



## 2021 WBI U.S. WORKPLACE BULLYING SURVEY

The Fifth National Scientific WBI Study  
Zogby Analytics, Pollster

3.

## REMOTE WORK & BULLYING

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FUNDING FROM GENEROUS GOFUNDME CONTRIBUTORS

### 3. REMOTE WORK & BULLYING

The coronavirus pandemic adversely impacts global health and economies in most nations, including the U.S. On-site work ceased for millions of workers. For those deemed “essential” employees, work continued despite the raging virus, putting them at risk of infection, hospitalization, or death. Professional white collar workers were fortunate to be able to continue work away from their employers’ locations. Telework and telecommunicated workers are not new. However, COVID compelled reliance on remote work on an unprecedented scale. We asked respondents in the Employed sample (n=787), the subset of the larger Adults national sample, a series of four questions to determine if remote work was related to bullying.

In this report, the exact wording of each Survey items begins with *Question:* . The respondents’ answer choices are the phrases without italics in all Tables. Subtotals comprised of sets of response categories are *italicized*.

*Question:* Do you work remotely from home?

Table 5      Remote Work

Work Location	Proportion	Percentage
Yes. I choose to work remotely from home	.3312	33%
Yes. Remote work is mandated by employer	.1357	14%
<i>Remote Workers</i>	.4670	47%
Yes. I work remotely and on-site	.1027	10%
No. My work cannot be done remotely by computer online	.2474	25%

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Nearly half of Employed workers in the survey do work remotely.

The bullying experience of remote workers was qualitatively different from that of hybrid employees whose job mixes remote with on-site work and employees who do no remote work. By combining the results of Table 5 with Table 1 (the principal bullying prevalence statistics), we see remote workers bullied at a 43% rate. See Table 6. Recall that the national Adults rate was 30% and the Employed respondents’ rate was 39%.

The percentage of remote workers affected by bullying (bullied + witnessed) was 61.5%. The national rate was 49%, while the rate for the Employed sample respondents was 61%.

The most self-reported bullies came from the group of hybrid workers, with remote workers reporting the second highest percentage.

Table 6      Experience X Remote Work: Adults

Experience with Bullying	Remote	Hybrid	No Remote
Bullied Target	43.2%	17.4%	20.6%
Witnessed	18.3%	29.3%	15.8%
Bullies	6.3%	6.5%	2.4%
Believers	15.3%	19.6%	22.2%
Unaware	16.9%	27.2%	39%

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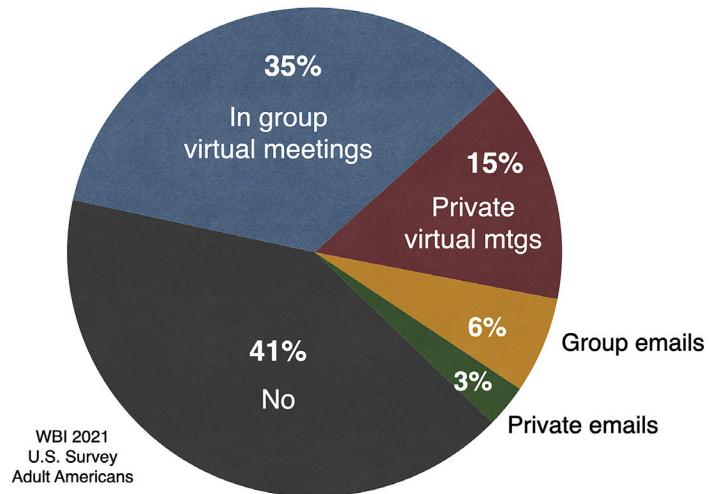
*Question:* Have you personally experienced or witnessed severe mistreatment during remote work?

Table 7

Location of mistreatment, experienced or witnessed	Proportion	Percentage
Yes. In virtual meetings in front of others (Zoom, Skype, WebEx, etc.)	.3482	35%
Yes. It happens only when target is alone with abuser, in personal virtual meeting	.1482	15%
<i>In Virtual Meetings</i>	.4964	50%
Yes. It happens via group emails so others are witnesses	.0635	6%
Yes. It happens only via personal emails	.0282	3%
<i>Via Emails</i>	.0917	9%
No. Never during virtual meetings or email	.4117	41%

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Figure 4



Half of the respondents reported experiencing or witnessing mistreatment during online meetings. The majority, 70%, of the online mistreatment happened publicly in front of others. This is equivalent to being berated at group meetings in which perpetrators magnify humiliation by performing with an audience of the target's coworkers. Instead of sitting around a conference table, it happens on computer (or phone or tablet) screens in real time with facial expressions made prominent by the technology.

Mistreatment by emails was done on a much smaller scale. Perhaps fear of leaving a paper trail mitigated bullying for some perpetrators.

*Question:* In your opinion has COVID-19 affected how much workers mistreat one another?

Table 8

COVID's effect on mistreatment	Proportion	Percentage
Increased harmful mistreatment (abuse, bullying)	.2452	25%
No change -- mistreatment was, and still is, common at my work	.1702	17%
No change -- mistreatment rarely happened before	.2401	24%
<i>No change</i>	.4155	41%
Decreased harmful mistreatment	.0559	6%
Not sure, I do not see coworkers as much as before	.2871	29%

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COVID inflicted a great deal of misery. According to one-quarter of respondents in our 2021 survey, it increased harmful bullying. See Table 8. However, for most respondents (41%), the pandemic did not change their workplaces. For readers hoping that from misery comes the opportunity for a decrease in bullying, only 6% of respondents agreed.

The corporation Salesforce declared the death of America's 9-to-5 work routine. It predicts a very different post-pandemic landscape in which workers will be hybrids -- on-site for a day or two, the remainder of the work week performed remotely.

Some of the findings from this survey suggest that organizations understand that a major negative consequence of increasing the amount of work done remotely is the likelihood of abusive conduct will rise commensurately. It is predictable. Employers cannot say they could not have anticipated the rise of workplace aggression. They should take steps to prevent and correct its inevitable occurrence.

Finally, we asked respondents about perceived workplace safety. The survey was administered one year from the beginning of the COVID pandemic in the U.S. And its mitigation has been spotty nationwide.

Workplace bullying is many things. It is sub-lethal, non-physical violence at work. It is emotional abuse causing emotional injury. It is status-blind harassment, but unlike its discriminatory cousin, it is not yet illegal in the U.S. It jeopardizes its targets' psychological safety. And it compromises targets' health and well-being through the involuntary onset of a host of stress-related diseases that can kill.

Workplace bullying or abusive workplace conduct fits well into the occupational health niche. Bullying poses a health hazard for its recipients. So we asked respondents about their perceived safety at work in light of bullying and the COVID pandemic. See Table 9.

*Question:* Do you worry about your safety at work, either on-site or remotely?

Table 9

Safety concern	Proportion	Percentage
Yes. My employer does not protect me from COVID-19 adequately	.2292	23%
Yes. Mistreatment (abuse, bullying) jeopardizes my psychological safety	.1357	14%
Yes. I face risks from both COVID-19 and severe mistreatment	.0844	8%
Worried	.4494	45%
No. I feel safe at work	.5505	55%

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The majority of respondents said they felt safe at work (55%). But nearly one-quarter felt inadequately protected from contracting COVID at work. And additional 14% were concerned about bullying. If we extrapolate the 37% to the work force of 160,567,000 (as we did in Chapter 2 Table 4), the workers with concerns for their safety could number approximately 59 million.