



2021 WBI U.S. WORKPLACE BULLYING SURVEY

The Fifth National Scientific WBI Study
Zogby Analytics, Pollster

THE COMPLETE REPORT

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workplacebullying.org

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2021 WBI U.S. WORKPLACE BULLYING SURVEY



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1. 2021 NATIONAL PREVALENCE

Workplace bullying is repeated mistreatment and a form of “abusive conduct.” We asked respondents to consider only the most serious forms of bullying. Bullying is a non-physical form of workplace violence. Our principal concern is the national prevalence of abusive conduct. The Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI) commissioned Zogby Analytics to conduct the interactive survey on January 23-25. Their methodology is described in a separate chapter of this report. The national representative sample of adult Americans included 1,215 respondents.

For the 2021 Survey, respondents were permitted to choose more than one response, if logical. That is, they could declare that they historically have been subjected to mistreatment and are currently being bullied. However, if they report no personal experience with bullying, they were prohibited from choosing either of the being bullied responses.

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: At work, what has been your personal experience with the following types of repeated mistreatment: abusive conduct that is threatening, intimidating, humiliating, work sabotage or verbal abuse?

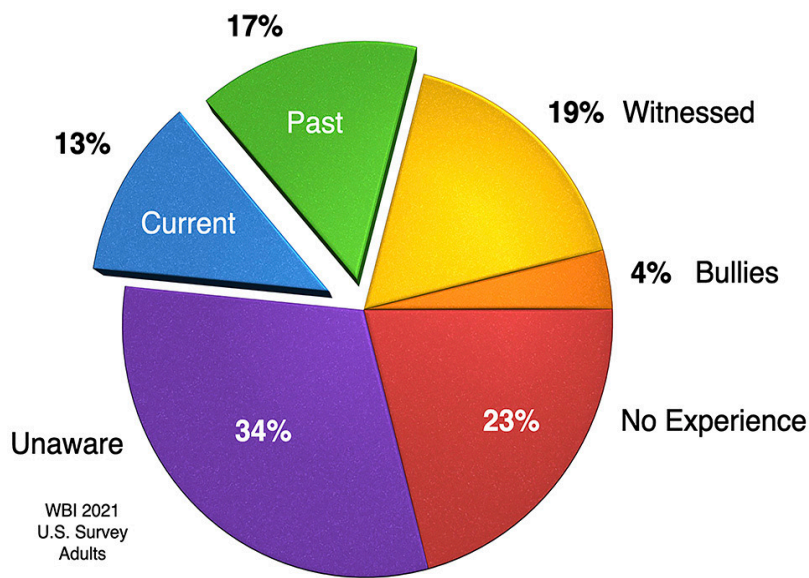
Table 1. Prevalence - Adults

Types of Experiences with Bullying	Proportion	Percentage
I am experiencing it now or have experienced it in the last year	.1325	13%
I have experienced it before in my work life, but not in the last year	.1703	17%
<i>Total of those with Direct Bullying Experience</i>	.3028	30%
I have seen it happen (in-person or via remote work) to others	.1275	13%
I know, but have not seen, that it happened to others	.0633	6%
<i>Total of those who Witnessed It</i>	.1909	19%
<i>Total of Americans Affected by Bullying</i>	.4938	49%
I am, or have been, a perpetrator myself <i>Self-Identified Bullies</i>	.0411	4%
I have not experienced or witnessed it: I do believe it happens in workplaces	.1349	13%
I have not experienced or witnessed it: I believe that what others consider “mistreatment” happens	.0954	10%
<i>"Believers"</i>	.2303	23%
<i>Total of Americans Aware of Bullying</i>	.6609	66%
I have no personal experience or knowledge of, or an opinion about, abusive mistreatment at work	.3390	34%

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**Adult Americans: 30% suffer abusive conduct at work,
another 19% witness it,
49% are affected by it, and
66% are aware that workplace bullying happens**

Figure 1



The Bullied

Nearly one-third of adult Americans (30%) said they directly experienced abusive conduct at work. This prevalence is similar to the UK prevalence in prior studies.

Witnesses

Witnesses experience bullying vicariously, indirectly. Research of witnesses found that the severity of emotional injuries were similar in severity to injuries suffered by bullied individuals. It is potentially traumatizing to watch colleagues humiliated and intimidated. However, there are multiple explanations for the unwillingness of witnesses to help their bullied colleagues.

Affected Americans

We define those “affected” by bullying to be those with direct or vicarious experiences with it. In the national sample of Adults, the sum of those bullied (30%) and witnessing it (19%) totals to 49% of Americans.

About Bullies

For WBI’s 24 years, we never could answer the question about the prevalence of predators. Bullies do not make themselves available to be studied, nor do they have to since no U.S. law compels them to be publicly outed. There are limited studies of bullies in other countries where legal violations regarding workplace bullying identify individual perpetrators. However, there still is no credible evidence regarding the prevalence of bullies. In this 2021 Survey, for the first time, the self-report by some individuals as perpetrators rose above an infinitesimally small percentage. In the national sample of Adults, 50 people (4.1%) admitted being bullies.

In a subsequent Table we extrapolate the above percentages of each bullying experience group to the American civilian labor force when the Survey was administered. The self-declared percentage of bullies represents approximately 6.6 million individuals. Thus, it is possible that the 6.6 million are responsible for bullying 48 million targeted workers. It is pure speculation that the ratio of 7.36 targets to bullies could represent the number of targets assailed by an average bully.

Believers

Respondents were asked to declare if they personally believe bullying happens despite not having any experiences with it. The second response option was to agree that others can be mistreated at work and their perceptions are credible. These two groups of no-experience respondents do not deny it, they are “believers.” In the national sample of Adults, they represent 23% of Americans. Believers will need to be drafted to support their bullied colleagues if the culture of organizations are to change from bullying-prone to cultures of psychological safety. Believers are appalled that abuse is so normalized and accepted in the contemporary American workplace.

Aware Americans

The percentage of adult Americans aware that abusive conduct/workplace bullying happens at work is the sum of those with direct and vicarious experiences, the self-declared bullies, plus those with no experience but who believe it happens. The sum of the

“aware” groups is 66%. That means two-thirds of adult Americans are familiar with workplace bullying -- ranging from a painfully intimate immersion to a superficial recognition of the term without knowing many details.

At the Workplace Bullying Institute, we claim partial credit for this high level of public awareness. Our work began in 1997 with the steadfast commitment to raising public awareness. The myriad of our activities and programs has helped drive that awareness.

Unaware

The final group to discuss is the one that baffles us most. These are respondents who claim no experience with workplace bullying and do not profess to have an opinion about it. They do not care. We surmise that this 34% of Americans deny its existence. They are the fellow workers likely to turn away when asked to help. Similarly, they are the most likely to blame targeted individuals for their fate. It is noteworthy that about one-third of Americans reliably deny science, cling to conspiracy theories, support authoritarians, eschew vaccines for themselves and their children, and, in general, represent the distrustful contrarians among us.

In fact, among Republican respondents to the Survey, 46% claimed an unawareness. By contrast, only 30% of Democratic respondents were unaware. A similar pattern emerged when ideologies were compared. Of Conservatives, 44% denied bullying exists whereas 29% of Liberals did so.



With respect to political ideology as shown in Table 2, respondents who described themselves as Liberal were 1.5 times more likely than Conservatives and twice as likely as Moderates to be bullied. Similarly, Liberals were also more likely to witness it. And the highest rate of self-reported admission that the respondent was a bully was by Liberals.

