



RESEARCH STUDIES

workplacebullying.org

The WBI Website 2012 Instant Polls

Surveys A - I

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WHY BULLYING HAPPENS

WBI 2012-A Instant Poll

Workplace Bullying Institute 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. 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.

The 658 respondents to this survey were asked:

Why does bullying in the workplace happen? Check up to 4 factors. [which led to 2,384 votes]

The rank order and percentages for each response option were:

1	.21	<i>Bullies are not punished & thrive</i>
2	.15	<i>Laws to stop it are either absent or too weak to be useful</i>
3	.13	<i>No one in the company/agency has the will to stop it</i>
4	.13	<i>Coworkers stand idly by & fail to stop it</i>
5	.10	<i>The workplace culture rewards cutthroat behaviors</i>
6	.10	<i>A few hyper-aggressive individuals have psychological & social problems</i>
7	.06	<i>Executives/owners/senior managers are the bullies</i>
8	.05	<i>Bullying is part of the larger society & culture</i>
9	.03	<i>Bullies follow orders from the top</i>
10	.03	<i>No one in the company/agency has the power to stop it</i>
11	.01	<i>We humans are aggressive by nature; it is inevitable</i>
12	.007	<i>Targeted workers somehow invite their fate</i> [only 7/10 ths of 1%]

The top three reasons from the target's perspective are employer-focused. The absence of negative consequences (punishment) for bullies and lacking the will to stop it both reflect employer mishandling of bullying. Employers establish and maintain the work environment.

The absence (still the story in early 2012 in the U.S.), or weakness, of laws also contributes to employers' ability to ignore bullying. No policies are necessary in the absence of laws. That's why so few are created voluntarily.

Coworker failure to help is ranked fourth. At WBI we assert that no policies or laws would be required if witnesses did not shirk from their social responsibility to help their colleagues. The multiple reasons for bystander not intervening are built on decades of social psychological research. Simply put, coworkers fear for their own survival. Bullied targets understand this on some level even when they suffer consequences from the inaction.

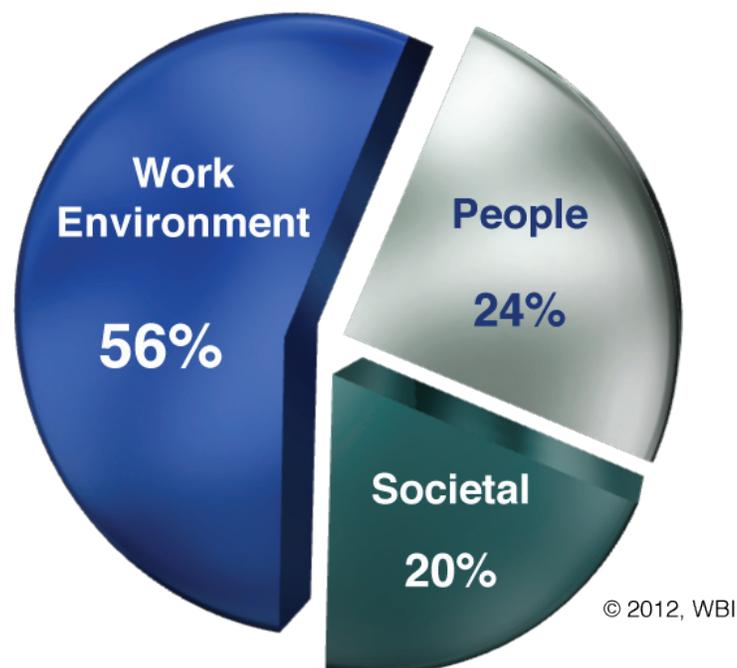
Reason 5 is again work environment related. Reward theory explains most bullying. It brings positive outcomes for bullies. Observers of the work environment, which includes most employees who bother to pay attention, learn quickly that aggression pays in a bullying-prone workplace culture. Bullies act accordingly and personally benefit from the misconduct. Look no further for a rationale.

The bully's flawed personality is reason 6 (actually tied) with bullying's reward. Targets are more realistic than the naïve public. It is too easy to blame bullying on the aggressor's anti-social personality (bordering on psychopathic). In fact, bullying is a complex behavioral pattern that requires both a willingness to exploit and harm another person (that does not require psychopathology any more than an affinity for reality TV shows that use humiliation for entertainment) and a place where exploitation can happen (which is the work environment).

The lowest rank reason is that targets somehow invite the misery inflicted on them. It seems obvious that no one would welcome nearly daily intimidation and humiliation. Yet, the public view is that victims of any misfortune must have wanted to experience their fate. This is the core of rape myths (her skirts were too short), domestic violence myths (he's a great guy, she must do something to set him off), and bullying (you just have to learn to work with him and grow a thicker skin). This survey shows that bullied targets know they did nothing wrong. Their view is the accurate one.

