



RESEARCH STUDIES

workplacebullying.org

**The WBI
U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey
conducted by Zogby International**

2010

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The Experience of Being Bullied & Witnessing It

Past WBI surveys have adopted the academic standard of separating the direct bullying experience into two mutually exclusive categories: (1) now and within the last year, and (2) ever been bullied but not now. To these groups were added those who only witness bullying but have never experienced it and those who say they have never witnessed it and have never been bullied.

For the 2010 survey, we addressed the missing groups — those who are both targets of bullying and witnesses. Finally, we asked if respondents were perpetrators, the bullies. A tiny proportion (7/2092) admitted to being one.

The results show that the majority have the dual experience of being bullied and witnessing it. Here is the complete breakdown.

Target Now/Witness	Target Now/No Witness	Been Bullied/Witness	Been Bullied/No Witness
6.9%	1.9%	19.6%	6.1%
Witness Only	Perpetrator	Not Target/Not Witness	
15.5%	0.3%	49.6%	

The above statistics were taken from Survey 2. 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 is +/- 2.2 percentage points.

Stability of Workplace Bullying Prevalence since 2007

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 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.

In August, 2010 WBI conducted a follow-up study to compare 2007 prevalence rates to 2010 rates. The data below are derived from Survey 2.

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.

Recession & Workplace Bullying

It's a no-brainer prediction that the economic recession escalates bullying at work. Be careful it may not be as clearcut as it appears. It seems that once again experience with bullying is required. From an online WBI summer 2009 survey of 454 respondents, 28% reported an escalation. In that sample, 97% said that they were now or were previously bullied. Thus, this was a snapshot of the world through the lens of bullied individuals, but not representative of the broader population (the other 65% who have not been bullied).

By contrast, the respondents to the 2010 WBI U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey (n=4,210) reported a much different story about the recession's impact. The large scientific (nationally representative) sample included lots of people who either deny bullying's existence or have a limited experience with it. Here is the comparison of results from the two studies.

2010 survey question: Has the bullying problem at your workplace changed since the recession (approx. Sept. 2008)?

2009 survey question: Did the bullying change since the economic downturn (Sept. 2008)?

Response Categories	2010 WBI U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey (scientific)	2009 WBI Online Survey
Yes. It is more of a problem/It became MORE abusive	8.6%	27.5%
No change. It is the same problem as before/Mistreatment was common and still is	26%	67%
Yes. It is less of a problem/It became LESS abusive	11.9%	3.4%
No change. It was not a problem at my workplace before/Mistreatment was rare and still is	22.9	2%
Not sure	30.7%	n/a

The results were derived from Survey 1.

The reader can see the striking difference experience with being bullied makes — 9% vs. 28% who believed that due to the recession, bullying worsened.

In addition to the sampling differences, there were slight variations in definitions used in the two surveys. For the national survey, we stated that: “For the purposes of this survey, workplace bullying is defined as the repeated mistreatment of an individual employee by a person or a group directed that takes the form of verbal abuse, behavior that is humiliating, threatening, intimidating, or sabotage of the targeted person’s work.” For the online 2009 survey, we defined bullying as: “sabotage that prevents work from getting done, verbal abuse, threatening conduct, intimidation, humiliation, or exploitation of a known vulnerability (psychological or physical).” This is the definition used by WBI and codified in the anti-bullying Healthy Workplace Bill.

Gender & Workplace Bullying

Gender of targets: 58% are women; 42% are men

Gender of perpetrators: 62% men; 38% women

Men bullies target men in 55.5% of cases; women in 45.5%

What tends to make news (based on the 2007 WBI findings) is that women bullies target women in 79.8% of cases; men in 20.2%. In 2007, the woman-on-woman bullying prevalence was 71%. Now it is **80%**. Looks like the American workplace is grower ever more toxic for women, at the hands of women.

The frequencies of all gender dyads of all bullying: 34% male perp/male target; 30% female perp/female target; 28% male perp/female target; and 8% female perp/male target.

All of the above results are from Survey 1: Zogby International was commissioned by the Workplace Bullying Institute to conduct an online survey of 4,210 adults from 8/18/10 to 8/23/10. The margin of error is +/- 2.2 percentage points. The sample was weighted to reflect accurate gender, age, and regional factors and designed to represent all adult Americans.

Race & Workplace Bullying

New research findings from the 2010 Workplace Bullying Institute national scientific survey regarding the effect of race on the experience of workplace bullying. Hispanics report the highest rates, African-Americans second highest, Asians the lowest. Public officials should infer from this that existing anti-discrimination laws (and resulting employer policies) are inadequate to stem the tide of abuse of minorities in the American workplace.

	Bullied Now	Been Bullied	Combined	Witnessed Only	No Bullying Experience
Hispanics	12.7%	23.5%	40.2%	12.3%	51.4%
African-Americans	11	27.6	38.6	7.9	51.5
Whites	7.9	25.7	33.6	16.8	49.6
Asians	3.8	9.7	13.5	37.6	48.9
2010 National Prevalence Statistics	8.8	25.7	34.5	15.5	49.6

These data were taken from Survey 2.