Table 2

Experience X Ideology: Adults

Experience with Bullying	Conservative	Moderate	Liberal
Bullied Target	28.5%	20.9%	44.2%
Witnessed	14.1%	20.3%	23.9%
Bullies	4.4%	1.8%	5.9%
Believers	25.5%	20%	23.1%
Unaware	44%	45.4%	26.7%

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Zogby Analytics provided the nationally representative sample of respondents enabling WBI to extrapolate results to the population of all Adult Americans. We refer to that sample of 1,215 respondents as the Adults sample. In addition, Zogby created a subset of 787 respondents all of whom were Employed or temporarily unemployed. Those data enable us to compare those employed with the larger sample that included retired and unemployed individuals. We will include only analyses in this Report where differences between the Adults and Employed samples were present.

Here are the prevalence percentages for respondents in the Employed sample. The *Question* is the same as for Adults.

Table 3

Prevalence - Employed

Types of Experiences with Bullying	Proportion	Percentage
I am experiencing it now or have experienced it in the last year	.1931	19%
I have experienced it before in my work life, but not in the last year	.1969	20%
<i>Total of the Employed with Direct Bullying Experience</i>	.3900	39%
I have seen it happen (in-person or via remote work) to others	.1486	15%
I know, but have not seen, that it happened to others	.0724	7%
<i>Total of Employed who Witnessed It</i>	.2210	22%
<i>Total of Employed Americans Affected by Bullying</i>	.6111	61%
I am, or have been, a perpetrator myself <i>Self-Identified Bullies</i>	.0584	6%
I have not experienced or witnessed it: I do believe it happens in workplaces	.1334	13%
I have not experienced or witnessed it: I believe that what others consider "mistreatment" happens	.0864	9%
<i>"Believers"</i>	.2198	22%
<i>Total of Employed Workers Aware of Bullying</i>	.7337	73%
I have no personal experience or knowledge of, or an opinion about, abusive mistreatment at work <i>Employed & Unaware</i>	.2662	27%

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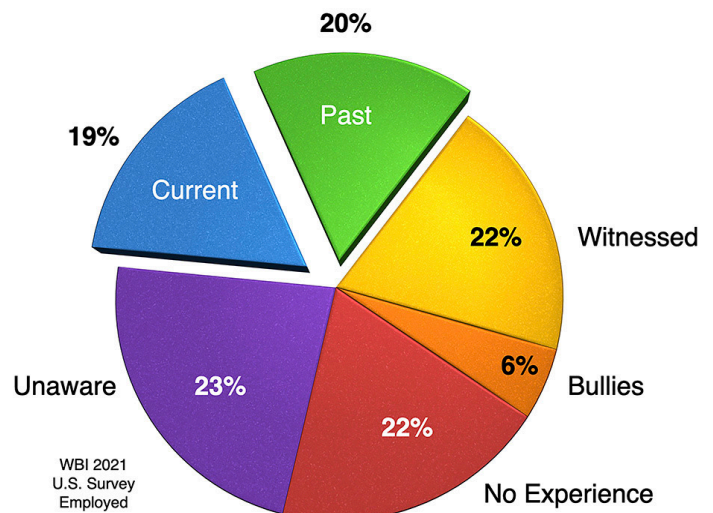
**Employed Americans: 39% suffer abusive conduct at work,
another 22% witness it, 61% are affected by it, and
73% are aware that workplace bullying happens**

Figure 2

Major noteworthy differences between Adults and Employed:

- the bullying prevalence jumps to 39% (vs. 30%)
- employed people see more bullies, 6% vs. 4%
- the proportion of the unaware drops by 1/3

The respondents in the Employed sample are closer to the workplace. Their perceptions about workplace bullying may be more trustworthy than the perceptions of outsiders. However, the size of the sample casts doubt on the certainty of drawing conclusions from the findings.



2. THE AFFECTED U.S. WORKFORCE

The 2021 WBI U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey was conducted in January 2021. The most recent prior U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimate of the U.S. civilian labor force was in December 2020, approximately 160,537,000 workers. By applying the prevalence proportions from our national sample of Adults (Table 1 in Chapter 1), we were able to estimate the equivalent number of working Americans that correspond to each bullying experience category. The results appear below.

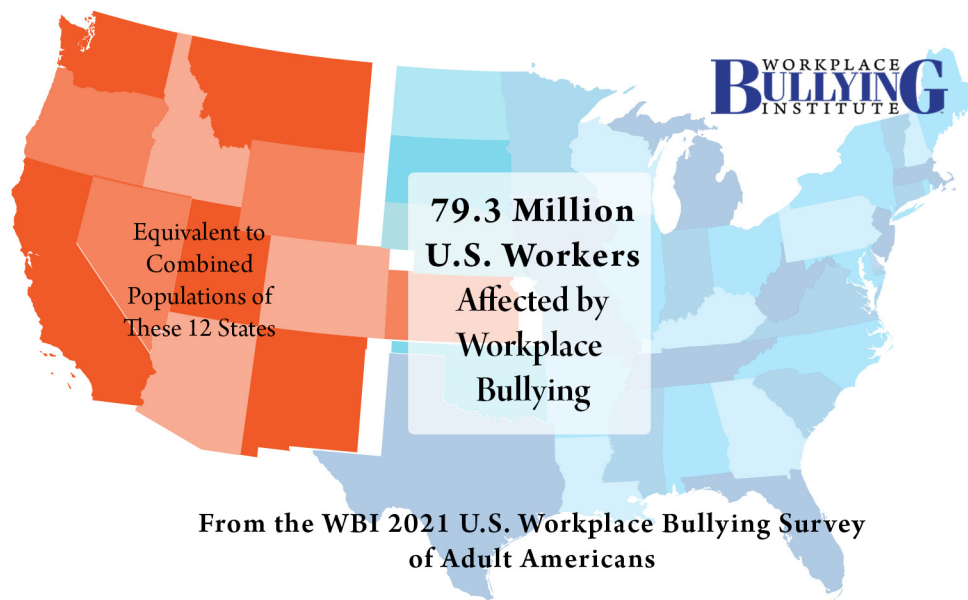
Table 4 Number of American Workers Affected by Bullying

Types of Experiences with Bullying	Proportion	Number
I am experiencing it now or have experienced it in the last year	.1325	21,275,127
I have experienced it before in my work life, but not in the last year	.1703	27,344,560
<i>Total of those with Direct Bullying Experience</i>	<i>.3028</i>	<i>48,619,687</i>
I have seen it happen (in-person or via remote work) to others	.1275	20,472,292
I know, but have not seen, that it happened to others	.0633	10,163,891
<i>Total of those who Witnessed It</i>	<i>.1909</i>	<i>30,652,240</i>
<i>Total of Americans Affected by Bullying</i>	<i>.4938</i>	<i>79,287,984</i>
I am, or have been, a perpetrator myself <i>Self-Identified Bullies</i>	.0411	6,599,303
I have not experienced or witnessed it: I do believe it happens in workplaces	.1349	21,660,488
I have not experienced or witnessed it: I believe that what others consider "mistreatment" happens	.0954	15,318,091
<i>"Believers"</i>	<i>.2303</i>	<i>36,978,580</i>
<i>Total of Americans Aware of Bullying</i>	<i>.6609</i>	<i>106,118,730</i>
I have no personal experience or knowledge of, or an opinion about, abusive mistreatment at work	.3390	54,432,213

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Workers who have been directly bullied number 48.6 million; witnesses number another 30.6 million. The sum suggests that 79.3 million workers have been affected (bullied + witnesses). Below is a graphical depiction of that number by combining the population of the dozen states shaded in red (actually totalling 79.4 million). Remarkably, 4% of the Adults sample declared themselves perpetrators. Assuming an underreporting, 6.6 million is a conservative estimate of the number of bullies operating in organizations. The number of Americans aware that workplace bullying exists nearly doubles the number of people who deny it.

