2017 Workplace Bullying Institute
U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey

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workplacebullying.org

Stopping the Bullying

Major funding from

MINNESOTA ASSOCIATION
OF PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYEES

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2017 WBI U.S. WORKPLACE BULLYING SURVEY

STOPPING THE BULLYING

65% of bullying stops when the target loses the job held when first bullied

At WBI, we have been immersed in the lives of bullied targets for two decades. Ideally, employers would recognize the risks workplace bullying/abusive conduct pose and act rationally to stop it. However, we know from targets, this is not the case.

Bullying in its simplest manifestation is dyadic. There is a target and a perpetrator. This question explores how much each player contributes to stopping the bullying and through which personal consequences. [N = 350 with no experience respondents and “not sure” respondents deleted.]

Wording of the Question: What stopped the abusive mistreatment?

Table 10.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Options</th>
<th>Proportion</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It has not stopped</td>
<td>.2485</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target voluntarily left the job to escape more mistreatment (quit)</td>
<td>.2319</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target forced to quit when work conditions were deliberately made worse</td>
<td>.1178</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer terminated the target</td>
<td>.0798</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target lost job</td>
<td>.5437</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target transferred to a different job or location with same employer</td>
<td>.1141</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perpetrator was punished but kept job</td>
<td>.1673</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perpetrator was terminated</td>
<td>.1140</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perpetrator voluntarily quit</td>
<td>.0836</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perpetrator lost job</td>
<td>.3650</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something positive the employer did – investigate, new policy</td>
<td>.0950</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This Survey question provided the response option: “It has not stopped” that was chosen by 25% of respondents. Thus, the sample was reduced to N = 263 when those respondents were eliminated. The subsequent percentages in the above Table are based on the new sample that excluded the 25%. The options were chosen only by those for whom the bullying had stopped, either for targets or witnesses.

The sad reality is that even the general public seems to know that it is the target, the victim of the abuse, who is asked to make additional sacrifices to stop the bullying. In 54% of cases, bullying stops only when the target loses her or his job. Remember that individuals do not invite this severe misery into their work lives. Therefore, once a person is targeted for bullying – a choice made by the perpetrator(s) – that person has a 5 out of 10 chance of losing her or his livelihood. If one adds the 11% of targets who had to transfer to retain employment, 65% of targets had to leave the job they loved for no cause.

Furthermore, the target is driven to quit. Voluntary quitting (23%) is usually based on escalating health problems that families and physicians recognize, then encourage the target to leave the job. But 12% of quitting is based on decisions made after work conditions become untenable, so cruel as to drive a rational person to escape. Constructive discharge is the goal for many perpetrators. Terminations (8%) of the skilled but threatening (to bullies) targets are typically based on fabricated lies. Several WBI surveys of bullied targets substantiate this claim.

Figure 7.

Accepting a transfer to retain a job (11%), to bullied targets, is often a source of perceived injustice. Their reasoning is “I did nothing to deserve the abuse, why should I be the one to leave the job I love and am best qualified to perform.” To many, transfers are punitive. On the other hand, it prevents economic devastation and might provide a degree of psychological safety.
The pattern of results from this national sample stands in marked contrast with WBI studies asking the same question of a sample of only bullied targets. To them, the ratio of negative consequences experienced by targets is 7:1 when compared to negatives for perpetrators. The public overestimates the proportion of negative consequences suffered by perpetrators.

In this 2017 version of the national survey, we added the option for respondents to choose – employers stopped the bullying by doing something positive and proactive such as creating a policy or conducting credible investigations. Ten percent of respondents chose this option.
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ABOUT WBI

The Workplace Bullying Institute is the first and still the only U.S. organization dedicated to the eradication of workplace bullying that combines help for individuals, research, books, public education, training for professionals-unions-employers, legislative advocacy, and consulting solutions for organizations. The founders, Dr. Ruth and Dr. Gary Namie, began their work in Benicia California in mid-1997. WBI is once again located in the San Francisco Bay Area.

The 2017 WBI U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey is the fourth national scientific survey done by WBI. Additional WBI studies can be found at the WBI website.

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