A recently published journal article by Janet Raver confirmed that those who endure ethnic harassment (which is legal and actionable) have their misery compounded when also bullied. It is an additive effect. [Once, twice or three times as harmful? Ethnic harassment, gender harassment and generalized workplace harassment. by J.L. Raver & L.H. Nishii. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 2010, 95 (2), 236-254.]

Age & Workplace Bullying

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

These data were taken from Survey 1.

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.

Education & Workplace Bullying

There are many myths and misconceptions about workplace bullying advanced by disbelievers and opponents. One portrayal is that bullying affects only the uneducated, unskilled workers.

The WBI 2003 online survey reported that the five top reasons individuals are targeted for bullying, in rank order, were: (1) refusal to be subservient (being independent), (2) being more technically skilled than the bully, (3) being liked by co-workers/customers (being the go-to expert), (4) being ethical and honest, and (5) not being sufficiently political. Thus, people are targeted for their strengths and the threats they pose to the defensive, narcissistic perpetrator.

In the scientific (nationally representative) 2010 WBI U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey, respondents could check whether they had a college degree (or beyond) or whether they did not

have a degree. That allows us to determine if the reported experiences with bullying differed according to education level.

The prevalence question given to respondents was: “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?” Here are the responses sorted by education and compared to the overall sample.

	Currently Bullied	Been Bullied, Not Now	Total Experienced Bullying	Witnessed It Only	Not Bullied/Not Witnessed
No College	7%	26%	33%	14%	53%
College Degree +	11	26	37	18	45
Full Nat'l Sample	8.8	25.7	34.5	15.5	49.6

These data were taken from Survey 2.

Note that the respondents with more formal education reported a higher bullying rate. Not having a college degree was associated with a higher denial of bullying rate. Myth busted.

Employer Engagement in preventing/correcting workplace bullying: Two completely different views

Perspective 1 is through the lens of people who know bullying from the inside, from the perspective of being the target of a bully's wrath. They have the experience with their employer's involvement with bullying. People who visit the WBI website and complete a front-page Instant Poll weigh in on a variety of issues. From their answers, we can describe the world through the lens of bullied targets because site visitors (98%) declare themselves to be bullied targets. The research samples are called "self-selected" samples. Despite the polls being "unscientific," they provide the most useful information for other bullied targets and shed light on the bullying phenomenon.

Perspective 2 is the national snapshot captured when we commission a national poll. We did this in August for the 2010 WBI U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey. Our pollsters, Zogby International, polled 4,210 individuals selected to represent all adult Americans. The sample was a "scientific" one because of the sampling methodology used. It allows WBI to extrapolate the findings to the general U.S. adult population. Surveys like these meet the requirement for publication in scientific journals and at academic conferences. However, when half of the population has no knowledge of bullying (49.6% of the 2010 WBI-Zogby respondents claimed never witnessing and never being bullied), results can be misleading.

What a difference personal experience makes. For instance, we asked in our National Survey and also in one of our Instant Polls:

How engaged is your employer with preventing or correcting workplace bullying?

A large portion -- 36.9% -- of the national survey respondents said they were "not sure" about employer activity. We did not give the online survey respondents the same opportunity. We eliminated the "not sure" people and adjusted the percentages accordingly for a direct comparison between the two groups. Here are the differences.

For each response category, the percentages for survey group are given.

Employer is ...	National Survey Adult Americans (n = 2,658)	Targets' Survey Online Sample (n = 332)
Very engaged. Employer has a specific policy, separate from harassment and violence policies. Policy is enforced.	33.4%	2.7%
Partially engaged. Employer has the specific policy, but does not enforce it.	9.9	12
Promotes awareness. Employer sponsors training or seminars. No policy	11.8	4.2
Unengaged. No employer activity. Unaware.	42.6	35.2
Resistant to topic. Refuses to educate employees or to create policy when asked by union or employees.	2.2	45.7

The above data are derived from Survey 1.

From the online targets' survey, we see that 81% of employers are either doing nothing to address bullying or actually resisting action when requested to do something. The non-expert public direct comparison percentage is 44.8.

Most startling is how optimistic is the general public that employers are very engaged in the battle against workplace bullying. One-third of adult Americans gave employers credit for having specific policies and faithfully enforcing them. Perhaps this confidence assumes that since schools have been forced to deal with bullying, workplaces for adults would similarly address bullying. Of course, this statistic is not founded on truth. Bullied targets tell us that less than three percent (2.7%) of employers are actively engaged like the public thinks.

The two views about employer engagement are divergent. The differences are so great that the veracity of one or both groups warrants scrutiny. Who shall be trusted -- the "average" American or a veteran of the bullying wars? We have 14 years experience with the latter group. They have proven themselves to us to be honest.

It also is true that one cannot imagine the intensity of the defense for the bully coupled with attempts to discredit and demoralize you, the target, until it happens to you. In other words, without direct experience, you might believe the promises that all employers care deeply about the health and safety of their workers. This is a naive belief not supported by the evidence -- empirical (as shown in the above table) and anecdotal (if you talk to bullied targets).