Figure 3



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>	<i>.4670</i>	<i>47%</i>
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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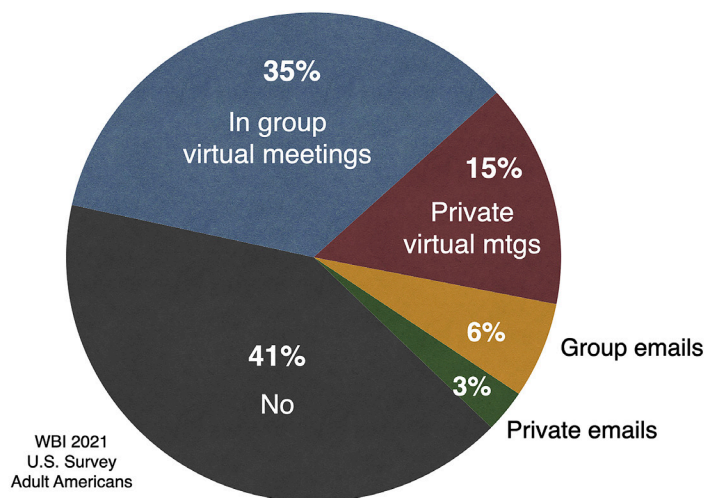
Question: Have you personally experienced or witnessed severe mistreatment during remote work?

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%
<i>Worried</i>	.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.

4. GENDER OF PERPETRATORS & TARGETS

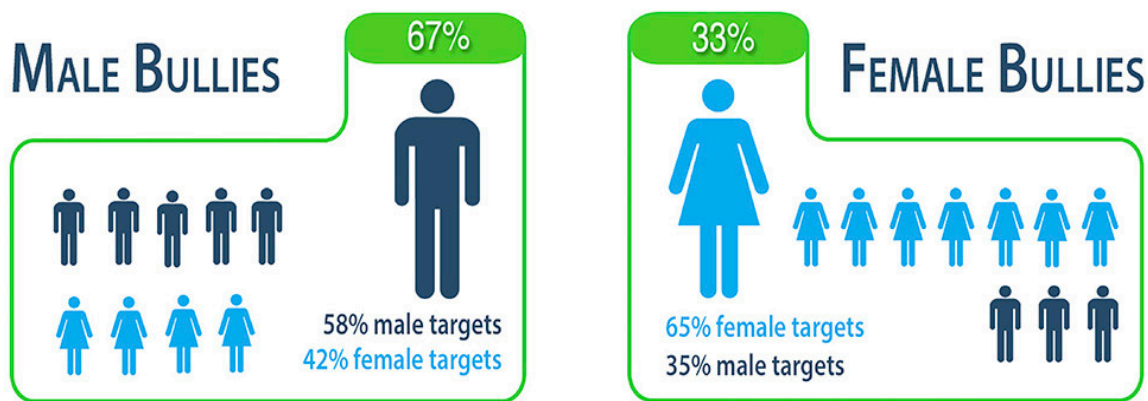
Question: At work, think of the perpetrator and person targeted for repeated mistreatment. What was the gender of each?

Table 10

Gender Pairs - Adult Sample	Proportion	Percentage
Male perpetrator: Male target	.3960	40%
Male perpetrator: Female target	.2836	28%
<i>Male Perpetrator</i>	.6743	67%
Female Perpetrator: Male Target	.1124	11%
Female Perpetrator: Female Target	.2078	21%
<i>Female Perpetrator</i>	.3256	33%
<i>Same Gender Pairs</i>	.6039	60%
<i>Male Target</i>	.5085	51%
<i>Female Target</i>	.4914	49%

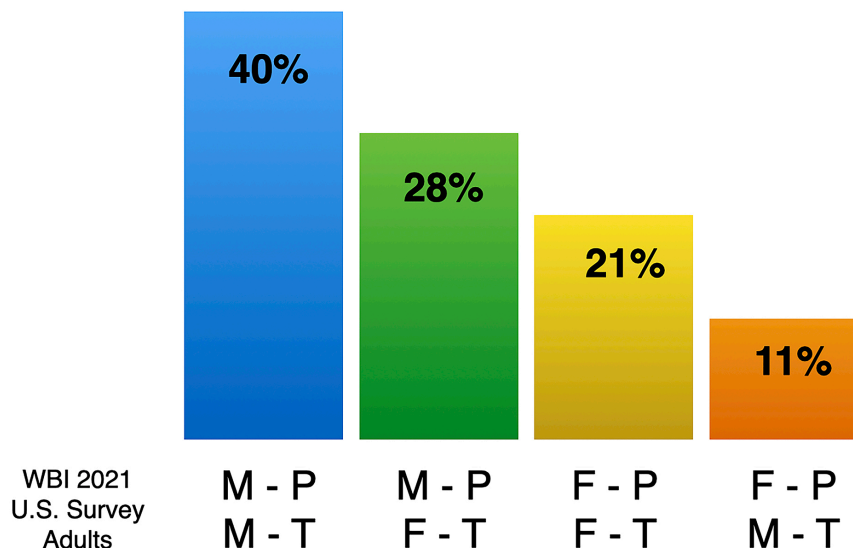
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Figure 5



WBI 2021 U.S. Survey - Adults

Figure 6



67% of bullies are men

51% of bullied targets are men

women bullies choose women targets 65% of the time

The majority of bullies are men (67%, See Table 10). Male perpetrators seem to prefer targeting men (58%) more than women (42%). Women bullies were less “equitable” when choosing their targets for bullying. Women bullied women in 65% of cases. [In past WBI national Surveys, the woman-on-woman bullying percentages were similarly disproportionately high.]

When considering all four combinations of gender pairs, the two most frequent were both when the perpetrator was male (See Figure 6). Men bullied by men comprised the largest group (40%), followed by women bullied by men (28%), women bullied by women (21%), and the rarest of all, men bullied by women (11%).

Men were targets in 51% of cases (See Figure 6); women were targeted in 49% of cases.

Same gender pairs represented 60% of situations described by Adult respondents (Table 10). Those cases prove practically difficult for bullied individuals to solicit employer support or legal representation to resolve. The civil rights nondiscrimination laws which compel employer policies that prohibit harassment and discrimination technically apply to same gender cases. In other words, a woman may claim sexual harassment by another woman coworker or boss. But it is extraordinarily difficult to prove that the underlying animus for mistreatment was the other person’s gender. Given that difficulty, HR compliance officers routinely discourage same-gender complaints, for both men and women. Likewise, it is nearly impossible to find an attorney willing to take a same-gender harassment case.

Thus, bullying cases, the majority of which can be same-gender, tend to fall outside the protections afforded both by federal and state laws as well as employer anti-harassment policies. The U.S. remains the sole western industrialized nation to not have laws or health and safety regulations addressing bullying in addition to status-based harassment. Some progressive employers and unions have created policies and collective bargaining agreement provisions to protect employees and members from abusive conduct.



An additional analysis crossed the *respondents’ gender* with the range of experiences with bullying. See Table 11. Male survey respondents were directly bullied at twice the rate (39%) that female survey respondents reported.

As we said in the discussion of results found in Table 1 in Chapter 1, individuals admitted to being perpetrators (bullies) themselves at a higher rate than in previous WBI national surveys. In 2021, the overall national rate was 4%. Table 11 reveals that 6% of men declared themselves bullies; while 2% of women said they were bullies.