Causes -- Work Environment: 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 7, 9 & 10; Societal: 2 & 8; People: 4, 6, 11 & 12

Here is a graphical summary.



EMPLOYER WORKPLACE BULLYING POLICIES

WBI 2012-B Instant Poll

In 2010, the Workplace Bullying Institute asked a national sample of respondents, representing all adult Americans, if their employers had an explicit anti-bullying policy. Based on the high estimate, we were certain that they confused an anti-discrimination policy (written to comply with state and federal laws) with the need for additional protections for workers against abuse in same-gender and same-race situations. So, we asked the question much more specifically for this single-item survey using our Instant Poll methodology.

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We acknowledge that new policies are springing up called “Respect,” “Respectful Workplace,” and “Civility.” The names indirectly address workplace bullying. However, they may be useful if specific protections against abusive conduct are included, regardless of the title that diminishes the problem.

Policies without enforcement and accountability for all abusers are insufficient. When special people (e.g., high-ranking bullies) are allowed to bully with impunity from punishment, the policy is not worth the paper it’s printed on. So, we offered survey respondents the chance to make a statement about the existence of a policy by any name and to further qualify the breadth of its enforcement.

Of the original 311 respondents to the 2012-B survey, 38 chose the option: “*Not sure if policy exists*”

We eliminated them, leaving a sample of 273 individuals who were sure about the presence or absence of policies relating to workplace bullying and the quality of enforcement.

The wording of the question we asked was:

Does (did) your employer have a specific policy prohibiting workplace bullying? [It can be part of another policy, but there must be protections for everyone, regardless of sex, age, religion, etc.]

Respondents could choose one of the following choices:

No. There are only anti-harassment or anti-violence policies -- chosen by 61.9%

Yes. [An anti-bullying] Policy exists, but not applied to everyone (some are immune from enforcement) -- chosen by 17.9% -- this counts as an employer failure to credibly stop abusive conduct.

Sort of. [The policy is] Named Respect or Incivility, too weak to stop bullying -- chosen by 14.6% -- also an employer failure to credibly stop abusive conduct.

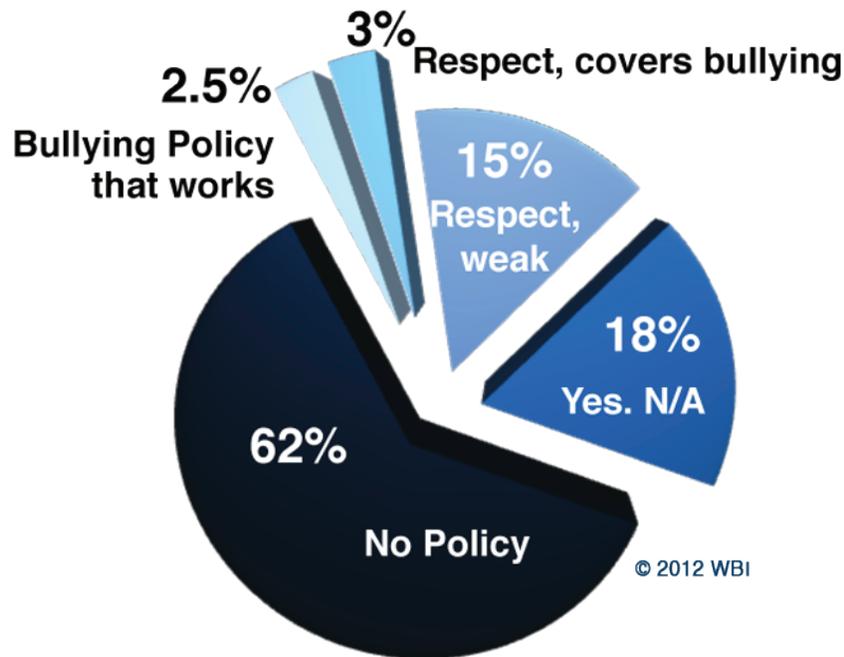
Sort of. [The policy is] Named Respect or Incivility but strong enough to stop bullying -- chosen by 2.9% -- this counts as employer success.

Yes. [An anti-bullying] Policy exists, and is applied to everyone (good enforcement) -- chosen by 2.5% -- this counts as an unequivocal employer success.

According to the customers of internal employer anti-bullying protections, approximately only 5% of employers have adequately addressed workplace bullying. Within the good employer group, **less than 3%** have the courage to call bullying what it is and to craft explicit policies with credible enforcement procedures.

