



RESEARCH STUDIES

workplacebullying.org

**The WBI Website
2013 Instant Poll - H
First-Time Abusers in
Bullied Targets' Lives**

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First-Time Abusers in Bullied Targets' Lives WBI 2013-H Instant Poll

Prior life experiences play a role in the depth of emotional injury that bullying can cause a person. Individuals who have never been abused in their lives may take longer to recognize that they are actually being bullied. Without memories or repressed cognitive representations of being the victim of abuse, bullying is a completely novel experience. Learning begins when first targeted for the first time in their lives.

Targets with prior brushes with abuse in their lives do not necessarily risk being targets of workplace bullying. However, when targeted, emotional memories are quickly triggered and those targets are subject to re-traumatization. The levels of emotional pain, shame and distress are much more severe than for individuals experiencing abuse for the first time as an adult in the workplace.

This single-question survey sought to ascertain what percentage of bullied targets were recipients of abusive conduct for the first time in their lives and who are the perpetrators.

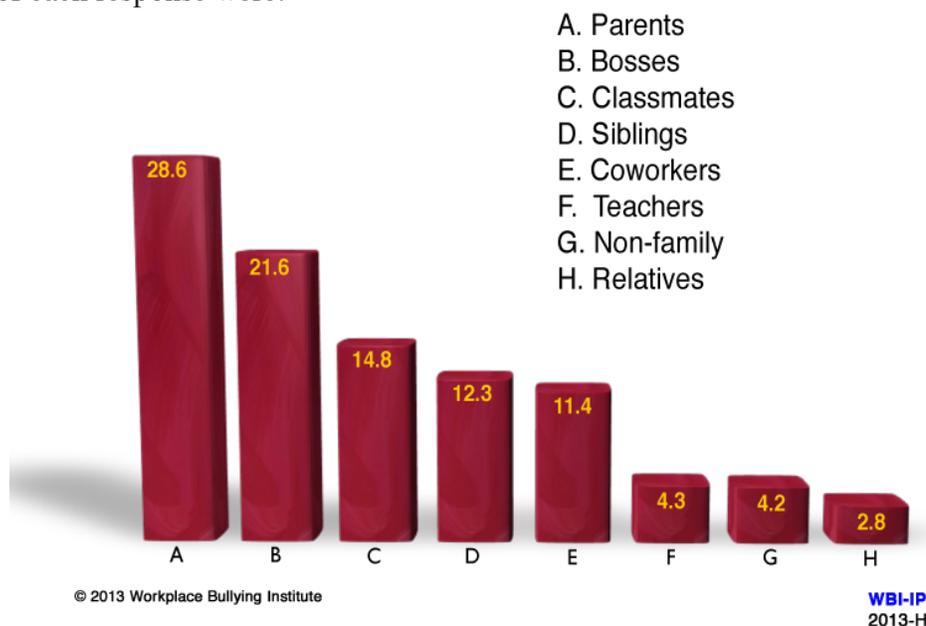
WBI Instant Polls are online single-question surveys that rely upon self-selected samples of individuals bullied at work (typically 98% of any sample). No demographic data are collected, but IP respondent samples are typically 80% female. Our non-scientific Instant Polls accurately depict the perceptions of workers targeted for bullying at work as contrasted with the views of all adult Americans in our scientific national surveys.

For this survey, 800 target-respondents answered the following question:

Who was the first abusive bully in your life?

Twelve participants responded *"I have never been bullied in my life,"* and were eliminated, leaving a group of 788.

Percentages of each response were:



.160	<i>Father</i>	.033	<i>Neighbor</i>
.126	<i>Mother</i>	.011	<i>K-12 teacher - Male</i>
.003	<i>Younger brother</i>	.032	<i>K-12 teacher - Female</i>
.061	<i>Older brother</i>	.071	<i>K-12 classmate - Male</i>
.006	<i>Younger sister</i>	.077	<i>K-12 classmate - Female</i>
.053	<i>Older sister</i>	.095	<i>Boss in the workplace - Male</i>
.015	<i>Family relative - Male</i>	.121	<i>Boss in the workplace - Female</i>
.013	<i>Family relative - Female</i>	.027	<i>Coworker - Male</i>
.009	<i>Babysitter-caregiver-nanny</i>	.088	<i>Coworker - Female</i>

