

Age & Workplace Bullying: 2010 WBI Survey

In the 13 years we have been helping and coaching targets of workplace bullying, there has been a noticeable over-representation of older workers, age 50 and up, in the group seeking help. It makes sense. Employers want to drive out the more experienced, typically higher paid, workers. Though discrimination based on age is technically illegal, illegalities do not frighten employers. Their attitude is “so, sue us.” Unemployed workers don’t have the money to launch a legal battle.

Our anecdotal experiences, however, may not accurately reflect the national experience. According to the 2010 WBI U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey, it appears that the 30-49 year age group is the most vulnerable. This finding reflects another major difference between the target audience for WBI and the broader population of adult Americans. Here are the results.

Respondents were asked: “At work, what is your experience with 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?”

For each prevalence question response category, the percentages for each age group are given.

Bullying Experience	Ages 18-29	Ages 30-49	Ages 50-64
Currently Bullied	27%	50%	23%
Been Bullied, Not Now	22	47	30
Witnessed Only	29	49	22
Not Bullied/Not Witnessed	23	48	30

Individuals in the 30-49 age group were the most frequently bullied. The 18-29 year olds were the second highest in currently being bullied and witnessing. The 50-64 year olds were the second highest in being previously but not now currently bullied and in not having any experience with bullying.

The 30-49 age group is also the likeliest representative of the current workforce. The survey respondents included workers and non-workers, all adult Americans. The 30-49'ers are the ones in harm's way, the most vulnerable to bullying simply by virtue of employment.

Clearly, the national picture does not match our anecdotal database of primarily older workers.

A second way to analyze the data is to consider experiences with bullying within each age group.

Age Group	Currently Bullied	Been Bullied, Not Now	Witnessed It Only	Not Bullied/Not Witnessed
18-29	11%	25%	20%	44%
30-49	11	26	16	47
50-64	9	30	13	48
Full Nat'l Sample	8.8	25.7	15.5	49.6

Note how high is the proportion of 50-64 year olds who have historically been bullied. Again, reflecting on the nature of the national survey sample, many of those who had been bullied may now be out of the workforce (often involuntarily). Therefore, they have the lowest rate of currently being bullied.

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Zogby International was commissioned by the Workplace Bullying Institute to conduct an online survey of 2,092 adults from 8/18/10 to 8/23/10. The margin of error is +/- 2.2 percentage points. The sample size for the three selected age groups above was 1,729 of the original 2,092.