About one-third of employers (32.5%) created something but either the policy or its enforcement is considered by targets to be too weak to prevent or correct workplace bullying.

The majority of employers (61.9%) simply ignore bullying. In a recent survey of HR professionals conducted by the HR trade association SHRM, 44% said they had no plans to create an anti-bullying policy in the future. Until there are laws, myopic employers may believe that bullying costs them nothing. This is a myth. Bullying is very expensive.



AFTERMATH OF REQUESTING HELP FROM HR

WBI 2012-C Instant Poll

We are saddened by the consistency of our own research about the failure by human resources (HR) staff to stop workplace bullying when such complaints are filed. Each complaint is a plea for help. We don't want to believe that HR folks are unwilling to help. It's natural to have an empathic bond with someone in pain (sometimes emotional and less apparent than physical wounds). However, the empirical findings are clear from two recent 2012 Workplace Bullying Institute studies (the *Strategies Effectiveness Study* and this 2012-C-IP). HR does not stop bullying when it is reported to them.

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We asked 372 respondents:

How effective was HR at resolving a workplace bullying complaint in which there was NO illegal discrimination (no sexual harassment, no racial discrimination) ?

The response choices were:

HR actions were not helpful to target, retaliation followed -- chosen by 37.3%

HR did nothing, took no action -- chosen by 30.9%

HR actions were not helpful to target, job was lost -- chosen by 18.2%

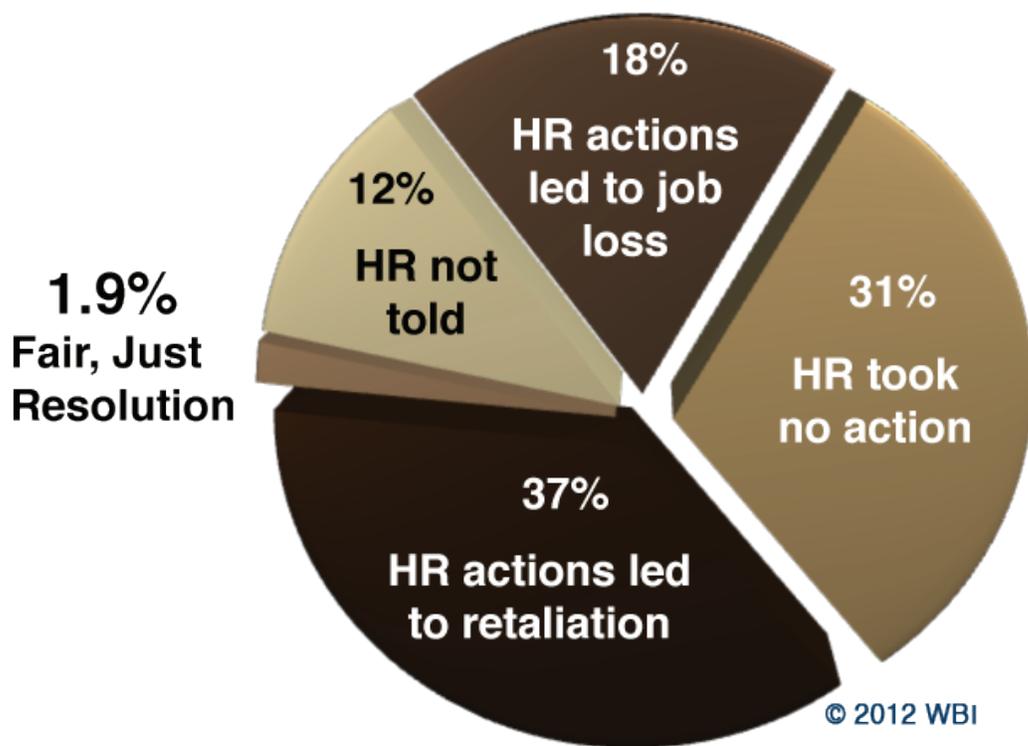
HR was not told -- chosen by 11.5%

HR stopped the bullying fairly & completely for target, justice achieved -- chosen by 1.9%

In our book, *The Bully-Free Workplace*, we made it clear that bullying, i.e., psychological violence, is leadership's problem, not just for HR. "HR Issues" are considered non-essential by corporate executives and senior managers. They think all the fuzzy psychobabble stuff should be handled by the subordinated HR department. The trouble is that executives should care deeply about the fiscal losses attributable to bullying. To act otherwise is an abdication of responsibility.

