



Impact of Occupational Stress on the Prevalence of Anxiety Symptoms Among Workers in Guayaquil

Impacto del estrés laboral en la prevalencia de síntomas de ansiedad en trabajadores de Guayaquil

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Abstract

There is growing global concern regarding mental health within organizations. The present study aimed to determine the impact of occupational stress on the prevalence of anxiety symptoms among workers in the city of Guayaquil. The research was conducted using a quantitative approach with a non-experimental, cross-sectional, and causal design. The sample consisted of 114 participants from various employment sectors, selected through non-probabilistic convenience sampling. Data were collected through a structured digital questionnaire based on the HSE Management Standards Indicator Tool to assess levels of occupational stress, complemented by items designed to measure anxiety

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symptoms in their cognitive, physiological, and behavioral dimensions. Data analysis was performed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The results showed a positive and statistically significant effect of occupational stress on anxiety symptoms ($\beta = 0.629$; $p < 0.001$). Additionally, the model explained 39.5% of the variance in anxiety. It is concluded that occupational stress is a relevant factor in the presence of anxiety symptoms among workers in Guayaquil, highlighting the importance of implementing organizational strategies for prevention, intervention, and the promotion of mental health.

Keywords: Occupational stress, Psychosocial factors, Anxiety symptoms, Psychological distress, Workplace mental health.

Resumen

Existe una preocupación global respecto a la salud mental en las organizaciones. El presente estudio tuvo como objetivo determinar el impacto del estrés laboral en la prevalencia de síntomas de ansiedad en trabajadores de la ciudad de Guayaquil. La investigación se desarrolló bajo un enfoque cuantitativo, con un diseño no experimental, de corte transversal y alcance causal. La muestra estuvo conformada por 114 participantes provenientes de distintos sectores laborales, seleccionados mediante un muestreo no probabilístico por conveniencia. Para la recolección de datos se aplicó un cuestionario estructurado en formato digital, basado en el HSE Management Standards Indicator Tool para evaluar el nivel de estrés laboral, complementado con ítems orientados a medir síntomas de ansiedad en sus dimensiones cognitiva, fisiológica y conductual. El análisis de los datos se realizó mediante el Modelo de Ecuaciones Estructurales (SEM). Los resultados evidenciaron un efecto positivo y estadísticamente significativo del estrés laboral sobre los síntomas de ansiedad ($\beta = 0.629$; p

< 0.001). Asimismo, el modelo explicó el 39.5% de la varianza de la ansiedad. Se concluye que el estrés laboral constituye un factor relevante en la presencia de síntomas de ansiedad en trabajadores de Guayaquil, destacándose la importancia de implementar estrategias organizacionales de prevención, intervención y promoción de la salud mental.

Palabras clave: Estrés laboral, Factores psicosociales, Síntomas de ansiedad, Malestar psicológico, Salud mental laboral.

Introduction

Mental health is a global challenge, as mental disorders are one of the leading causes of morbidity worldwide (Marín-Berges et al., 2025; Máté et al., 2025). In this context, the workplace has emerged as a key focus of analysis due to workers' increasing exposure to psychological, emotional, and physical demands that can compromise their well-being. Particularly in healthcare settings, such as general hospitals and psychiatric services (Shmul et al., 2024), the demands of patient care and organizational pressure increase the risk of burnout and psychological distress (Chen et al., 2025).

Work-related stress directly impacts workforce stability and the quality of services worldwide (Yang et al., 2025; Sani et al., 2024). Furthermore, this issue manifests itself in emerging work arrangements such as remote work, where individual perception and subjective experience shape the response to stress (Rana et al., 2022; Perego et al., 2024). The magnitude of this phenomenon has led some countries to mandate workplace stress assessments by law (Marcatto et al., 2024) and has strengthened interest in the analysis of psychosocial factors in organizational management and human resources (Onesti et al., 2024).

From an institutional perspective, work-related stress is defined as a harmful physical and emotional response that occurs when job demands do not align with the worker's capabilities, resources, or needs (American Psychological Association, 2023). This conceptualization allows us to understand stress as the result of a structural mismatch between demands and available resources, consistent with evidence linking sustained exposure to stressors with emotional distress and decreased organizational performance (Yang et al., 2025; George & Collard, 2024).

