employment to identify 'groups' that may be more vulnerable to bullying. Finally, the study assesses employees' self-perception of victimization-related workplace bullying as measured by the NAQ-R. A cross-sectional design was used, and data were collected with a paper-and-pencil questionnaire.

Method

Study design, setting, and participants

The descriptive cross-sectional study of 226 Uruguayan employees was an initial exploratory study on the subject. This study recruited employees holding administrative, technical, or service positions at a public harbor agency in Montevideo. The dataset was screened for invalid and missing values before the analysis. Two cases with invalid age values (age = 0) were excluded. No missing data were identified for the 22 items of the NAQ-R.

The number of valid responses varied across demographic variables due to missing participant information. Specifically, 226 valid responses were available for the main analyses, 201 participants reported their gender, and 218 participants provided information on years of employment. Among those who reported gender, 142 (70.6%) were men and 59 (29.4%) were women. Participants' mean age was 48.69 years (SD = 6.35, ranging from 35 to 61). Educational attainment ranged from primary to secondary, technical, and university education. Regarding years of employment, 218 participants had an average of 26.60 years (SD = 6.16, ranging from 16 to 42). Missing data were handled using listwise exclusion for analyses involving variables with incomplete responses.

Questionnaire

The data used in this exploratory study were provided by the first author and extracted from an Excel file created from the initial paper-and-pencil data collection. The dataset did not contain any personal identifying information to ensure confidentiality. In 2004, the full original questionnaire was translated from English into Uruguayan Spanish and compiled by the first author. Following standard practice in questionnaire-based research, the introductory section of the instrument described the purpose of the study, explained how the results would be used, and provided contact information. The questionnaire also included demographic items (gender, age, education) assessed through multiple-choice questions, bipolar adjectives rating, and a Likert-type scale.

Negative Acts at work were measured with an adapted Uruguayan Spanish version of the NAQ-R, based on the 22-item scale developed by Einarsen and Raknes (1997). The Spanish version of the NAQ-R was approved by Einarsen. The instrument demonstrated high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha of .88, comparable to that reported in previous Spanish studies (e.g., Dujo-López et al., 2020). The questionnaire includes a five-point Likert scale for each item to assess frequency, ranging from never to daily; 1 = never, 2 = now and then, 3 = monthly, 4 = weekly, and 5 = daily. The scores across the 22 items were summed to obtain a total NAQ-R score ranging from 22 to 110, with higher scores indicating greater reported workplace bullying.

While cut-off ranges can vary by study, general thresholds often classify a total NAQ-R score from 22 to 32 as 'no significant bullying,' 33 to 45 as 'occasional bullying or moderate incivility,' and 46 or higher as 'high likelihood of being a victim of workplace bullying.' Workplace bullying typically involves the systematic and repeated use of negative behavior directed toward the same individual or group over time.

Perception of being bullied was assessed with the widely used self-labeling question included at the end of the questionnaire: *Have you been bullied at work?* In this section, bullying was defined *as a situation where one or several individuals persistently, over a period of time, perceive themselves to be on the receiving end of negative actions from one or several persons, in a situation where the target of bullying has difficulty in defending themselves against these actions. This definition of bullying is a starting point and does not refer to a one-off incident. According to the definition above, please indicate whether you have been subjected to workplace bullying in the past six months*.

Statistical Analyses

The collected data were imported into IBM SPSS Statistics 29.0 (SPSS IBM Corp., Chicago, IL, USA) for analysis. Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation was conducted to examine the instrument's factor structure. The internal consistency of the resulting scale and subscales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (α), and t-tests were performed to evaluate significant differences between groups. Statistical significance was established at $p < .05$.

Results

Negative acts at work: First, the frequency distribution and factorial structure of the Uruguayan version of the NAQ-R were examined. The total NAQ-R score showed a mean of 50.83 (SD = 8.12) in the sample of 226 participants, with scores ranging from 22 to 79. Although the score distribution was slightly skewed, it approximated a normal distribution. Regarding the general threshold, an NAQ-R total score indicates that this sample had a high probability of becoming a victim of workplace bullying.

Perception of being bullied (victimization): The mean score for the additional self-labeling item was 1.24 (SD = 0.66; N = 208). Most respondents (n = 179, 86.1%) reported never being bullied at work. In contrast, 14 employees (6.7%) said they had experienced bullying "yes, but only a few times," while 12 respondents (5.8%) reported being bullied "at least once a month." Only two employees (1.0%) reported experiencing bullying daily.

An exploratory factor analysis using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with Varimax rotation initially produced six factors. The first factor had an eigenvalue of 30.97 and accounted for 12.90% of the variance, while the remaining five factors had eigenvalues ranging from 9.15 to 4.90 and explained between 11.96% and 7.26% of the variance. However, the eigenvalues of the last three factors were only marginally higher than the variance explained by a single item, suggesting limited substantive contribution. Overall, the first four factors explained 47.91% of the total variance, whereas the complete six-factor solution accounted for 64.96%.