So, with an inattentive C-suite, the burden falls on HR whose staff actually interact with employees. HR's hands are tied because executives don't have the will to stop the bullying until a law passes in America. HR doesn't have the authority to craft policies with the requisite power and credibility to hold everyone in the organization accountable. It is also troubling that HR staffers are victims of bullying themselves. Victims cannot help other targets.

As this survey shows, bullied targets (the real customers of bullying resolution processes) are satisfied with HR's role in just **under 2% of cases**. Not nearly good enough.



IMPACT OF WORKPLACE BULLYING ON INDIVIDUALS' HEALTH

WBI 2012-D Instant Poll

In 2003, the Workplace Bullying Institute conducted an online survey exploring many aspects of the phenomenon, of which one was impact on targets' health. The self-selected sample of 1,000 individuals bullied at work (typically 98% of any sample visiting WBI are known to be bullied) completed a 33-item self-report symptoms checklist. Women were the majority of respondents (80%). In rank order of most to least frequent, respondents reported their top five health problems: Anxiety (76%), Loss of concentration (71%), Disrupted sleep (71%), Hypervigilance symptoms (60%), and Stress headaches (55%).

The newer online WBI Instant Polls are single-question surveys that are also self-selected samples. 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.

This time we recreated a 52-item health checklist that asked about stress-related physical health complications that occur after exposure to bullying, psychological effects. Four additional questions asked whether or not respondents were treated by either physicians or mental health professionals. There were 516 respondents. No demographic data were collected. We do not know their gender, however, we do know from prior WBI online studies that the sample is comprised of people who declare themselves bullied at work, now or in the past.

Instant Poll 2012-D has some methodological strengths. First, the list of health problems in the 2012 survey is more comprehensive than the one used in 2003. With nine more years experience in the field, the items more accurately reflect the reality targets endure. Another advantage is that we could calculate adjusted prevalence rates based on the reports of seeking treatment by either a physician or mental health professional.

The principal shortcoming of Instant Poll methodology is its generalizability. We can only extrapolate to workers targeted for bullying at work. Further, we do not know the respondents' gender.

The Poll was introduced by the following phrases:

Assessing the impact of bullying on individual workers. Please answer the two treatment questions at the top, then check all of the symptoms personally experienced during or after your bullying episodes.

The Results

71% have been treated by a physician for work-related symptoms.

63% have been treated by a licensed mental health professional for work-related symptoms.

The slightly higher treatment rate for physicians suggests less stigma attached to physicians than to psychologists, counselors or psychiatrists.

The 15 most frequent symptoms reported (in decreasing proportions) were:

- .827 Anticipation of next negative event
- .796 Overwhelming anxiety
- .767 Sleep disruption (hard to begin/too little)
- .756 Loss of concentration or memory
- .703* Uncontrollable mood swings
- .663 States of agitation or anger
- .637 Pervasive sadness
- .609* Heart palpitations
- .607 Insomnia
- .596* High blood pressure (hypertension)
- .587 Obsession over personal circumstances
- .500 Intrusive thoughts (flashbacks, nightmares)
- .498 Loss of affect (flat emotional responses)
- .490* Depression (diagnosed)
- .482* Migraine headaches

Adjusted rates are marked with asterisk (*). Adjusted rates for psychological diagnoses reflect the percentage calculated for those who claimed to have been treated by a mental health professional. For medical diagnoses, the percentage is for those who claimed to have been treated by a physician.

New neuroscience studies produce evidence of neurological foundations for most behavioral experiences. Therefore, the traditional dichotomy of physical and psychological health problems is nearly moot. PTSD, for instance, used to be considered solely psychological. However, fMRI studies can now reliably confirm its presence or absence using a technique called MEG. In the above list of 15, only the cardiovascular system symptoms could probably still be considered physical.

Symptom Clusters

1. PTSD – posttraumatic stress disorder with 3 symptom categories

(1) Intrusive thoughts, (2) Hypervigilance, and (3) Avoidance-Dissociation

- .301* Diagnosed with PTSD [.188* Diagnosed with Acute Stress Disorder, ASD]
- .827 Anticipation of next negative event (part of Hypervigilance)
- .663 States of agitation or anger (also Hypervigilance)
- .587 Obsession over personal circumstances (also Hypervigilance)
- .500 Intrusive thoughts (flashbacks, nightmares)
- .136 Dissociation - out-of-body experience

A PTSD diagnosis is difficult to assign based on the restrictive DSM definition (based on a single instigating incident). Symptoms are reported at higher frequencies than the diagnosis. ASD is a time-limited experience, not continuous.