Longitudinal research indicates that prolonged exposure to adverse working conditions increases psychological distress and absenteeism and decreases performance. Work-life conflict is a factor that undermines emotional health, especially when demands are high and coping resources are limited (Marti et al., 2022). The tension between the emotions required by one's work role and personal beliefs—known as emotional labor—contributes to burnout (Benesch & Prior, 2023). High levels of stress can compromise mental capacity and productivity (Sani et al., 2024) and even predict the intention to change careers among healthcare workers (Kavaliauskas et al., 2024). This overload is particularly evident among professionals such as physical therapists in intensive care units (Castro et al., 2024; Gonçalves et al., 2024).

The dependent variable, anxiety, is a central component of psychological distress along with depression and stress (Awad et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2024; Michot et al., 2024; Pitron et al., 2024; Miller et al., 2024). Recent evidence suggests that anxiety can become a persistent symptom following chronic exposure to workplace stressors. A positive association has been identified between inattention and anxiety in young adults, suggesting that cognitive processes play a role in emotional vulnerability (Liu et al., 2024).

Elevated levels of anxiety linked to specific stressors have been documented in various occupational contexts. Among popular musicians, factors such as unpredictable schedules and economic insecurity are significantly associated with anxiety symptoms (King et al., 2024). Similarly, simulated night work increases anxiety-like mood levels compared to baseline (Qian et al., 2022). Anxiety and stress also constitute significant risks during pregnancy (Yüce et al., 2024), and individual beliefs about stress can moderate its effect on healthcare workers (Laferton et al., 2024), reflecting the cognitive and contextual complexity of the phenomenon.

The American Psychological Association warns that prolonged work-related stress is associated with anxiety disorders, depression, sleep disturbances, and cardiovascular problems, as well as decreased organizational commitment and higher staff turnover (American Psychological Association, 2023). Various studies confirm the presence of stress and anxiety in multiple occupational groups, reinforcing the influence of psychosocial factors on mental health. This issue has been documented among taxi drivers (Marín-Berges et al., 2025), female firefighters (Hollerbach et al., 2024), and nurses, where stress mediates the relationship between abusive supervision and negative work outcomes (Labrague, 2024). Risks have also been identified among pharmacy workers (Formuli et al., 2024) and veterinarians (Máté et al., 2025), as well as in the onset of musculoskeletal disorders associated with the accumulation of stress (Brenner-Fliesser et al., 2024).

The evidence suggests that work-related stress is a predominant factor linked to anxiety in multiple contexts (Habtu et al., 2025; Shmul et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2025; Kavaliauskas et al., 2024). Although studies exist in specific fields such as family medicine (Trifunović et al., 2024) and experiences during the pandemic (Simonovich et al., 2023), there remains a need for context-specific research that delves deeper into the relationship between psychosocial factors and mental health symptoms in

working populations, especially in regions with limited evidence (Habtu et al., 2025; Gehanno et al., 2025).

This study is justified as it helps fill this knowledge gap, strengthening our understanding of the impact of working conditions on mental health (Germinario et al., 2022). Anxiety has been linked to specific conditions of vulnerability, such as unilateral hearing loss (Apa et al., 2024) and hormonal symptoms (Raves et al., 2025). Psychological distress has also been associated with functional consequences such as dropping out of or abandoning work activities (Tamayo Contreras & Padilla Contreras, 2019). Within this framework, the present study aims to determine the impact of work-related stress on the prevalence of anxiety symptoms among workers in Guayaquil.

Methodology

This study was conducted using a quantitative approach with the aim of examining the causal relationship between work-related stress and the prevalence of anxiety symptoms among workers in the city of Guayaquil. A non-experimental design was used, since the variables were not deliberately manipulated but rather observed as they occur in their natural context. Furthermore, the study has a causal scope. The research is cross-sectional in nature, as data collection took place at a single point in time, allowing for an assessment of the current state of the relationship between the two variables.

The population consisted of workers from various occupational sectors residing in the city of Guayaquil, Ecuador. Non-probabilistic convenience sampling was used due to the accessibility of the participants and limitations in time and resources. The total sample consisted of 114 participants.

