

Stability of Workplace Bullying Prevalence since 2007: 2010 WBI Survey

In 2007, WBI commissioned Zogby International to conduct the first survey of a large representative sample of all adult Americans concerning workplace bullying in the U.S. The results are the most frequently cited U.S. study in the world. The 37% prevalence rate laid to rest the claim of opponents that bullying in the American workplace was imaginary.

In August, 2010 WBI conducted a follow-up study to compare 2007 prevalence rates to 2010 rates.

Here are the results.

| Response Categories | 2007 | 2010 |
|-----------------------------|------|------|
| Currently Bullied | 12.6 | 8.8 |
| Been Bullied, Not Now | 24.2 | 25.7 |
| Total: Bullying Experienced | 36.8 | 34.5 |
| Witnessed Only | 12.3 | 15.5 |
| Total: Bullying Recognized | 49 | 50 |
| Not Bullied/Not Witnessed | 44.9 | 49.6 |

In both measurement periods, respondents were asked the following: 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?

The obvious finding is that rates are stable. Bullying remains a problem for over a third of the population. Given the margin of error for the 2010 survey, the figures are essentially equivalent.

The decline in the reported current rate of bullying is probably best attributed to the fear and stigma that shrouds the phenomenon of workplace bullying. Bullied targets feel ashamed that it happened to them (though they did not seek it). That suppresses reporting.

There is an ever-present fear of retaliation for reporting it. However, this real-world experience should not govern choices on an anonymous questionnaire. Instead, we believe that into national polls is creeping an unwillingness for respondents to make declarations that best serve their personal interests. That is, there is an increasing reluctance to believe that workers deserve rights.

After 40 years of a steady diet of pro-corporate media messages that what is good for corporations is good for America and to believe otherwise is un-American, it seems individuals are uncritically accepting the message despite its harmful consequences to those same individuals. Unions have been vilified. Workers are told they are lucky to have work. Exposure to these messages convince workers to be submissive, to stop believing that they are entitled to work free from abuse.

To declare you are bullied may require more independence, pride, and self-assurance than we originally thought.

We originally hypothesized that bullying rates would have increased since the great economic recession. It sounds logical. However, in a separate question, we explored this question. Few respondents reported that their workplace situations worsened since late 2008. The potential explanation can be found in our report of that finding — *Recession & Bullying: 2010 WBI Survey*.

In conclusion, we accept the stability of workplace bullying prevalence since 2007 as evidence that the problem is still worthy of elimination. Much work remains to stop bullying for the 35% of affected Americans.

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2007. Zogby International was commissioned by the Workplace Bullying Institute to conduct an online survey of 7,740 adults from 8/10/07 to 8/13/07. The margin of error was +/- 1.1 percentage points.

2010. 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. A sampling of Zogby International's online panel, which is representative of the adult population of the U.S., was invited to participate. Slight weights were added to region, party, age, race, religion, gender, education to more accurately reflect the population. The margin of error was +/- 2.2 percentage points.