2. Clinical Depression

- .490* Diagnosed with depression
- .767 Sleep disruption (hard to begin/too little)
- .756 Loss of concentration or memory
- .703* Uncontrollable mood swings
- .637 Pervasive sadness
- .607 Insomnia
- .498 Loss of affect (flat emotional responses)
- .390* Increased dosages of prior emotion-regulating medications
- .218* Prescribed psychotropic medications (1st time)

3. Violence

Toward self

- .292 Had suicidal thoughts
- .162 Actually planned how to commit suicide

Toward others

- .406 Understood how a person could be driven to hurting or killing those who bullied them
- .139 Actually planned how to get even by hurting or killing those who have hurt me

4. Anxiety & Phobia

- .796 Overwhelming anxiety
- .519 Panic attacks
- .168* Agoraphobia

5. Cardiological

All of these problems involve labeling after treatment by a physician. All are adjusted rates.

- .609* Heart palpitations
- .596* High blood pressure (hypertension)
- .096* Cardiac arrhythmia
- .021* Stroke
- .014* Heart attack
- .007* Cardiac ischemia
- .004* Surgery to correct heart disease

6. Other Diseases Exacerbated by Stress

- .442 Tension headaches
- .482* Migraine headaches
- .206* Fibromyalgia
- .333* Chronic fatigue syndrome
- .369* Irritable bowel disease (Crohn's or ulcerative colitis)
- .124* Auto-immune disorder (diagnosed)
- .170* Psoriasis/Neurodermatitis (skin disorders)
- .103 Diabetes
- .011* Multiple Sclerosis
- .070 Eating disorder (diagnosed by MHP)
- .269* Sexual dysfunction (diagnosed by MHP)

7. Self-Destructive Behaviors

- .060 Relapse of formerly controlled addiction
- .012 New addiction to street drugs
- .085 New addiction to overeating
- .062 New addiction to alcohol
- .014* Bulimia
- .011* Anorexia

8. Lost Loyalty

- .742 Sense of betrayal by peers
- .626 Distrust of institutions
- .465 Grief over losses

GARY NAMIE, PhD, WBI RESEARCH DIRECTOR

EMPLOYERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD RESPONSIBILITY FOR SOLVING THE WORKPLACE BULLYING PROBLEM

WBI 2012-E Instant Poll

The online WBI Instant Poll is a single-question survey relying on self-selected samples. 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.

During the summer of 2012, 250 site visitors to the WBI website completed the survey that asked:

My EMPLOYER'S attitude toward workplace bullying is/was (choose one)

Response choices and percentages of respondents choosing each were:

It doesn't happen here 30%

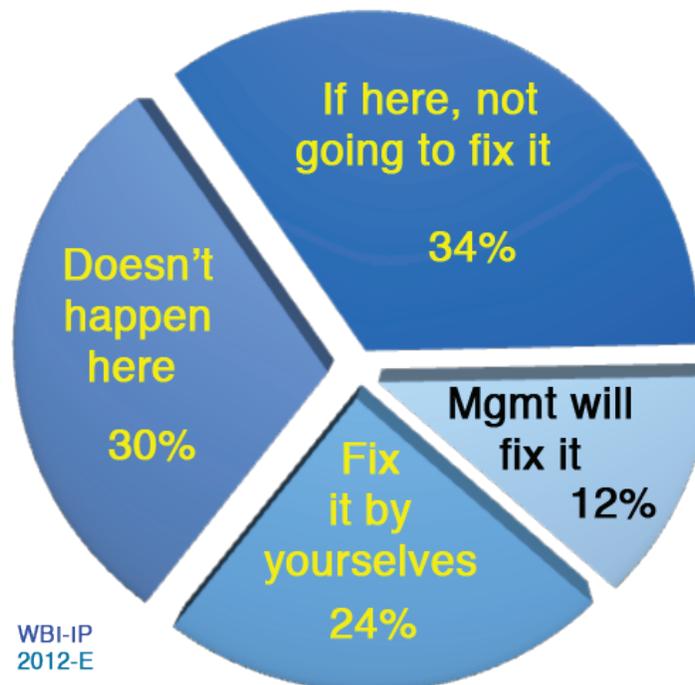
If it happens here, we're not going to fix it 34%

If it happens here, it's the responsibility of only the individuals involved to fix it themselves 24%

If it happens here, it's management's responsibility to fix it 12%

Employers abdicate responsibility to act in **88.4%** of cases. Telling individuals to “work it out between yourselves” forces target-victims to solve a problem they neither invited nor deserved. Sadly, in 2012, American employers still believe they are not responsible for work conditions that encourage worker-on-worker violence or for fostering toxic work environments that sustain bullies.