Data collection was carried out using a structured questionnaire in digital format via Microsoft Forms, ensuring the anonymity

and confidentiality of the information. Table 1 presents a description of the sample.

Table 1

Sample Description

Variable	Categoría	Porcentaje (%)
Género	Hombre	44.7%
	Mujer	50.9%
	Prefiero no decirlo	4.4%
¿Se encuentra trabajando actualmente?	Si	77.7%
	No	22.3%

The independent variable in this study is work-related stress, defined as the physical and emotional response experienced by an employee when the demands of the organizational environment exceed their personal resources to cope with them. This construct was examined through dimensions related to job demands, the degree of control and autonomy, interpersonal relationships, and social support, as well as organizational conditions that may generate pressure or job insecurity. To measure work-related stress, the HSE Management Standards Indicator Tool was used as a conceptual reference, adapting its structure to the study's objectives and the context of the population under investigation.

The dependent variable, meanwhile, corresponds to anxiety symptoms, defined as cognitive, physiological, and behavioral manifestations that reflect the psychological impact associated with stressful situations in the workplace.

SmartPLS 4 software was used to analyze the results. The analysis technique employed was structural equation modeling.

The first part of the analysis involved assessing construct validity, followed by an evaluation of the proposed model.

Results

To evaluate the predictive power of the structural model, the coefficient of determination (R^2) for the anxiety symptoms construct was analyzed. This indicator allows us to estimate the percentage of variance explained by the independent variable, work-related stress. The results show that the model provides a moderate level of explanation for anxiety symptoms among the participants. The R^2 value obtained was 0.395, indicating that approximately 39.5% of the variability in anxiety symptoms can be explained by work-related stress. The data are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

R-squared

	R-square	R-square adjusted
Ansiedad	0.3.95	0.442

Internal consistency and convergent validity of the constructs were assessed using Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE). Table 3 shows that both work-related stress and anxiety symptoms exhibit good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alphas of 0.815 and 0.792, respectively. The composite reliability values (ρ_c) exceed 0.80 in both cases, confirming that the indicators consistently represent their latent constructs. Although the AVEs are below 0.50, these levels are considered acceptable in exploratory studies on complex psychosocial topics.

Table 3

Construct Validity

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted
Estrés	0.815	0.827	0.850	0.270
Síntomas de ansiedad	0.792	0.807	0.841	0.315

To verify that both constructs represent conceptually distinct dimensions, the HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio) criterion was used. Table 4 presents the HTMT value of 0.753. This is clearly below the threshold of 0.85, confirming adequate discrimination between work-related stress and anxiety symptoms.

Table 4

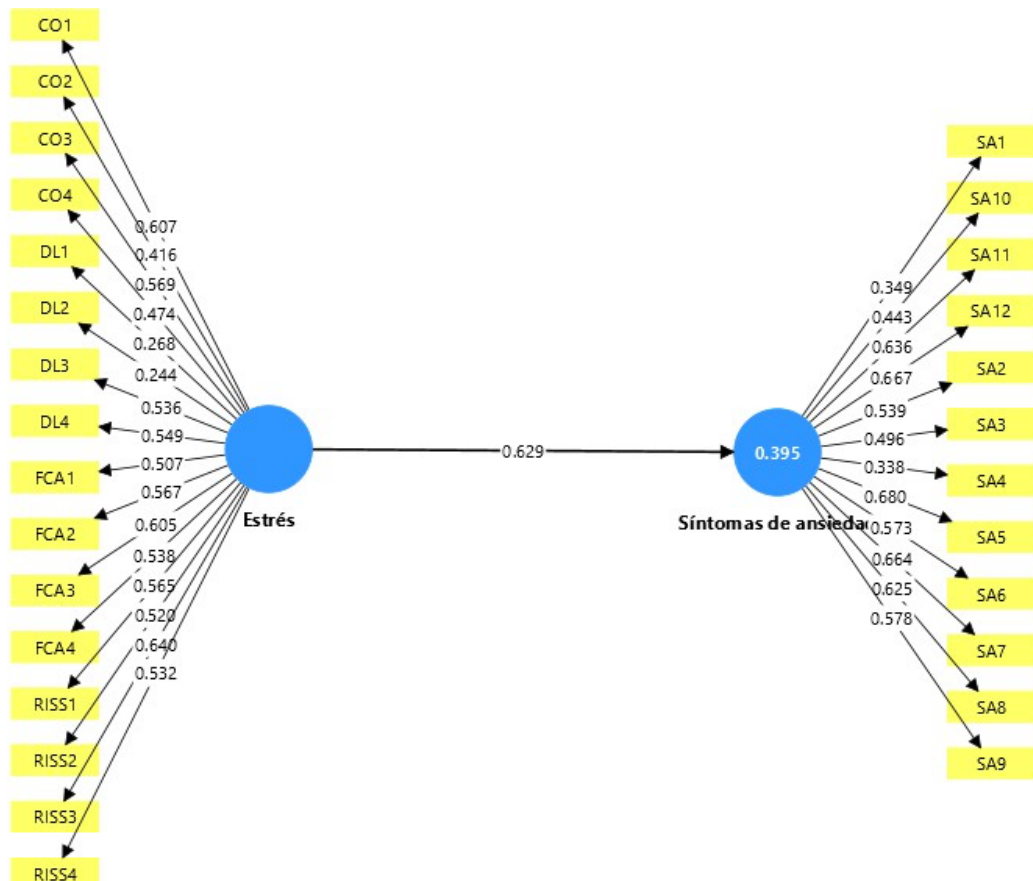
Discriminant Analysis – Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio

