

# WORKPLACE **BULLYING** INSTITUTE™

## 2014 WBI U.S. WORKPLACE BULLYING SURVEY

### **Causal Factors & About Bullied Targets**

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## CAUSAL FACTORS

### 41% believe bullying can be blamed on the perpetrator; differences among racial groups emerged

Two questions explored with varying levels of accuracy the public explanation for why bullying happens.

In the better of the two Survey items, we asked respondents to choose one primary factor or reason for the bullying.

*Question:* Which one factor is most responsible for abusive mistreatment at work?

Table 15

Potential Causes	Proportion	Percentage
<b>Work related skill deficiencies of the target/victim</b>	.0769	7%
<b>Personality flaw of the target/victim</b>	.1264	13%
<i>Something about the target</i>	.2033	20%
<b>Work related skill deficiencies of the perpetrator</b>	.1099	11%
<b>Personality flaw of the perpetrator</b>	.3004	30%
<i>Something about the perpetrator</i>	.4103	41%
<b>Work conditions that encourage abusive conduct</b>	.0824	8%
<b>Perpetrators are not held accountable</b>	.2015	20%
<i>Something about the employer</i>	.2839	28%
<b>Society that supports aggression, abuse and humiliation</b>	.1044	10%

There were four factors from which respondents could choose: two items centered on the target; two items about perpetrator characteristics; two items about the organization; and one item about our pro-aggression society.

Target and perpetrator factors are based on individuals' personalities and skills. A respondent who assigns the majority of responsibility to targets is blaming targets for their fate. Focusing on perpetrators blames bullies. Employer work conditions and the failure to stop bullying, allowing bullying to happen with impunity, hold organizations responsible. Employer responsibility is external to both target and perpetrator. At the broadest level, societal mores surrounding aggression and violence can be credited as the reason so much bullying happens in America.

The primary causal explanation chosen by respondents was the perpetrator (41%), specifically, the bad personality of the bully (30%). Respondents saw the employer with its bullying-prone work environment and failure to hold bullies accountable as the second best explanation (28%).

One-fifth of respondents hold targets responsible for their fate, while half of that number (10%) perceive society is to blame. This Survey question was the respondents' opportunity to blame victims, but only 20% chose to do so. The vast majority believed that factors outside the targets' control were responsible.

There were differences across the racial groups in which factors best explained the bullying (See Race and the Bullying Experience for a fuller analysis). African Americans were the only group to assign a high percentage to society. Of all the racial groups Hispanics blamed targets the most. Perpetrators were blamed most by whites. Employers were blamed the most by Asian Americans and African Americans. The two groups with the highest "external" explanatory factor percentages were African Americans (62%) and Asian Americans (50%). Whites and Hispanics preferred "internal" personality factors to explain bullying (68% & 65%, respectively).

In terms of preventing or controlling bullying, the prospects of changing the personality of either the target or bully are dim. Change is more likely when organizational factors are redesigned.

The second Survey question asking respondents to allocate responsibility for bullying was less clearly written and focused than the previous question. We used the term “most worsened the workplace climate,” which is a compound question and certainly confusing. The response options sorted into target-related factors, coworkers’ reactions, and two types of management responses.

*Question:* Which factor most worsened the workplace climate for the bullied target, coworkers, and organization?

Table 16

Response Options	Proportion	Percentage
<b>The targeted person’s inability to defend herself or himself</b>	.3326	33%
<b>The target’s decision to file a complaint</b>	.1992	20%
<b>Coworker reactions to incidents</b>	.1807	18%
<b>Human resources’ response to the complaint</b>	.1170	12%
<b>High-level management’s response</b>	.1704	17%

The majority of respondents (53%) blame targets (mostly for their inability to defend themselves). There is research that suggests coworkers perceive bullied colleagues who are not seen fighting back, and therefore assumed to be incapable of doing so, somehow deserving to be bullied. It’s a case of double condemnation – by the bully first, then by witnesses.

Survey respondents blamed coworkers in 18% of cases. Management, including HR, a management support department, was responsible in 29% of cases.



## ABOUT BULLIED TARGETS

Finally, we asked the American public what type of person is targeted for abusive mistreatment in the workplace. Though this was a short, not exhaustive, list of personality traits, the results are clear. Those who claimed to have been aware that workplace bullying happens, believe that the overwhelming majority of individuals targeted possess positive attributes.

That is, the same respondents who believed that targets are mostly incapable of defending themselves against bullying assaults believe targets are kind, cooperative and agreeable. Perhaps these same traits render the guileless person vulnerable to unpredictable attacks. This Survey does not provide a way to draw the causal link between the traits and targets’ ability to defend themselves.

It is noteworthy that only 6% of targets are considered abusers themselves.

*Question:* Which personal style best describes the targeted person?

Table 17

Personality Style Choices	Proportion	Percentage
<b>Compassionate &amp; kind</b>	.3723	37%
<b>Cooperative</b>	.1948	19%
<b>Agreeable</b>	.2229	22%
<b>Aggressive</b>	.1537	15%
<b>Abusive</b>	.0563	6%

## ZOGBY ANALYTICS SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The Workplace Bullying Institute commissioned Zogby Analytics to conduct an online survey of 1,000 adults in the US. All interviews were completed January 27 and 28, 2014. Using trusted interactive partner resources, thousands of adults were invited to participate in this interactive survey. Each invitation is password coded and secure so that one respondent can only access the survey one time.

Using information based on census data, voter registration figures, CIA fact books and exit polls, Zogby uses complex weighting techniques to best represent the demographics of the population being surveyed. Weighted variables may include age, race, gender, region, party, education, and religion.

Based on a confidence interval of 95%, the margin of error for 1,000 is +/- 3.2 percentage points. This means that all other things being equal, the identical survey repeated will have results within the margin of error 95 times out of 100. Subsets of the data have a larger margin of error than the whole data set. Additional factors can create error, such as question wording and question order.

One of the conventions used in Zogby surveys is to allow respondents a response option of “Not Sure.” WBI chose to eliminate the “Not Sure” responses from the sample in all questions. Below are the sample characteristics.

Table 18

Sample Characteristics	Frequency	Valid Percent*
<b>Sample size</b>	1,000	100
<i>Region</i>		
<b>East</b>	220	22
<b>South</b>	260	26
<b>Central/Great Lakes</b>	300	30
<b>West</b>	220	22
<i>Age</i>		
<b>18-29</b>	220	22
<b>30-49</b>	360	36
<b>50-64</b>	250	25
<b>65+</b>	170	17
<i>Race</i>		
<b>White</b>	680	68
<b>Hispanic</b>	130	13
<b>African American</b>	120	12
<b>Asian/Pacific</b>	41	4.1
<b>Other/mixed</b>	29	2.9
<i>Religion</i>		
<b>Catholic</b>	260	26
<b>Protestant</b>	530	53
<b>Jewish</b>	30	3
<b>Other/None (religion)</b>	180	18
<i>Respondent Gender</i>		
<b>Male</b>	485	48.5
<b>Female</b>	515	51.5
<i>Employment Status</i>		
<b>Working</b>	532	53.6
<b>Unemployed – Looking for work</b>	63	6.3