



2021 WBI U.S. WORKPLACE BULLYING SURVEY

The Fifth National Scientific WBI Study
Zogby Analytics, Pollster

1.

NATIONAL PREVALENCE

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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?

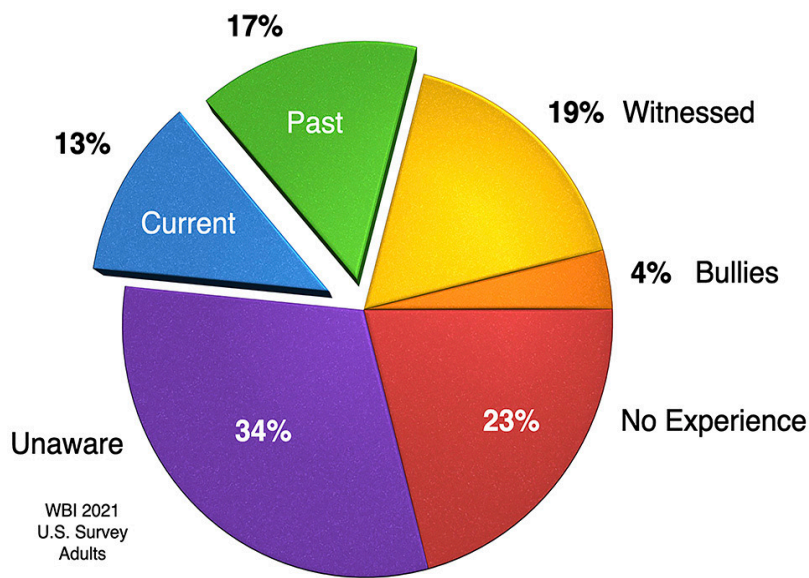
Table 1. Prevalence - Adults

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 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.