	Estrés	Síntomas de ansiedad
Estrés		
Síntomas de ansiedad	0.753	

Figure 1 presents the structural equation model, which illustrates the relationship between work-related stress and anxiety symptoms among workers in Guayaquil.

Figure 1

Structural Equation Model



A positive direct effect of work-related stress on anxiety symptoms is observed, with a standardized coefficient $\beta = 0.629$. This indicates that higher levels of stress are associated with greater intensity of anxiety symptoms. The dependent construct has an R^2 of 0.395, meaning that 39.5% of its variance is explained by work-related stress. The factor loadings remain within moderate and appropriate ranges, supporting the validity of the estimated model. Table 5 presents the model coefficients and their significance levels.

Table 5

Model Coefficients

	Original Sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
Estrés → Síntomas de Ansiedad	0.629	0.674	0.060	10.562	0.000

According to Table 8, the work-related stress → anxiety symptoms path has a coefficient $\beta = 0.629$, with $p = 0.000$, demonstrating a positive and highly significant relationship ($p < 0.001$). In other words, increases in work-related stress are significantly associated with a higher prevalence of anxiety symptoms among participants. These findings fully support the study's main hypothesis and highlight the important role of work-related stress as a factor affecting workers' mental health, particularly in urban settings with high work demands.

Conclusions

The objective of the study was to examine the impact of work-related stress on the prevalence of anxiety symptoms among workers in the city of Guayaquil. This was addressed using a quantitative approach with a non-experimental, cross-sectional design and analysis via a structural equation model applied to a sample of workers from various occupational sectors.

The results indicate that there is a direct, positive, and statistically significant relationship between work-related stress and the manifestation of anxiety symptoms among the participants. The structural coefficient ($\beta = 0.629$) indicates that higher levels of work-related stress—reflected in excessive

demands, lack of control and autonomy, interpersonal conflicts, and adverse organizational conditions—are associated with higher levels of reported anxiety symptoms, including cognitive, physiological, and behavioral manifestations.

Furthermore, the model showed a coefficient of determination of $R^2 = 0.395$, indicating that approximately 39.5% of the variability in anxiety symptoms is explained by work-related stress. This result reflects a moderate level of explanatory power, confirming that psychosocial factors in the work environment are a relevant factor in understanding psychological distress among the working population.

Regarding the model's quality, reliability and validity analyses demonstrated adequate levels of internal consistency for the constructs of work-related stress and anxiety symptoms, which supports the relevance of the indicators used.

The findings fulfill the stated objective, demonstrating that work-related stress is significantly associated with the presence of anxiety symptoms among workers in Guayaquil. These results highlight the importance of developing preventive strategies and organizational interventions aimed at promoting mental health in the workplace, as well as continuing to conduct in-depth research to broaden our understanding of the psychological factors linked to occupational stress.

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