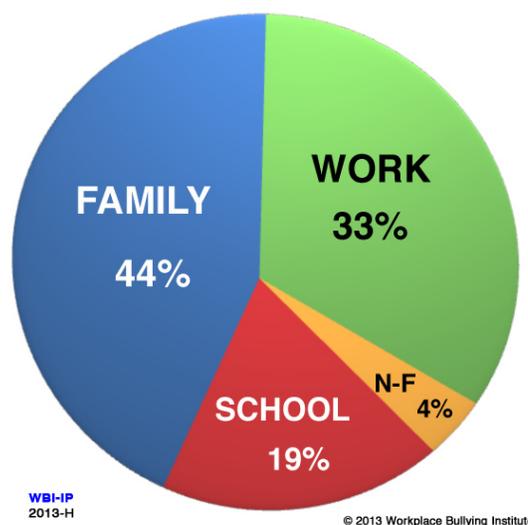
Sources of First-Time Abuse

Most target-respondents reported families as the most frequent source of initial abuse (43.7%).

For 33% of bullied targets, there was no abuse ever experienced in their lives until incidents of workplace bullying happened.

School-age experiences were responsible for initial abuse for only 19% of bullied adults.

Finally, stranger-abusers, non-family (NF) including neighbors, accounted for only 4% of first-time abusers.



Family

The family into which an individual is born is the family-of-origin (FOO), usually, but not necessarily, blood relatives. For too many people, family provides the initial exposure to abuse. Bullied targets are no exception. Remember, the vast majority of respondents in this survey were women.

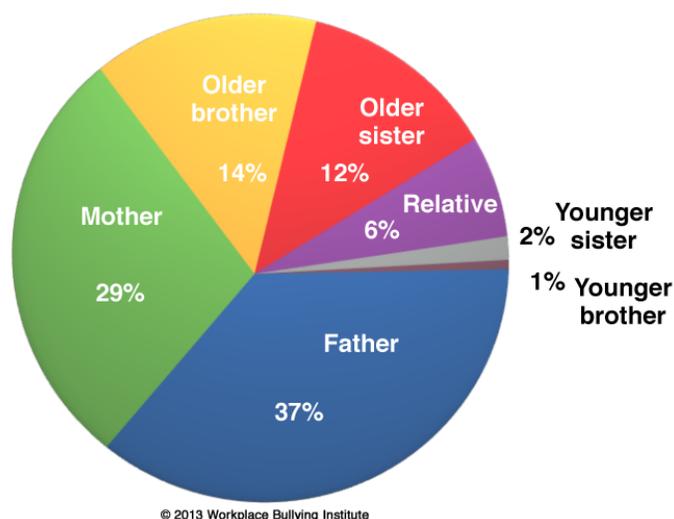
Fathers were the most frequent first abusers overall (for 16% of respondents); mothers were second (12.6%). Within the FOO, parents were the abusers for 69% of targets who claimed the initial abuse happened in the family. Of parents, fathers were 56% of first-time abusers.

Siblings abused at a much lower rate than parents. Brothers and sisters were overall equally likely to be first abusers (16% and 15%, respectively within the FOO). Older siblings were 24 times more likely than younger siblings to be the abuser when it was a brother and 8 times more likely when it was a sister.

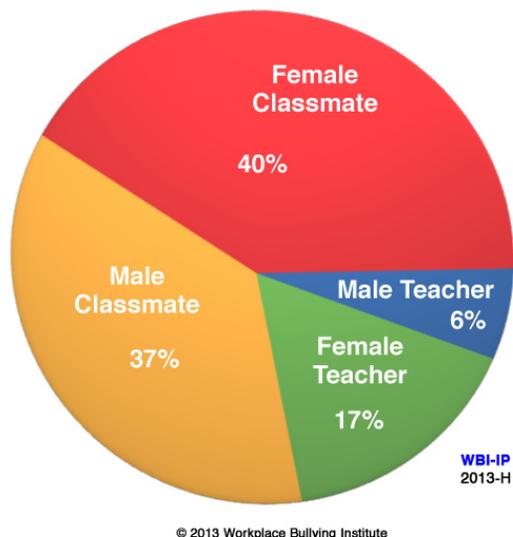
Outside the FOO, few relatives (only 2%) were abusers. When FOO and relatives are combined, relatives comprise only 6% of abusers within that group. Relatives' genders were nearly equal, 12 for males and 10 for females.