The other major gender difference among respondents was the lack of awareness by women about workplace bullying more than double the unawareness of men.

Table 11

Adult Respondents	Women	W %-age	Men	M %-age
Bullied	.1982	20%	.3885	39%
Witnessed	.1568	16%	.2060	21%
Bully	.0236	2%	.0574	6%
Believer	.2278	23%	.1773	18%
Unaware	.3934	39%	.1706	17%

5. RACE & THE BULLYING EXPERIENCE

The pollster Zogby Analytics provided data on four racial groups: Whites, Hispanics, Blacks, and Asians. The sample of Adult Americans was 60% White, 19% Hispanic, 14% Black and 6% Asians. Table 12 shows how people of different races experienced workplace bullying differently. The rate of being directly bullied (current + past) was highest for Hispanics at 35%. The national rate of 30% (see Table 1 in Chapter 1) was matched by Whites. Blacks had a lower rate (26.3%) and Asians had a much lower rate (11.7%).

In order of the highest to lowest rates of being affected by bullying (bullied + witnessed): Hispanics at 53.8%, Whites at 47%, Blacks at 45%, and Asians at 32%

Hispanics also admitted to being perpetrators/bullies, 6%, more than the other groups.

Table 12

	White	Hispanic	Black	Asian
Bullied	.3009	.3547	.2631	.1168
Witnessed	.1682	.1837	.1871	.2077
Bully	.0369	.0598	.0409	.0259
Believer	.2790	.2649	.2280	.2467
Unaware	.2517	.1965	.3216	.4285

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Hispanics were the group most aware of the workplace bullying phenomenon (80%, see Figure 7) by virtue of their high rate of being bullied, witnessing it, and having over one-quarter of the respondents believing it happens. Asian respondents are interesting because the rates of witnessing and believing are comparable to all the other groups but the reported rate of bullying (12%) is less than half the rate of Blacks. One possible inference is that, for Asians, a cultural stigma accompanies admission that one is bullied while it is acceptable to claim to witness it happening to others (who may be from a different racial group) and to believe in its existence.

Figure 7



WBI 2021 U.S. Survey - Adults

6. RANK OF PERPETRATORS

Question: What was rank of the principal perpetrator(s)?

Table 13

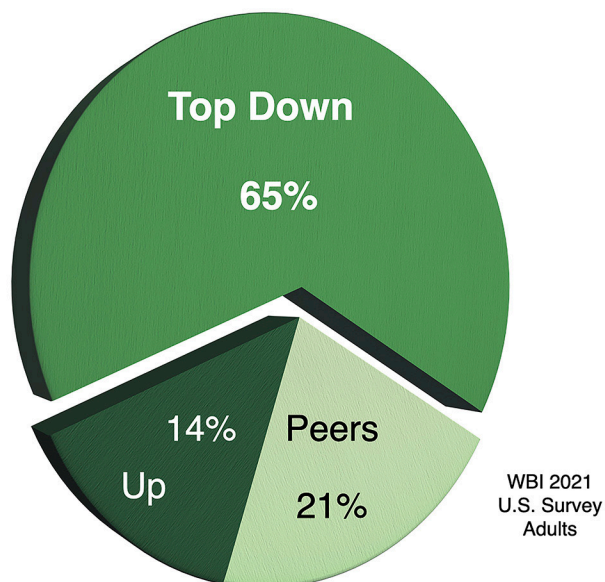
	Proportion	Percentage
Single individual, higher rank than target, a boss	.4680	47%
Single individual, same rank, a coworker	.1598	16%
Single individual, lower rank, a subordinate	.0936	9%
More than one, higher rank, bosses	.1392	14%
More than one peer, coworkers	.0411	4%
Multiple subordinates	.0365	4%
A combination of bosses & peers	.0365	4%
A combination of bosses, peers & subordinates	.0228	2%
Higher rank than target (no combinations)	.6472	65%
Coworkers/peers	.2141	21%
Lower rank than target	.1386	14%
Lone perpetrator	.7231	72%
Multiple perpetrators	.2768	28%

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Unshaded rows in Table 13 are the response choices seen by survey respondents. The first three shaded rows are the values used in Figure 8. Bosses remain the most frequent perpetrators across all WBI national surveys begun in 2007. There is truth to the alliteration -- Bully Bosses. Bullying originates with peers in about 1 in 5 cases. Subordinates, lower in rank but not in self-perceived power, bully “up the ladder” in 14% of cases.

We also asked respondents if the principal perpetrator worked alone or as part of a group. Many readers will recognize this as a way to distinguish Mobbing (with its requisite multiple perpetrators) from Bullying (by a single instigator). In fact, every lone instigator soon acquires support from others, either explicitly through commands or requests or implicitly as coworkers align with the aggressor. Workplace bullying is rarely a solo act. Respondents said they saw a lone person (72%). But they did not see the others.

Figure 8



7. ROLES OF TARGETED PEOPLE

Question: What was the role of the targeted person?

Table 14

TARGETS

52%
NOT
MANAGEMENT

40%
MANAGERS

Adults sample	Proportion	Percentage
Non-supervisory employee	.3630	36%
Lead worker, not supervisor	.1575	16%
<i>Not Management</i>	.5205	52%
First-line supervisor	.1392	14%
Manager	.1849	18%
Senior manager or executive	.0776	8%
<i>Management</i>	.4018	40%
Owner, president, CEO	.0639	6%
Contractor	.0159	2%

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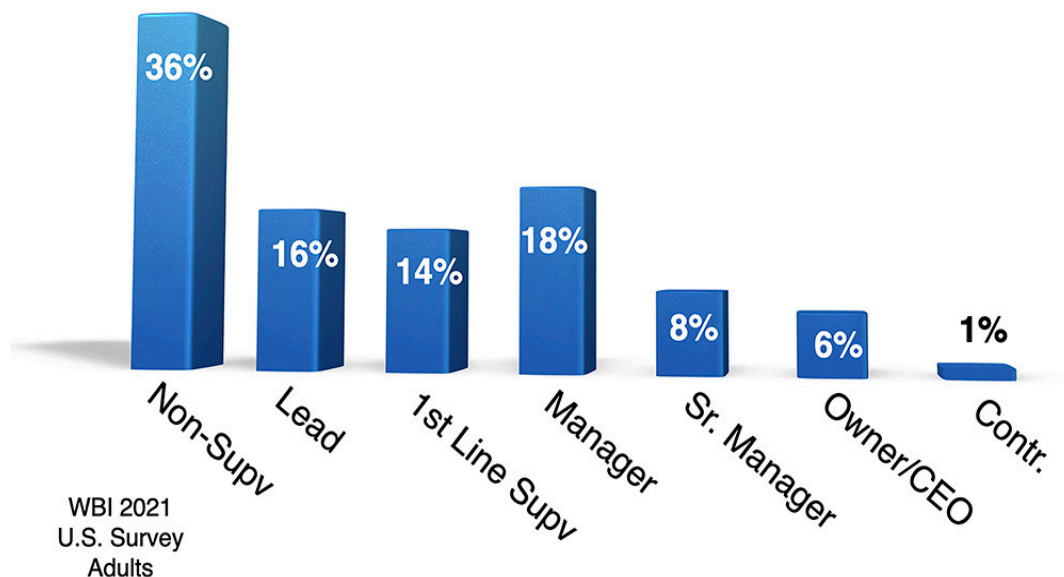
Unshaded rows in Table 14 were response options for survey respondents in the Adults national sample. There were two categories of positions that were not management and three levels of management positions. One myth about workplace bullying is that managers do all the bullying and non-supervisory workers are their only targets.

