



RESEARCH STUDIES

*workplacebullying.org*

## **Labor Day 2008 Surveys**

# **How Employers & Co-Workers Respond to Workplace Bullying**

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# How Employers & Co-Workers Respond to Workplace Bullying

## Labor Day 2008 Survey

Research from the Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI)

### The definition of bullying used in the study:

*Question asked: At work, have you experienced any or all of the following types of repeated mistreatment: sabotage by others that prevented work from getting done, verbal abuse, threatening conduct, intimidation or humiliation?*

This same question was asked of a nationally representative sample of adult Americans in the 2007 WBI-Zogby survey. 37% of Americans reported its direct experience; 12% witnessed it.

For this 2008 WBI study, there were two separate 400-person respondent groups who visited the WBI website and completed one or both of the surveys, asking about either their employers' responses to bullying (data collected in June-July), or asking what co-workers did (data collected in August).

### Principal Findings from the Employers' Response Study

*Question asked: When the employer was told about the bullying, what did the employer do?*

- 1.7% - conducted fair investigation and protected target from further bullying with negative consequences for the bully
- 6.2% - conducted fair investigation with negative consequences for the bully but no safety for the target
- 8.7% - inadequate/unfair investigation; no consequences for bully or target
- 31% - inadequate/unfair investigation; no consequences for bully but target was retaliated against
- 12.8% - employer did nothing, ignored the complaint; no consequences for bully or target
- 15.7% - employer did nothing; target was retaliated against for reporting the bullying but kept job
- 24% - employer did nothing; target was retaliated against and eventually lost job

Bullied workers report that employers predominantly did nothing to stop the mistreatment when reported (53%) and actually retaliated against the person (in 71% of cases) who dared to report it.

In 40% of cases, targets considered the employer's "investigation" to be inadequate or unfair with less than 2% of investigations described as fair and safe for the bullied person. Filing complaints led to retaliation by employers of bullied targets leading to lost jobs (24%). Alleged bullies were punished in only 6.2% of cases; bullying is done with impunity.

- Bullied individuals are not whiners, nor do they complain at the slightest provocation.

*Question asked: Was a formal, written complaint filed with management or human resources?*

50.7% No; 44.8% Yes; 4.5% Not sure

What Employers Do: 2008 WBI Study



Recall that in the 2007 WBI-Zogby survey with a national representative sample, only 15% of bullied individuals ever formally complained to their employers, only 4% filed EEO state or federal claims, and a miniscule 3% filed lawsuits against bullying employers!

### **Additional facts from the Employers' Response study:**

- 95% of respondents were self-described targets of bullying (past or current)
- 59% of the bullies were women; 80% of targets were women
- 74% Bully enlisted others sometimes or always; 26% Bully worked alone
- *Question asked: Bully's rank relative to the targeted person:*
  - 7.6% Bully ranked lower than the targeted individual
  - 18.7% Bully was a co-worker, colleague, a peer of the targeted individual
  - 73.6% Bully ranked above the target by one or more levels in the organization
- *Question asked: Was the bullying illegal? Did the conduct violate anti-discrimination rights laws because the target was a member of a legally protected group and the bully was not?*
  - 32.6% Yes, it was at least partially illegal; 42.7% No, it was not illegal; 24.7% Not sure
- *Question asked: Did the targeted person tell the employer that the bullying occurred?*
  - 75.8% Yes; 20.5% No; 3.7% Not sure

### **Types of employers described by survey respondents:**

27.7% - Government -- Federal, State, County, City, Quasi-Govt; 31.1% - For-Profit Corporations -- Large & Medium & Small; 10.6% - Non-Profit Organizations & Churches; 18.8% - Education: K-12 thru Universities; 8% - Healthcare provider

### **Principal Findings from the Co-Workers' Response Study**

*Question asked: Did the target's co-workers (of any rank -- peers or managers) SEE the mistreatment, at least once?*

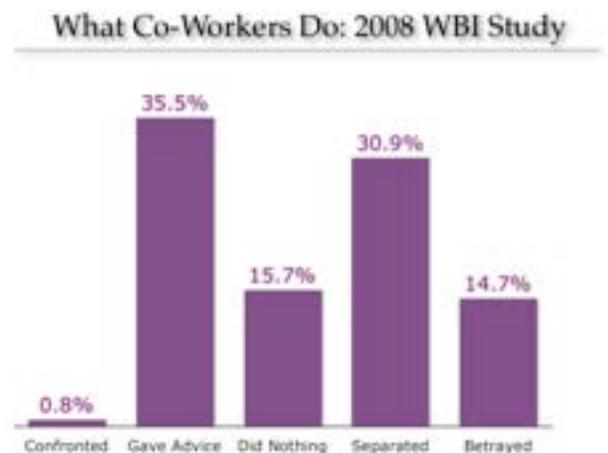
95% said "Yes"

*Question asked: Were the target's co-workers AWARE of the mistreatment?*

97% said "Yes"

*Question asked: What did (at least one of the) co-workers DO in response to the mistreatment?*

- 0.8% They banded together and confronted the bully as a unit; stopped the bullying



- 7.1% They offered specific advice to the target about what he or she should do to stop it
- 28.4% They gave only moral, social support
- 15.7% They did and said nothing, not helping either the target or bully
- 13.2% They voluntarily distanced themselves from the target, isolating him or her
- 4.8% They followed the bully's orders to stay away from the target
- 12.9% They betrayed the target to the bully while appearing to still be friends
- 14.7% They publicly sided with the bully and acted aggressively toward the target
- 2.5% Not sure

Coworkers were nearly as unhelpful as employers though nearly all were aware of what what was happening. In 46% of bullying cases, coworkers abandoned their bullied colleagues, to the extent that 15% aggressed against the target along with the bully. Coworkers did nothing in 16% of cases.

Co-workers did do positive things in 36% of cases -- mainly limited to offering moral support. The rarest outcome (less than 1%) was for coworkers to band together to stop the bullying through confrontation. Coworkers' personal fears were the preferred explanation by bullied targets (55%) for the actions taken or not taken by witnesses.

### **Additional facts from the Co-Worker study:**

- 95% of respondents were self-described targets of bullying (past or current)
- 85% of targets were women
- *Question asked: If Co-workers were AWARE, HOW were they made aware?*
  - 73% Co-workers witnessed it directly; 16.5% Target explicitly told co-workers what happened; 5.1% Co-workers saw the target react in ways that they themselves had reacted; 5.4% Not sure how they learned about it, but they were certainly aware
- *Question asked: WHY did co-workers do what you said they did above?*
  - 23.7% Co-workers made conscious, deliberate choices on their own, right or wrong
  - 12% Co-workers did what they thought MANAGERS wanted them to do
  - 7.1% Co-workers did what MANAGERS explicitly told them to do
  - 2.3% Co-workers did what they thought the TARGET wanted them to do
  - 0.3% Co-workers did what the TARGET explicitly told them to do
  - 54.7% Co-workers acted out of personal fear, whether or not they recognized the fear