The findings above illustrate a second point about the American public. Americans hold myths about employers as benevolent stewards of workers. They want to believe. And as most elections prove, they are susceptible to slogans, broad promises, and symbols. Facts and evidence pale by comparison. Americans are willing to ignore facts when their worldview dictates a contrary view. This indefensible ignorance about employer actions seems to have affected our own national survey.

It is critical that lawmakers understand the reality of the bullying phenomenon and employer resistance to voluntary action. A major point of our advocacy for the anti-bullying Healthy Workplace Bill is that without laws compelling action, employers will continue to ignore bullying. Employer lobbying groups promise that voluntary action will suffice. When lawmakers, the source of much of the over-hyped optimism and sloganeering in our culture, adopt the false belief that a third of employers are doing the right thing now, they will be reluctant to sponsor or support the legislation.

The danger of a society duped by untruths about workplace bullying is that action is stalled. The more credible truth about employer action is that very little is happening. Targets have told us so.

Personal Political Affiliation and the Experience of Workplace Bullying

New research findings from the 2010 Workplace Bullying Institute national scientific survey regarding political party affiliation and political ideology.

Because bullying ignores gender and rank boundaries, it makes sense that hyper-aggressive perpetrators of abusive misconduct do not identify with a particular political party. Nor are targets selected principally based on a political ideology.

However, in the 2007 WBI survey and now again in the 2010 WBI national survey, the reported prevalence rates for bullying differ based on party affiliation and ideology. The following results were derived from Survey 2. Here are the results and comparisons with the national average.

Question: “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?”

National Prevalence Statistics	Bullied Now	Been Bullied	Combined	Witnessed Only	No Bullying Experience
	8.8%	25.7%	34.5%	15.5%	49.6%

Survey respondents were asked if they identified with one of the two major political parties or if they self-identified as independents.

Pol Party Affil	Bullied Now	Been Bullied	Combined	Witnessed Only	No Bullying Experience
Democratic	11%	32%	43%	15%	41%
Independent	9.4	26.2	35.6	13	50.8
Republican	5.7	20	25.7	13.2	60.9

A similar pattern emerges when respondents were asked to identify their political ideology.

Ideology	Bullied Now	Been Bullied	Combined	Witnessed Only	No Bullying Experience
Liberal	14.1%	31%	44.1%	17.2%	37.5%
Moderate	5.9	27.1	33	21.2	44.8
Conservative	6.6	22	28.6	12.3	59

Thus, Republicans and Conservatives reported less bullying and were more likely to report no experience with bullying at all. In other words, party affiliation and ideology may serve as a perceptual filter, a lens through which the phenomenon of bullying is interpreted.

Many people do not realize they are being bullied. It is a shameful experience that one does not readily admit to. It's a stigmatizing act. The findings above illustrate that a conservative perspective makes one less likely to admit that bullying ("repeated mistreatment" as used in the definition in the survey) occurs; conversely, being politically liberal seems to make a person more likely to define observed or experienced misconduct as bullying.

What cannot be determined from the data alone is whether conservatives underestimate bullying that is occurring or if liberals overestimate its occurrence.

Support for a Workplace Bullying Law

New research findings from the 2010 Workplace Bullying Institute national scientific survey regarding the level of support for the workplace bullying law, called the Healthy Workplace Bill (HWB).

The question asked: "Do you support or oppose enactment of workplace bullying laws that would protect all workers from what can be considered malicious, health-harming abusive conduct committed by bosses and co-workers?" This is the language of the HWB. Here are the results for the entire national sample as well as by political ideology and race.

	YES = all support	Strongly Support	Somewhat Support	Not Sure/ No Opinion	Somewhat Oppose	Strongly Oppose
National sample	64.2%	37.5%	26.7%	12%	10.8%	13%
Liberals	89.5	62	27.5	4.3	2.4	3.8
Moderates	77.8	48.2	29.6	10.5	7.5	4.2
Conservatives	47.1	20.5	26.6	13.6	16.9	22.5
Democratic Party Affil.	83.5	57.8	25.7	9.5	3.6	3.3
No Poll Party Affil.	60.1	49.3	10.8	34.9	3.5	1.5
Independent Party Affil.	55.2	29.5	25.7	10.4	13.2	21.2
Republican Party Affil.	50.2	20	30.2	14.1	17.5	18.2
African-Americans	73.2	54.8	18.4	12.9	5.1	8.8

Hispanics	65.9	40.9	25	5.7	11.2	17.2
Asians	63.8	37.5	26.3	19.7	5.1	11.4
Whites	63	34.2	28.8	12.4	11.8	12.8

All of the above results were derived from Survey 1.

For comparison, consider that the Sunday newspaper magazine, *Parade*, asked the same question in a July 18, 2010 article titled: “Workplace Bullying: Do We Need a Law?” The magazine’s online poll results found overwhelming support for a law — 92% yes.

According to a WBI Instant Poll posted on July 23, 2010, 96.8% of 252 online respondents stated their support for a workplace bullying law.

Readers will want to digest Suffolk Law Professor David Yamada’s thorough and thoughtful Labor Day 2010 analysis of the liberal, moderate and conservative features of the Healthy Workplace Bill. He is the bill’s author.