Our 2021 results show that employees who are not management comprise the majority of bullied targets (52%), but managers are also bullied (40% of all targets), especially mid-level managers (18%). Bullying thrives in hierarchical organizations. Managers have bosses, too.

Freedom from bullying is one of the prerequisites of being on top of the hierarchy. Of individuals targeted for bullying, only 6% are at the very top. Contractors are rarely bullied (2% of all targets), according to the Adults sample respondents. Without the constraints of an employee, contractors are free to escape bullying workplaces. A key component of targethood is the bullied employee's limited ability to flee harmful work environments without financial consequences.

The distribution of roles for the Adults sample respondents was not provided.

Figure 9



Remember that the pollster provided data from the national Adults sample and a subset of Employed respondents. It is noteworthy that Employed sample responses to this question generated different results than the Adults detailed on the previous page.

Question: What was the role of the targeted person?

Table 15

Employed sample	Proportion	Percentage
Non-supervisory employee	.2881	29%
Lead worker, not supervisor	.1585	16%
<i>Not Management</i>	.4466	45%
First-line supervisor	.1556	16%
Manager	.2190	22%
Senior manager or executive	.0864	8%
<i>Management</i>	.4610	46%
Owner, president, CEO	.0749	7%
Contractor	.0172	2%

TARGETS

46%
MANAGERS

45%
NOT
MANAGEMENT

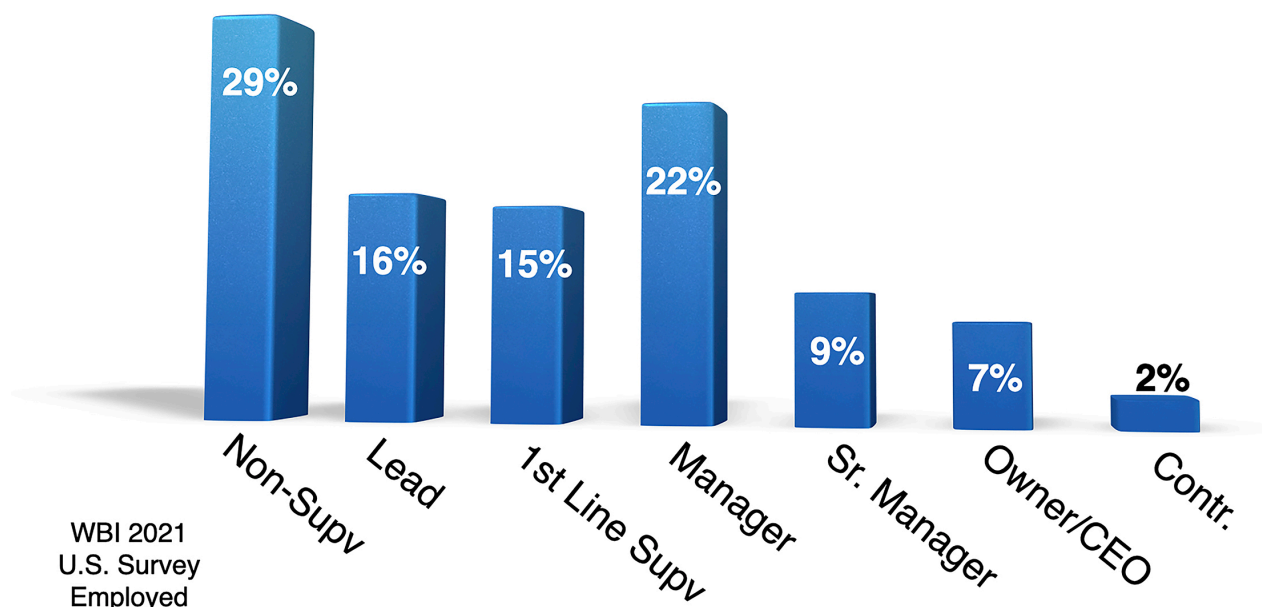
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Respondents from the Employed sample reported that managers were more frequently targeted for bullying (46%), again with mid-level managers experiencing the most bullying (22% of all targets) than were employees not in management. Non-supervisory employees were targets in 29% of cases.

The distribution of roles for the Employed sample respondents was not provided. We can only hope that the numbers of managers and non-managers in the sample approximated the real world distribution, with fewer managers than others.

The results shown here suggest that managers are equally likely to be bullied as others. Therefore, we can reasonably expect advocates to end abusive conduct at work to come from the ranks of management. At the very least, managers could be less adversarial to bullied complainants since they ostensibly understand the experience themselves.

Figure 10



8. EXPLAINING TOXIC & ABUSIVE WORKPLACES

Question: Which factor best explains why a workplace becomes toxic and abusive?

Table 16

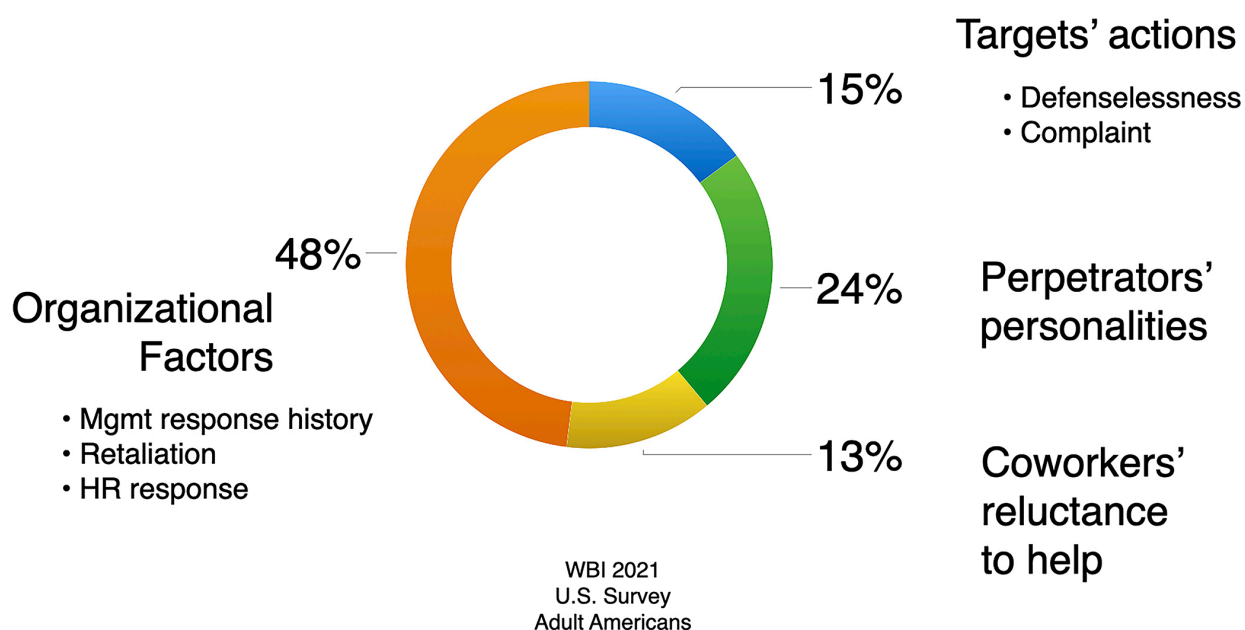
Explanatory Factors	Proportion	Percentage
Targeted people's inability to defend themselves or other personal shortcoming	.0993	10%
Targets' decision to complain about their mistreatment	.0491	5%
<i>Targets' Personal, Dispositional Factors</i>	.1485	15%
Organizational retaliation for filing a complaint	.1589	16%
Management's history of responding to complaints	.2112	21%
HR's response to complaints	.1098	11%
<i>Organizational Factors</i>	.4801	48%
Perpetrators' personalities, they have personal problems	.2405	24%
Coworkers' reluctance to help the targeted person	.1307	13%
<i>Internal & Personal [Perp + CW + Targ]</i>	.5198	52%

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Unshaded rows in Table 16 were response options for survey respondents in the Adults national sample. The most frequently chosen factor (24%) to explain workplace toxicity was the personality of the perpetrator. The U.S. is a culture that reveres individuals. The correspondence bias leads us to associate bad behavior with an underlying bad character. With this reasoning, bullies are defective people. This belief convinces employers to reflexively send identified offenders to “anger management” to get “fixed.” Unfortunately, the likelihood of redirecting an adult personality is low. There can be no change without changing the context of their performance, the work environment.

