



2021 WBI U.S. WORKPLACE BULLYING SURVEY

The Fifth National Scientific WBI Study
Zogby Analytics, Pollster

9.

EMPLOYER REACTIONS TO BULLYING

Gary Namie, PhD
Director

workplacebullying.org

FUNDING FROM GENEROUS GOFUNDME CONTRIBUTORS

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%

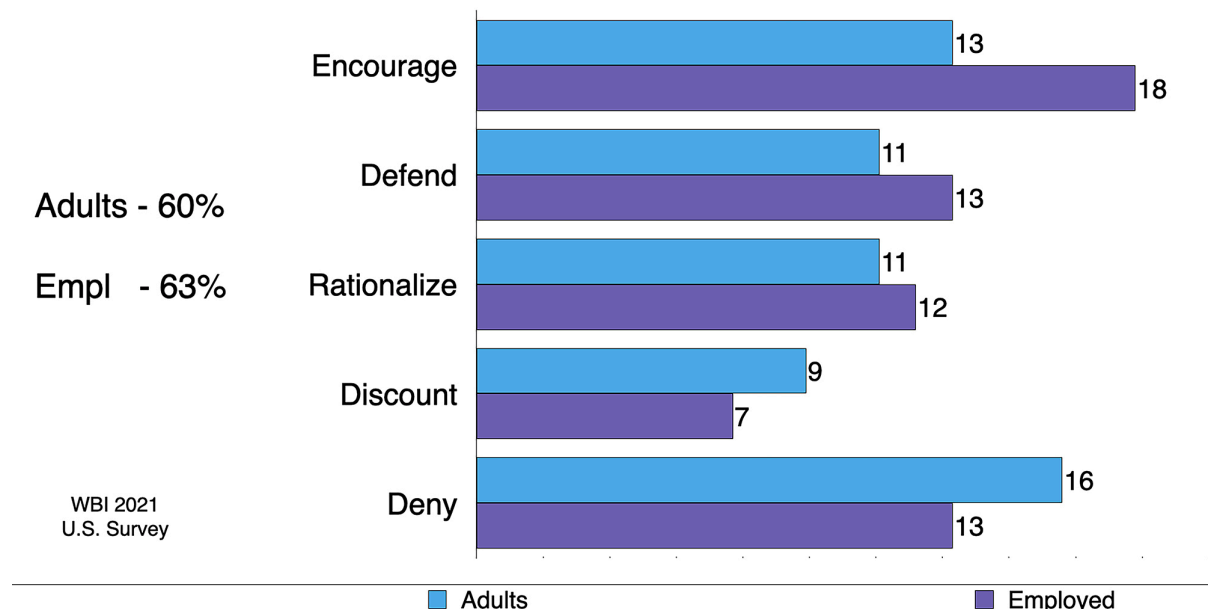
© 2021 Workplace Bullying Institute

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