First-Time Abusers Within Families

It was also possible that a stranger in early life could have been initial abuser in a person's life -- a babysitter, caregiver or nanny. It turns out that it was extremely rare -- less than 1% of cases, .0008.



School



Chronologically, going to school represents the next opportunities, after FOO, for abuse and bullying. Overall, first abusers were identified at school by 19.2% of adult target-respondents in our survey.

Classmates were abusers nearly 3.5 times more frequently than were teachers, representing 77% of in-school abusers. Of classmates, female abusers (remember our predominantly adult female respondent pool) were slightly more frequent (40% of in-school abusers) than were male classmate abusers (37%). The girl-on-girl statistic does not appear to be an accurate predictor of the 80% rate by which adult women bullies target other women as targets (WBI 2010 U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey).

When the first abuser was identified as a K-12 teacher, women teachers (17% of in-school abusers) were more of a problem than were men teachers.

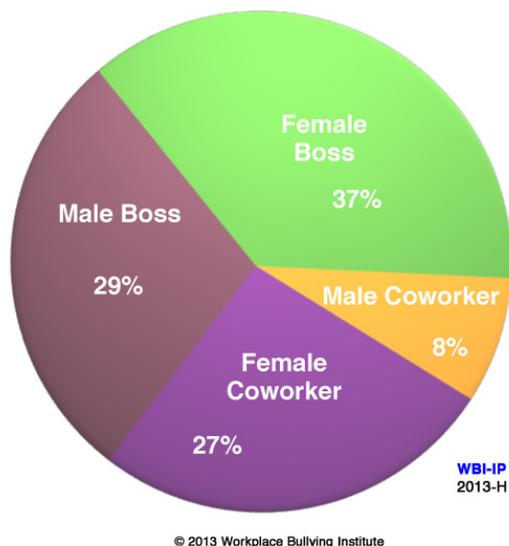
Work

For one-third of targets of workplace bullying, the abuse they endure is the first-ever experience of its kind in their lives.

Bosses are 1.9 times more likely to be the abusers than are coworkers. Bosses represent 22% of first-time abusers overall. Considering only the workplace as the source of abuse, bosses are 65% of the abusers. Note how closely this follows from the national statistic that of all bullies, 72% are bosses (WBI 2007 U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey). In this WBI-IP survey, the majority of bosses who were first-time abusers were women (56%).

Coworkers are notoriously sources of distress and disappointment for bullied workers. In other WBI surveys (2009 & 2008), we have documented the surprising actions taken by coworkers that serve to sustain the bullying of colleagues.

In this WBI survey, coworkers were much less likely than bosses to be first-time abusers. Within coworkers, women coworkers (77%) were over 3 times more likely to be a first-time abuser than male coworkers. Women coworkers represented 27% of the workplace first-time abusers, slightly less than male bosses and a full 10% less frequent than women bosses.



First-Time Abusers at Work

Conclusion

For a third (33%) of bullied targets, workplace bullying is the first time in their lives they suffered abuse at the hands of another person. Thus, bullying is an unfamiliar phenomenon and likely to surprise and baffle the individual.

It is often assumed that both school-age perpetrators and their targets replicate those roles of dominator and dominated in adulthood. New longitudinal studies show the positive correlation and linkage between being a childhood bully and antisocial conduct in adulthood. However, respondents in the current survey show that only one in five adult targets bullied at work were previously bullied in school, and then most likely by classmates.

The saddest result is that 44% of bullied targets were initially abused at home by their parents or siblings. Of parents, fathers were most frequently named.

We asked *Who was the first abusive bully in your life?* We did not specify what form the abuse took. It could have been verbal, physical or sexual. Regardless, it seems the lessons of abuse are taught to too many people in their family of origin.

Second only to the family, and more significant a learning environment for abuse than school, is the workplace.

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