The U.S. is a society that blames victims for their fate. Respondents in this survey did not make the attributional error. Only 15% of respondents faulted targets. Nevertheless, when the coworkers’ tendency toward inaction is added to the personality factors for targets and perpetrators, 52% of the factors are classified as internal to individuals. That is, in slightly over half the cases, respondents preferred a dispositional explanation.

Figure 11



The recognition of organizational factors accounted for the other half (48%) of the explanations. Management's history of responding appropriately, or more likely inappropriately, to past complaints about abuse, bullying, or mistreatment was the most significant (21%) component. Employees notice. Retaliation and HR's record of failing to resolve bullying situations convince many prospective complainants to remain silent. Then, the organization loses its chance to correct the current bullying and to prevent it in the future with policy changes.

It is noteworthy that respondents in this 2021 survey were cognizant of the role organizational culture, described via the three factors in the response options, plays in enabling and failing to stop workplace bullying. Solutions require an increased awareness of organizational determination of individuals' conduct with a simultaneous decrease in attention to irreversible individual personalities.



A related survey question explored the potential effect of an important set of events that occurred outside the workplace.

Question: In your opinion has the display of bullying, disrespect and intolerance of the opinions of others by politicians and public figures affected workplaces?

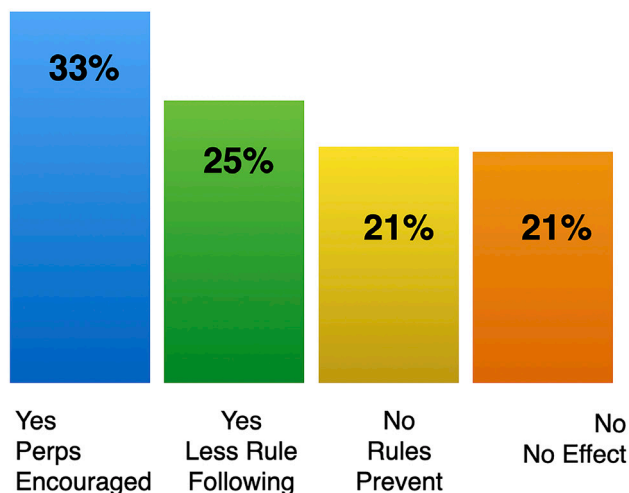
Table 17

Adults sample	Proportion	Percentage
Yes. The public disrespect encourages workplace perpetrators	.3311	33%
Yes. Fewer people believe they should follow rules or laws	.2519	25%
<i>YES it does affect workplaces</i>	<i>.5830</i>	<i>58%</i>
No. Rules and policies prevent the mistreatment of others	.2106	21%
No. Actions by politicians do not affect workplaces	.2062	21%
<i>NO it does not affect workplaces</i>	<i>.4169</i>	<i>42%</i>

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Unshaded rows in Table 17 were response options for survey respondents in the Adults national sample. There was a preference (58%) for believing that actors in the public sphere did adversely affect the American workplace. The two methods described in this question were disruption by encouragement of aggression (33%) and granting permission to ignore rules (25%). A strong minority (42%) of respondents disagreed. They concluded that employers had guardrails to prevent deviant behavior from taking over (21%) or that what politicians do is irrelevant to the workplace.

Figure 12



WBI 2021 U.S. Survey - Adults

This question posited that a factor external to organizational life might influence the internal workplace culture.

We asked this question at a time that coincided with the end of a tumultuous single presidential term of Donald Trump.

Research on school bullying showed an increase in aggressive behaviors throughout Trump's tenure. It was undeniable that he modeled bullying, abusive interpersonal behavior.

An argument can be made that workplace cultures are inextricably embedded in the national culture where organizations call home. The 58% of respondents seem to have acknowledged this immersion.

When public discourse returns to a moderate degree of civility, if it ever does again, we will ask the question to explore if public and political comity positively affects workplace cultures.

9. EMPLOYER REACTIONS TO BULLYING

Question: What do you believe is the most common reaction to complaints of mistreatment (when it is not illegal discrimination) by American employers?

Table 18

Reactions by employer	Adults Proportion	Adults Percentage	Employed Proportion	Employed Percentage
Encourage it; Necessary for a competitive organization	.1277	13%	.1814	18%
Defend it; When offenders are executives and managers	.1101	11%	.1259	13%
Rationalize it; It's an innocent, routine way of doing business	.1132	11%	.1244	12%
Deny it; It doesn't happen here, fail to investigate complaints	.1606	16%	.1349	13%
Discount it; Consider the impact on people to not be harmful	.0895	9%	.0674	7%
<i>Negative reactions</i>	.6014	60%	.6314	63%
Acknowledge it; Show concern for affected workers	.1256	13%	.1289	13%
Eliminate it; Create and enforce policies and procedures	.1132	11%	.1064	11%
Condemn it; Exercise zero-tolerance	.1585	16%	.1304	13%
<i>Positive reactions</i>	.3975	40%	.3658	37%

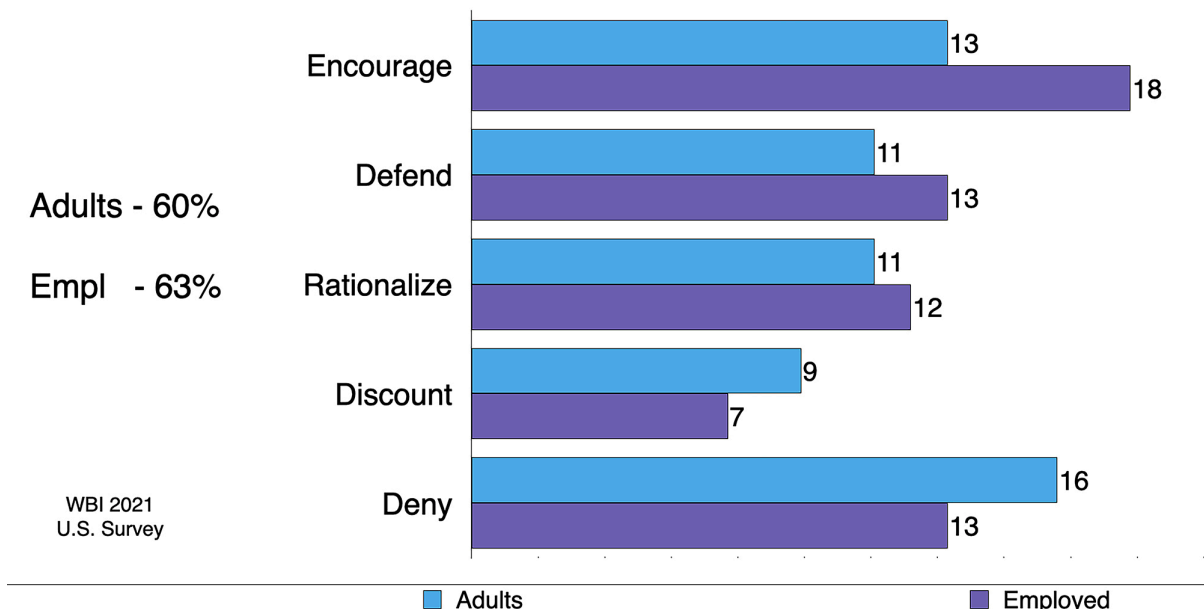
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Unshaded rows in Table 18 were response options for survey respondents in the Adults and Employed samples. Employers do not like complaints. Few organizations see complaints as opportunities to improve and complainants as internal consultants. Most loathe complaints because they expose weaknesses or individuals whose misconduct reflects on their bosses. Hence the outcomes depicted in Chapter 10 What Stopped the Bullying.