Subsequently, a fixed three-factor solution was tested using PCA with Varimax rotation (see Table 2), in line with previous studies on the NAQ-R (Einarsen et al., 2009; Tsuno et al., 2010; Gupta et al., 2017; Dujo-López et al., 2020; Erwandi et al., 2021). The resulting three-factor structure, consisting of *personal bullying*, *workplace bullying*, and *physical intimidation*, provided a satisfactory fit and explained 47.83% of the total variance. The first factor (eigenvalue = 30.97) accounted for 19.58% of the variance, the second factor (eigenvalue = 9.15) explained 15.17%, and the third factor (eigenvalue = 7.71) explained 13.07% of the variance.

Table 2. Results of the fixed three-factor analysis (Principal Component Analysis-Rotated Method Varimax)

Factors and Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Bullying at work - Personal related			
Q2 Being humiliated or ridiculed in connection with your work (person-related)	**.465**		
Q4 Having key areas of responsibility removed or replaced with more trivial or unpleasant tasks (work-related)	**.594**		
Q5 Spreading gossip about you (person-related)	**.469**		
Q6 Being ignored or excluded (person-related)	**.576**		
Q8 Being shouted at or being target of spontaneous anger (physically intimidating)	**.448**		
Q9 Intimidating behaviors such as finger-pointing, invasion of personal space, shoving, blocking your way (physically intimidating)	**.481**		

In addition, the total NAQ-R score was positively associated with the self-labeling bullying item ("Have you been bullied at work?"), supporting the concurrent validity of the instrument. Similar associations between exposure to negative acts and subjective victimization have been consistently reported in previous NAQ-R studies.

The factorial analyses suggested a multidimensional structure of workplace bullying. Three factors were identified, generally corresponding to dimensions described in the international literature: personal bullying, intimidation-related behaviors, and work-related bullying. This finding is broadly consistent with studies conducted in Norway, Japan, Spain, and Indonesia, which also reported multidimensional solutions for the NAQ-R. However, some differences from the original NAQ-R structure proposed by Einarsen et al. (2009) were observed in the distribution of items across factors. Such variability has also been reported in other cross-cultural adaptations of the instrument, including studies from Greece and Brazil.

The differences observed in this study may reflect contextual and organizational characteristics influencing how workplace bullying behaviors are perceived and interpreted. Nevertheless, these interpretations should be considered exploratory, and further studies with larger, more heterogeneous samples are necessary before drawing culturally specific conclusions about workplace bullying dynamics in Uruguay. Workplace violence is a highly significant psychosocial risk. Studies conducted in Uruguay have reported prevalence rates ranging from 4% to 15% for frequent exposure to workplace bullying, and from 31% to 62% for occasional exposure. In addition, workplace bullying has been found to correlate significantly with absenteeism, health-related disorders, and feelings of status loss (Buunk et al., 2017; Franco, 2015, 2018). Collectively, these findings provide robust evidence of the psychosocial impact of workplace bullying in Uruguay, highlighting its major implications for workers' health, organizational operations, and the development of preventive public policies (Franco et al., 2025).

These findings also support the relevance of workplace bullying as a psychosocial occupational health issue. Previous international studies have demonstrated that exposure to workplace bullying is associated with psychological distress, burnout, anxiety, depression, reduced well-being, and organizational dysfunction. In this regard, the availability of a Spanish-language NAQ-R adapted to the Uruguayan context may contribute to psychosocial risk surveillance, organizational assessment, and the implementation of prevention strategies in occupational health systems.

Furthermore, the implementation of ILO Convention 190 on violence and harassment at work reinforces the importance of having valid and reliable tools for identifying workplace bullying behaviors in organizations. Uruguay's early ratification of this convention highlights the relevance of developing local evidence and assessment instruments adapted to the national context.

Some limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study relied exclusively on self-report data, which may introduce social desirability and recall biases. Second, the sample was relatively specific and limited to a single occupational setting, which limits generalizability. Third, the study implemented exploratory factorial procedures. Future research should include confirmatory factor analyses (CFA), larger representative samples, measurement invariance analyses, and additional indicators of convergent and discriminant validity.

The time elapsed between data collection and publication is also a limitation, as work environments and cultural contexts may have changed since 2004. Nevertheless, the aim of this study was not to provide current epidemiological estimates but to report the original psychometric evaluation of the Uruguayan-Spanish adaptation of the NAQ-R. For this purpose, the 2004 dataset remains informative and suitable, while additional validation studies with more recent samples would further strengthen the evidence base.

Conclusions and practical implications

This exploratory study provides preliminary evidence supporting the reliability and construct validity of a Uruguayan Spanish version of the NAQ-R. The instrument demonstrated acceptable internal consistency and a multidimensional structure broadly comparable to those reported in previous international validation studies, although some differences in factor composition were observed.