Employers' Attitudes



Gary Namie, PhD
WBI Research Director

WBI-IP
2012-E

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IS JUSTICE ATTAINABLE FOR BULLIED TARGETS?

WBI 2012-F Instant Poll

Workplace bullying jeopardizes targeted workers' careers, compromises their health and strains familial relations. Perhaps the most persistent damage from targets' perspective is the injustice of it all. Bullying was inflicted involuntarily on them. The assaults were not grounded in facts, not even a "kernel of truth." The most competent workers, the ones who pose threats to the deeply insecure aggressors, are targeted. The disconnect between deservedness and the deep misery experienced is at the heart of the injustice. Years after targets are out of harm's way, they still feel lingering pangs of unfairness, inequity, injustice.

Common sense suggests that justice can be found in a courtroom. However, legal punishment of workplace offenders is extremely rare and costly. In the U.S., without specific laws addressing workplace bullying, a.k.a., status-blind harassment, bullied workers must resign themselves to alternatives to courts.

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We explored potential sources of justice by posting the following statement in the sixth WBI Instant Poll of 2012 to which 331 site visitors responded:

I found "justice" after my workplace bullying experience through:

More than one of the following response choices could be selected:

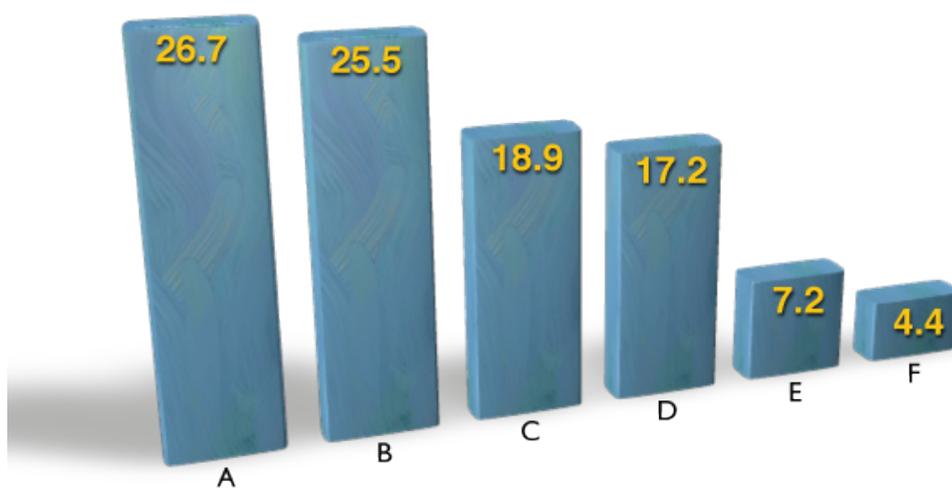
- A. Exposing the bullying to senior management*
- B. Prioritizing my health and career over that particular job*
- C. Becoming an advocate for the cause to end workplace bullying*
- D. Hiring an attorney and mounting a legal response*
- F. Telling my story to the media*
- E. Other - An unlisted method*
- G. I never found a sense of justice*

The first result is that the simple majority of respondents - 54.5% - reported to have “never found a sense of justice.” This aligns reasonably with the anecdotal evidence we gather by phone at the Workplace Bullying Institute.



For the sub-sample defined by the 46% who said that at least some justice was achieved, we calculated the conditional percentage of respondents who chose potential sources of justice from the list of factors, A to F. The graph shows the percentages. The factors are percentages ranked from highest to lowest.

- A. Exposing the bullying to senior management*
- B. Prioritizing my health and career over that particular job*
- C. Becoming an advocate for the cause to end workplace bullying*
- D. Hiring an attorney and mounting a legal response*
- E. Other - An unlisted method*
- F. Telling my story to the media*



Gary Namie, PhD
WBI Research Director

U.S. EMPLOYERS STOPPING WORKPLACE BULLYING: WHEN & WHY

WBI 2012-G Instant Poll

Employers are responsible for stopping workplace bullying because it is they who establish work conditions that result in either a safe or an unsafe work environment for employees. Managers are employers' agents. Employers are legally liable actions done in their name. Several other WBI empirical surveys show low employer engagement in the eradication of bullying. In this poll, we asked whether employers would ever stop it and what would compel them to do the right thing.

