



Bullying in the Workplace

Bullying is Prevalent and Pervasive:

- 35% of workers have experienced bullying firsthand
- Bullying is 4 times more prevalent than illegal harassment
- The majority (68%) of bullying is same-sex harassment
 - Mostly legal per anti-discrimination laws, many workplace policies
- Women bullies target women in 80% of cases
- 62% of bullies are men
- 58% of targets are women
- Ages 30-49 most vulnerable (50% currently bullied)

Source: Workplace Bullying Institute US Workplace Bullying Survey 2010

- Over one-half (51%) of organizations reported incidents of bullying in their workplace.
- Compared with two years ago, organizations said incidents of bullying had stayed the same (48%) or decreased in frequency (34%), while 18% reported an increase in frequency of bullying.
- Among organizations that experienced incidents of bullying:
 - 73% reported verbal abuse
 - 62% reported malicious gossiping and/or spreading lies/rumors about workers
 - 50% reported threats or intimidation
- 27% of HR professionals reported having been bullied in the workplace. Of those who had been bullied, more than one-half (57%) had reported their experiences to someone in the organization.
- The three most common outcomes of bullying incidents were decreased morale (68%), increased stress and/or depression levels (48%) and decreased trust among co-workers (45%).

Source: SHRM Workplace Bullying 2011 Survey

Effects on Bullying Victims:

- Increased mental and emotional problems:
 - High stress/PTSD
 - Reduced self-esteem and self-blame
 - Phobias
 - Depression
 - Obsessing about the problem
- Increased physical problems:
 - Musculoskeletal issues
 - Sleep disturbances
 - Digestive problems
 - Headaches
- Impact on work, productivity
 - Increased absences
 - Fear and distraction from work
 - Negative impact on trust with co-workers
 - Isolation from the team

- Economic harm
 - Bullies have control over victims' livelihood in 72% of cases, which may result in:
 - Unwanted transfers
 - Constructive discharge/quitting to avoid bullying and its effects
 - Financial issues due to absences

Effects on Bullying Witnesses:

- Increased turnover and inclination to change jobs:
 - Rayner et al—20% of witnesses decide to look for another job
 - Houshmand et al—witnessing bullying correlated with increased turnover intentions
- Lower job satisfaction, productivity, motivation
 - Einarson et al—21% reported lower job satisfaction, 27% reported lower productivity in their department
 - Hoel and Cooper—32% reported lower efficiency and 28% reported reduced motivation for themselves
 - O'Driscoll et al—greater negative perception of workplace, lower wellbeing and poorer work attitudes
 - Lutgen-Sandvik et al—significantly lowered work quality and satisfaction, higher stress and feelings of negativity
- Higher individual stress and personal impacts
 - Rayner—73% reported increased stress levels and 44% worried about becoming a target of bullying; only 16% reported no effect at all
 - Vartia—increased general stress and mental health stress, lowered self confidence

What the Organization Can Do:

Bullying isn't illegal—YET

- Ask employees to report it immediately to a supervisor or HR
- Look into changing supervisors or co-workers, if possible
- Make employees aware of bullying
- Open door policies
- Employee surveys
- Commitment from the top to stop it
- EAP for emotional support and education

Bullying may be so entrenched and condoned that there is no way to stop it.

Some Best Practices and Rules:

- Know the company policy—and strengthen it to address bullying
- Know the law—existing laws:
 - Harassment based on gender, race, or religion may apply
 - 21 states have or are currently considering Healthy Workplace legislation
 - Having no intent to harm has not been a useful defense.
- Litmus test: If you wouldn't want to see it happen to your partner, children or grandmother, it probably doesn't belong at work
- Do not assume a victim's silence or lack of protest is an acceptance of the behavior

Definitions of harassment and bullying vary and there is much overlap. The essential differences between harassment and workplace bullying are as follows:

| Harassment | Workplace bullying |
|---|---|
| Has a strong physical component, e.g., contact and touch in all its forms, intrusion into personal space and possessions, damage to possessions including a person's work, etc. | Almost exclusively psychological (e.g., criticism), may become physical later, especially with male bullies, but almost never with female bullies |
| Tends to focus on the individual because of what they are (e.g., female, black, disabled, etc.) | Anyone will do, especially if they are competent, popular and vulnerable |
| Harassment is usually linked to sex, race, prejudice, discrimination, etc. | Although bullies are deeply prejudiced, sex, race and gender play little part; it's usually discrimination on the basis of competence |
| Harassment may consist of a single incident, or a few incidents or many incidents | Bullying is rarely a single incident and tends to be an accumulation of many small incidents, each of which, when taken in isolation and out of context, seems trivial |
| The person who is being harassed knows almost straight away they are being harassed | The person being bullied may not realize they are being bullied for weeks or months—until there's a moment of enlightenment |
| Everyone can recognize harassment, especially if there's an assault, indecent assault or sexual assault | Few people recognize bullying |
| Harassment often reveals itself through use of recognized offensive vocabulary | Workplace bullying tends to fixate on trivial criticisms and false allegations of underperformance; offensive words rarely appear, although swear words may be used when there are no witnesses |
| There's often an element of possession, e.g., as in stalking | Phase 1 of bullying is control and subjugation; when this fails, phase 2 is elimination of the target |
| The harassment almost always has a strong, clear focus (e.g., sex, race, disability) | The focus is on competence (envy) and popularity (jealousy) |
| Often the harassment is for peer approval, bravado, macho image, etc. | Tends to be secret, behind closed doors with no witnesses |
| Harassment takes place both in and out of work | The bullying takes place mostly at work |
| The harasser often perceives their target as easy, albeit sometimes a challenge | The target is seen as a threat who must first be controlled and subjugated, and if that doesn't work, eliminated |
| Harassment is often domination for superiority | Bullying is for control of threat (of exposure of the bully's own inadequacy) |
| The harasser often lacks self-discipline | The bully is driven by envy (of abilities) and jealousy (of relationships) |
| The harasser often has specific inadequacies (e.g., sexual) | The bully is inadequate in all areas of interpersonal and behavioral skills |

Questions?

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