The findings suggest that the NAQ-R may be a useful screening instrument for assessing workplace bullying behaviors and psychosocial risks in Uruguayan organizational contexts. Its application may contribute to occupational health surveillance, organizational diagnosis, and the implementation of prevention strategies addressing workplace violence and harassment.

Additionally, these results should be interpreted cautiously given the exploratory nature of the study and the characteristics of the sample. Future research should use larger and more heterogeneous samples, confirmatory factorial approaches, and cross-cultural validation procedures to further evaluate and refine the psychometric stability, construct validity, reliability, and applicability of the NAQ-R in Uruguay and other Latin American countries and broader contexts. Additional confirmatory validation studies may also help

reduce the item overlap and determine which items should be retained, modified, or removed to strengthen the instrument's consistency and psychometric reliability.

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Disclosure Statement

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

Data Availability Statement

The dataset for this study is available on request. The data are not publicly available in accordance with the consent provided by participants on the use of confidential data. Requests to access the datasets supporting the conclusions of this article should be addressed to the first author.

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Appendix

The Uruguayan version of the NAQ-R in Spanish according to Franco, Buunk-Werkhoven (2026) based on the NAQ-R, Negative Acts Questionnaire (Einarsen, Hoel, 2001)

Las siguientes conductas sirven como ejemplo de conductas negativas en el lugar de trabajo. Pensando en los últimos 6 meses, puede usted indicar ¿cuántas veces se ha visto sometido a los siguientes actos negativos en el trabajo?

1	2	3	4	5
Nunca	Alguna vez	Mensualmente	Semanalmente	A diario

1) Alguien le ha ocultado información que ha afectado a su rendimiento	1	2	3	4	5
2) Ha sido humillado o ridiculizado en relación a su trabajo	1	2	3	4	5
3) Le han ordenado realizar un trabajo que está por debajo de su nivel de competencia	1	2	3	4	5
4) Le han cambiado de realizar tareas de responsabilidad por otras más triviales o desagradables	1	2	3	4	5
5) Se han extendido rumores sobre usted	1	2	3	4	5
6) Ha sido ignorado, excluido o le han dejado de hablar	1	2	3	4	5
7) Le han insultado u ofendido con comentarios sobre usted, sus actitudes o su vida privada	1	2	3	4	5
8) Le han gritado o ha sido objeto de enfados espontáneos	1	2	3	4	5
9) Ha sufrido conductas intimidatorias como ser apuntado con el dedo, la invasión de su espacio personal, empujones, que no le dejen pasar, etc.	1	2	3	4	5
10) Ha visto detalles o indirectas de otros que le sugieran abandonar su trabajo	1	2	3	4	5
11) Le han recordado continuamente sus errores y fallos	1	2	3	4	5
12) Ha sido ignorado o ha recibido una reacción hostil cuando se ha acercado a alguien	1	2	3	4	5
13) Ha recibido críticas persistentes sobre su trabajo y esfuerzo	1	2	3	4	5
14) Sus opiniones y puntos de vista han sido ignorados	1	2	3	4	5
15) Ha recibido bromas pesadas de gente con la que no se lleva bien	1	2	3	4	5
16) Le han asignado tareas u objetivos inalcanzables	1	2	3	4	5
17) Ha recibido alegaciones en su contra	1	2	3	4	5
18) Ha sido excesivamente supervisado en su trabajo	1	2	3	4	5
19) Ha sido presionado para no reclamar algo a lo que tiene derecho (Ej. Baja temporal por enfermedad, vacaciones, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
20) Ha sido objeto de numerosas tomaduras de pelo y sarcasmos	1	2	3	4	5
21) Ha sido expuesto a una excesiva carga de trabajo	1	2	3	4	5
22) Ha recibido amenazas de violencia o abusos físicos	1	2	3	4	5

23). ¿Le han acosado en el trabajo? Definimos el acoso como una situación en la que uno o varios individuos perciben continuamente durante un periodo de tiempo que reciben actos negativos de una o varias personas, en una situación donde el sujeto víctima del acoso tiene dificultad para defenderse de estas acciones. No nos referimos al acoso como un incidente puntual.

Según la definición anterior, por favor indique si ha sido acosado en el trabajo durante los últimos 6 meses.

1. No	2. Sí, pero pocas veces	3. Sí, pero de vez en cuando	4. Sí, varias veces por semana	5. Sí, prácticamente a diario

Nota para los profesionales
Factor VARP – Violencia/acoso relativo a la persona
Preguntas: Q2, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q8, Q9, Q10, Q11, Q12, Q13, Q14
Factor VARD – Violencia/acoso relativo a la dignidad/menosprecio
Preguntas: Q7, Q15, Q17, Q19, Q20, Q22
Factor VART – Violencia/acoso relativo al trabajo
Preguntas: Q1, Q3, Q16, Q18, Q21