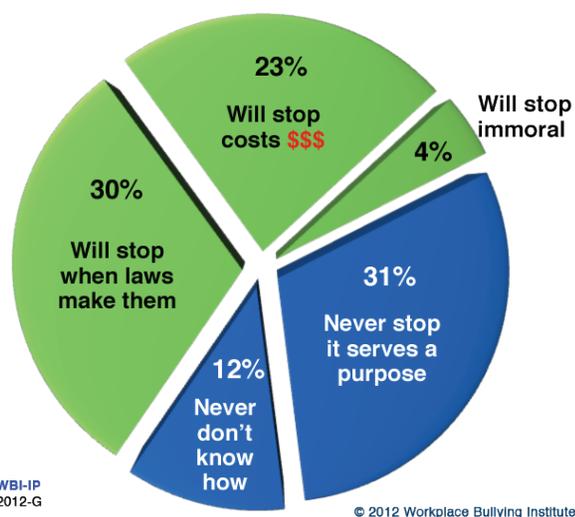
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For this seventh WBI Instant Poll of 2012, we asked 338 site visitors:

What will it take for the majority of U.S. employers to take workplace bullying seriously and stop it?

The response choices (limit one per respondent) and the results were:

- The majority never will. It accomplishes what they want. .305*
- The majority never will. They don't know how to stop it. .115*
- When laws are in place, the majority will respond positively. .305*
- The majority will stop when they learn how expensive preventable bullying is. .231*
- The majority will stop when they see the immorality of abuse in the workplace. .044*



Gary Namie, PhD
WBI Research Director

A majority (58%) of bullied target-respondents believed that employers will eventually stop for some reason. Given their experience, the optimism is unexpected. Of course, 42% said that employers never will stop it for one of the two alternative reasons posed in the question.

Less than a fourth of respondents echo the rational "bottom-line" impact argument -- that employers will stop bullying when they see how costly it is.

Employer groups frequently claim that because bullying is so complex a phenomenon they don't know how to stop it. Bullied targets do not give this excuse much credence; only 12% believe employers lack the skill to stop bullying. 31% said employers lack the will to stop it.

WORKPLACE BULLYING PERPETRATORS' RANK & NUMBERS

WBI 2012-H Instant Poll

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The 806 respondents to this survey were asked:

When you were bullied, who did the bullying? Check 1 best answer.

The rank order and percentages for each response option were:

- | | | |
|---|------|--|
| 1 | .344 | <i>One person who held a higher rank than mine</i> |
| 2 | .172 | <i>More than one person -- a mix of higher rank & peers</i> |
| 3 | .156 | <i>More than one person -- all with higher rank than mine</i> |
| 4 | .136 | <i>More than one person -- a mix of peers, bosses & subordinates</i> |
| 5 | .113 | <i>One person who was a peer, same rank</i> |
| 6 | .052 | <i>More than one person -- all peers</i> |
| 7 | .026 | <i>One person who held a lower rank than mine</i> |

In the vast majority of cases of bullying, the boss is involved.

- | | |
|------|-----------------------------------|
| .808 | <i>Bullying by boss</i> |
| .473 | <i>Bullying by peer coworkers</i> |
| .162 | <i>Bullying by a subordinate</i> |

Compared to the 2010 WBI U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey, responses are roughly comparable. In that scientific survey, the proportions added to a full 100% because only 3 response options were available to respondents. Bosses comprised 72% of bullies, coworkers 18% and subordinates 10%. Using the results of this Instant Poll, the percentage of bullies who were solely peers and coworkers was 16.5%.

It is easier for a boss to bully a subordinate. Lower-ranking individuals are socialized to not challenge authority. Bosses can have greater impact on their targets' economic livelihood by depriving them of jobs. Coworkers can leverage social exclusion and ostracism to harm targets. Subordinates can tactically destroy careers through sabotage of work of higher-ranking targets.