The first five reactions are considered negative. They sustain and justify unconscionable abusive misconduct. The final three reaction options are positive. They enable the organization to prevent and correct workplace bullying.

Respondents in the Employed sample believed employers showed a higher rate of negative reactions than the larger Adults sample. the Employed chose actual encouragement (reinforcement) of bullying as the most common reaction. Respondents in the Adults sample said denial was the most common negative reaction.

Figure 13

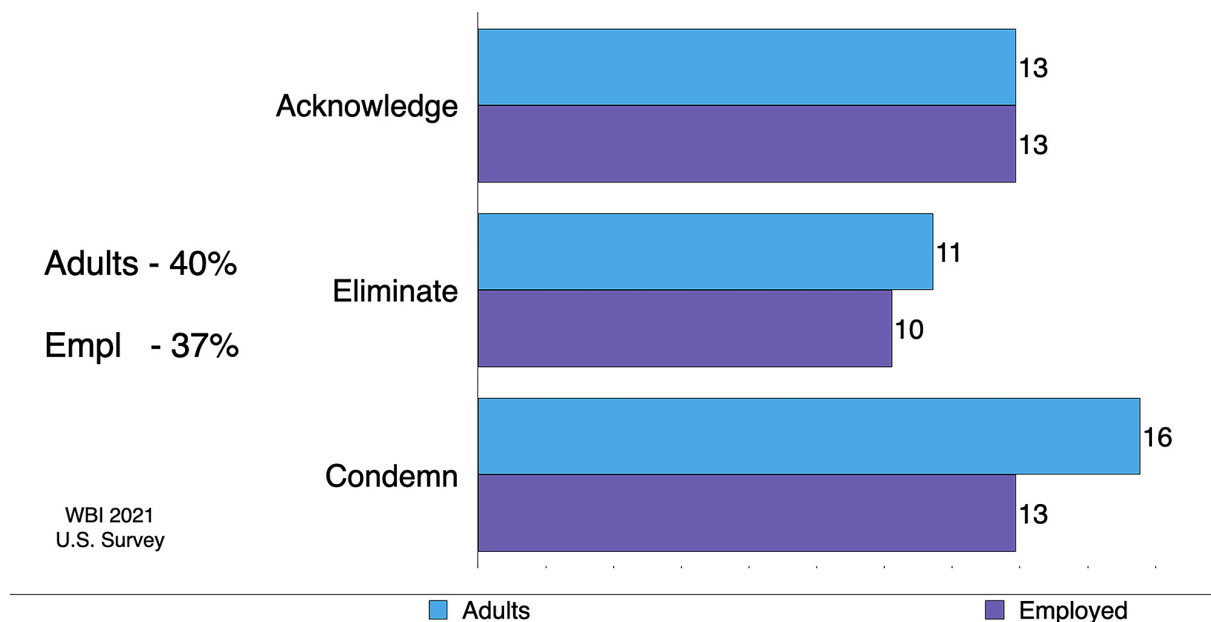


Both groups, the Adults and the Employed, praised employers for taking some positive steps in response to bullying complaints. The most common positive reaction was to claim a zero tolerance for bullying.

Unfortunately, adopting zero tolerance in an organization with a history of bullying is doomed to be ineffective. Individuals have to unlearn behaviors practiced and rewarded for years. That requires some training, coaching, and an engaged management that fully understands the nuances of workplace bullying. Offenders should be given a chance to try, fail, and do it right the next time. Learning requires patience. The bludgeon of zero tolerance crushes employee morale and could lead to the flight of the most talented employees.

The responses to this question suggest that (1) American employers are starting to try to do the right thing, and (2) they need to better understand workplace bullying and its subtlety.

Figure 14



10. WHAT STOPPED THE BULLYING

Question: Thinking about the worst case of repeated mistreatment at work, what stopped the abusive mistreatment?

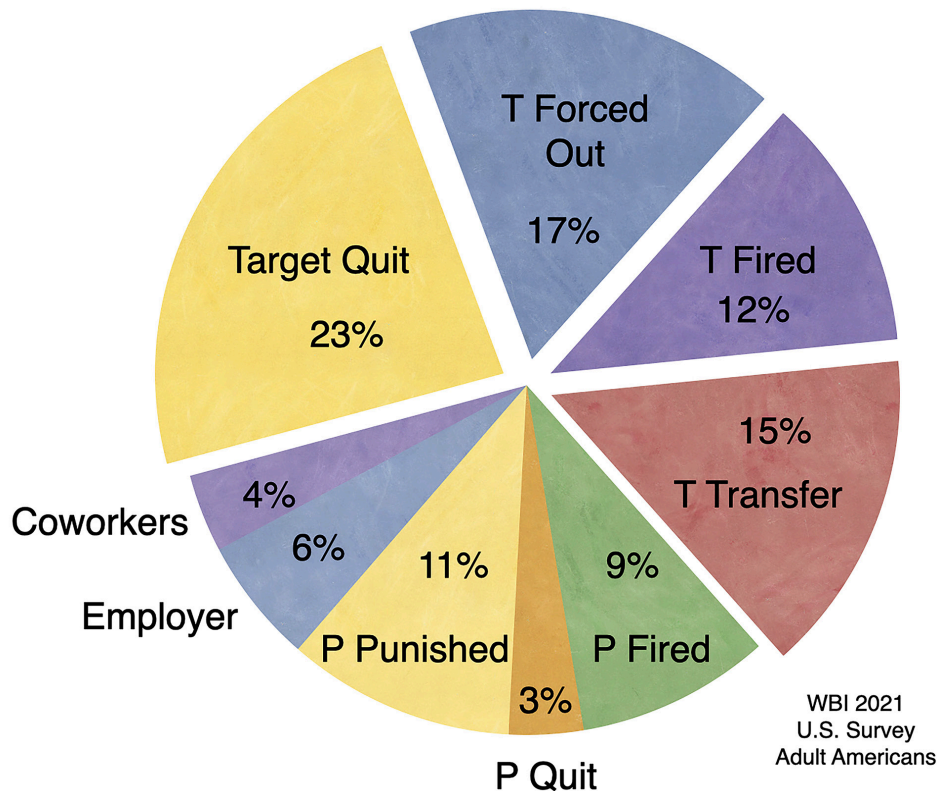
Table 19

	Proportion	Percentage
Target voluntarily left the job to escape more mistreatment	.2346	23%
Target was forced to quit when work conditions were deliberately made intolerable	.1732	17%
Employer terminated the target	.1181	12%
Target transferred to different job or location with same employer	.1496	15%
<i>Negative outcomes for target</i>	<i>.6755</i>	<i>67%</i>
Perpetrator was punished but kept job	.1055	11%
Perpetrator was terminated	.0897	9%
Perpetrator voluntarily quit	.0346	3%
<i>Negative outcomes for perpetrator</i>	<i>.2298</i>	<i>23%</i>
Positive actions by employer stopped it	.0582	6%
Positive actions by target's coworkers stopped it	.0362	4%
It did not stop	.1229	12%

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Unshaded rows in Table 19 were response options for survey respondents in the Adults national sample. For 12% of respondents, the bullying was ongoing. The remaining proportions were calculated based on the number of respondents for whom the bullying had stopped.