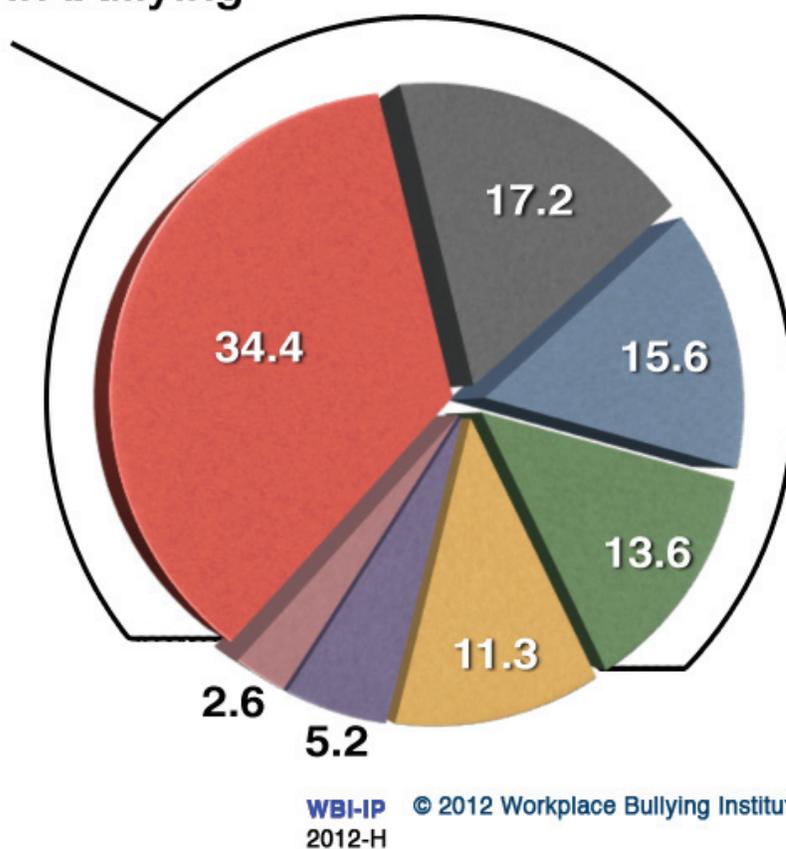
Many people distinguish the concepts of workplace bullying and mobbing. To them, the distinction is that Workplace Bullying (Andrea Adams, England begun in the early 1990's) involves only one-on-one interpersonal mistreatment, while Mobbing (Heinz Leymann, Sweden begun in the 1980's). In line with that thinking, bullying is done by a lone perpetrator; mobbing necessarily has multiple perpetrators who "gang up" on a single victim/target.

Results of this Instant Poll:

.483 *Solo perpetrator*
.517 *Multiple perpetrators*

The WBI position is that bullying always begins with a single instigator who nearly immediately recruits the assistance of others. Those who aid and abet the bully do so either through a direct and explicit appeal or through implied coercion. Thus bullying becomes mobbing.

In 81% of cases bosses participate in bullying



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HOW BULLIES SELECT THEIR TARGETS

WBI 2012-I Instant Poll

Individuals who are bullied ask themselves, “why me?.” They worry that some personal shortcoming is the reason. This self-defeating logic focuses responsibility inward. The truth is that no one wakes on a work day with a plan to invite humiliation and torment, nor does anyone deserve it. Some academic researchers (e.g., Tepper) adopt “victim precipitation,” an ideology borrowed from criminology that has been thoroughly discredited. It leads to blaming victims/targets. Bullies may rationalize their actions with “the target made me do it,” but anecdotal evidence from targets and witnesses refute this notion.

This 2012 survey of 655 respondents was intended to replicate original WBI 2003 findings exploring from the targets’ perspective why they were targeted.

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We asked:

Why were you (or the witnessed person) targeted for bullying? Check top 2 reasons. [1250 total votes]

The rank order and percentages for each response option were:

- | | | |
|----|------|---|
| 1 | .208 | <i>Bully/ies threatened by target’s technical skills</i> |
| 2 | .176 | <i>Bully/ies abusive-toxic personality/ies</i> |
| 3 | .140 | <i>Target is not a political game player</i> |
| 4 | .137 | <i>Bully/ies threatened by target’s popularity with others</i> |
| 5 | .099 | <i>Target perceived as weak</i> |
| 6 | .073 | <i>Single instigator convinced group to mob target</i> |
| 7 | .070 | <i>Bully/ies are noticed by higher ups; promotions depend on willingness to aggress</i> |
| 8 | .066 | <i>Bullying is rewarded at the workplace; experimentation encouraged</i> |
| 9 | .021 | <i>Group did the bullying & became out of control</i> |
| 10 | .010 | <i>Target deliberately provoked attacks upon self</i> |

Similar to the 2003 WBI survey results, targets stated that their technical prowess and personal popularity posed a threat to their bully (chosen by 34.5% of respondents). Target strengths threaten bullies.

Two responses could indicate that bullies perceive a vulnerability in targets selected -- not a political game player and perceived as weak -- accounting for a combined 27.5%.

The majority of reasons for selection involve factors outside targets' control -- personality of the bully, an instigator igniting a mob, organizational incentives -- totaling 38.5%. However, it's nearly as frequent a set of reasons as is target strength.

Proponents of mobbing who point out Leymann's original contention that group cruelty gains a momentum separate from any original reason for selecting the target will notice the extremely low percentage of bullied targets (2%) who stated that this was their experience.

Only 1% of target-respondents stated that their selection was a response to their provoking the bully to attack them. This finding counters the belief advanced by bully apologists that targets share responsibility for bullying with perpetrators.