Figure 15



**TARGETED EMPLOYEES
HAVE A 67% CHANCE
OF LOSING THE JOBS
THEY LOVED FOR
NO LEGITIMATE
REASON**

We have asked this question in various forms over the years.

Remarkably, the share of negative outcomes is starting to rise for perpetrators. The 2021 rate of 23% has risen from 2% in 2003 to 11% in 2010 to its current level. Of course, the perpetrator rate of quitting (3%) is one-seventh the rate of targets (23%). But progress toward accountability is being made.

It is also admirable that some employers are taking positive action to eliminate bullying.

However, the price to stop bullying is still paid overwhelmingly by targets themselves. Through no fault of their own, they have a 67% risk of losing a job they once loved. Not only are targets terminated (12%), constructively discharged (17%) (which is made to look like a voluntary quit), convinced to quit to save their mental and physical health, but 15% of them transfer. We consider a transfer a negative outcome. Though it preserves income, it most likely is work that differs significantly from the responsibilities held before the bullying. It is often ostracizing by virtue of physical or social isolation. Tasks are often belittling and demeaning. A paycheck alone does not offset the losses endured by a transfer. Furthermore, the transferred bullied employee is greeted by the new boss with the admonition to not act as she or he did in the last position. The bully's defamation precedes the transfer.

It is unconscionable that employers compel victims to suffer job loss in addition to months or years of unremitting episodes of abuse.

11. SUPPORT FOR A NEW LAW

Question: Do you support or oppose enactment of a new law that would protect all workers from repeated, harmful, abusive mistreatment in addition to current laws against discrimination and harassment?

Table 20

	Proportion	Percentage
Not needed. Existing laws are adequate	.0867	9%
Strongly support	.6057	61%
Somewhat support	.2895	29%
<i>Support</i>	.8952	90%
Somewhat oppose	.0721	7%
Strongly oppose	.0326	3%
<i>Oppose</i>	.1050	10%

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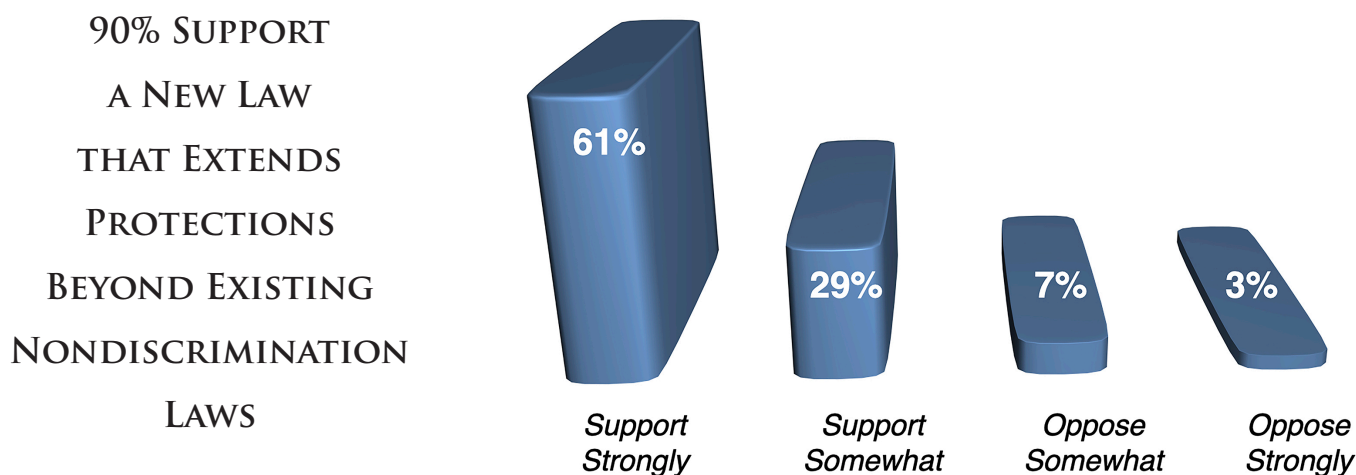
Unshaded rows in Table 20 were response options for survey respondents in the Adults national sample.

WBI through its network of volunteer Coordinators across the U.S. has been lobbying for the anti-bullying Healthy Workplace Bill (HWB) for 18 years as of the date of this survey. In the 31 states and two territories in which HWB has been introduced, pro-business lobbying groups, including SHRM, the HR trade association, have opposed our legislation. In each jurisdiction, opponents argue that the HWB is not necessary. They claim that current civil rights laws offer sufficient deterrence and employee protections. Not true. Research by D. Yamada finds that current laws are inadequate (also see the same-gender discussion in Chapter 4).

We built a question within the question. We asked the American public about the adequacy of current employment law. The result is that only 9% of respondents agree with the Not Needed business lobby argument.

We scores the level of support and opposition for a new law, by excluding the Not Needed responses. Based on that truncated sample, we calculated the percentages shown in Table 20. Support for a new law, explicitly described as additional to nondiscrimination laws, is certainly overwhelming (90%).

Figure 16



WBI 2021 U.S. Survey - Adults

We have always believed the HWB to be non-partisan legislation. The bill gives employers liability exemption as an incentive to do the right thing and take steps to prevent and correct abusive workplace conduct (the term “workplace bullying” does not appear in the bill). Attentive lawmakers, regardless of party affiliation, should see value for their business constituents.

In fact, HWB has enjoyed bipartisan support. In New York State, its inaugural sponsor was Republican. Everyone should be able to agree that stopping abuse at work is a noble goal. Abuse at work is the sole form of abuse in America that still has not been made taboo. Worse yet, it is too often encouraged (see Chapter 9) and normalized (see its prevalence in Chapter 1).

One of the demographic variables provided by our pollster was the self-declared political ideology of survey respondents. Table 21 shows that support for a new law is strong across the Conservative to Liberal continuum. Only Conservatives show a double-digit belief that current law is adequate.

Table 21

	Support	Oppose	Current Law Is Adequate
Conservative	86%	14%	18%
Moderate	92%	8%	4%
Liberal	92%	8%	2%

WBI 2021 U.S. Survey - 1,002 Adult Americans



An alternative analysis.

We treated the Not Needed response choice as a question separate from the other responses. It is possible to simply include the option as a fifth option in a single list. Using the slightly larger sample size, the level of support dips slightly to 82% (Strongly support, .5532; Somewhat support, .2644) with opposition remaining at 10% (Somewhat oppose, .0658; Strongly oppose, .0297) and the Not Needed proportion at .0866.

12. ZOGBY ANALYTICS POLL METHODOLOGY

US Adults
1/23/21 – 1/25/21

Zogby Analytics was commissioned by Workplace Bullying Institute to conduct an online survey of 1,215 adults in the US.

Using internal and trusted interactive partner resources, thousands of adults were randomly 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, we use 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 1,215 is +/- 2.8 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. As a rule we do not rely on the validity of very small subsets of the data especially sets smaller than 50-75 respondents. At that subset we can make estimations based on the data, but in these cases the data is more qualitative than quantitative.

Additional factors can create error, such as question wording and question order.

##

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