

Office Bullying Plagues Workers Across Races, Job Levels and Educational Attainment, According to CareerBuilder's New Study

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CHICAGO, Sept. 18, 2014 /PRNewswire/ -- Is the office the new playground for bullies? Twenty-eight percent of workers reported they have felt bullied at work - nearly one in five (19 percent) of these workers left their jobs because of it. While the prevalence is higher among certain minorities and workers with lower incomes, the new CareerBuilder study found that workers in management roles, those with post-secondary education and other workforce segments are not immune to bullying.

"One of the most surprising takeaways from the study was that bullying impacts workers of all backgrounds regardless of race, education, income and level of authority within an organization," said Rosemary Haefner, Vice President of Human Resources at CareerBuilder. "Many of the workers who have experienced this don't confront the bully or elect not to report the incidents, which can prolong a negative work experience that leads some to leave their jobs."

The nationwide survey, which was conducted online by Harris Poll on behalf of CareerBuilder from May 13 to June 6, 2014, included a representative sample of 3,372 full-time, private sector workers across industries and company sizes.

Bullying Among Minorities

Minorities continue to face challenges in being treated fairly and equally in the workplace, according to the study. Forty-four percent of physically disabled workers have felt bullied at the office. Thirty percent of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) workers shared this sentiment.

Comparing genders, female workers were significantly more likely to experience bullying at work (34 percent) than their male counterparts (22 percent).

Comparing racial segments, minorities were not the only ones to experience strong-arming at the hands of co-workers or the boss. Twenty-seven percent of African American workers and 25 percent of Hispanic workers said they have been bullied at work compared to 24 percent of Caucasian males.

Bullying at Work Today

Of those who reported being bullied at some point in their careers, nearly one in four (24 percent) said the bullying is taking place right now in their present jobs. Surprisingly, bullied workers in management roles were the most likely to report this. While high school graduates who have not received any further education had a higher tendency to feel pressured by a bully, nearly one in four workers (23 percent) who have been bullied and have bachelor's degrees or higher reported that the bullying is taking place in their present jobs. The percentage of workers earning less than \$50,000 annually who said they are being bullied was nine percentage points higher than those earning \$50,000 or more.

Of those who reported being bullied at some point in their careers, the percentages that said that they are currently being bullied break down as follows:

Job Level

- Management (manager, director, team leader, vice president and above) – 27 percent

- Professional and technical – 21 percent
- Entry-level/administrative and clerical – 26 percent

Highest Level of Education Attained

- High school graduate – 28 percent
- Associate's degree – 21 percent
- Bachelor's degree or higher – 23 percent

Compensation Level

- Earning less than \$50,000 – 28 percent
- Earning \$50,000 or more – 19 percent

Who Are the Bullies?

Of workers who felt bullied, 45 percent said the main culprit was the boss while 25 percent said the person was higher up in the organization, but not the boss. Forty-six percent pointed to a co-worker.

More than half (53 percent) of workers who were bullied said the aggressor was someone older while 25 percent were bullied by someone younger.

Most of the situations involved one person, but nearly one in five workers (19 percent) who were bullied said the incidents took place in a group setting where more than one person partook in the bullying.

Comparing the public and private sectors, workers in government were nearly twice as likely to report being bullied (47 percent) than those in the corporate world (28 percent).

Ways People Were Bullied

"The definition of bullying at work will vary considerably depending on whom you talk to," Haefner added. "It's often a gray area, but when someone feels bullied, it typically involves a pattern of behavior where there is a gross lack of professionalism, consideration and respect – and that can come in various shapes and sizes. Whether it's through intimidation, personal insults or behavior that is more passive-aggressive, bullying can be harmful to the individual and the organization overall."

Respondents reported a number of ways they felt bullied while on the job, including:

- Falsely accused of mistakes he/she didn't make – 43 percent
- Comments were ignored, dismissed or not acknowledged – 41 percent
- A different set of standards or policies was used for the worker – 37 percent
- Gossip was spread about the worker – 34 percent
- Constantly criticized by the boss or co-workers – 32 percent
- Belittling comments were made about the person's work during meetings – 29 percent
- Yelled at by the boss in front of co-workers – 27 percent
- Purposely excluded from projects or meetings – 20 percent
- Credit for his/her work was stolen – 20 percent
- Picked on for personal attributes (race, gender, appearance, etc.) – 20 percent

Confronting the Bully

Nearly half (48 percent) of workers who were bullied at work took matters into their own hands and confronted the bully in an attempt to discourage it from happening again. Of these workers, 45 percent stated they were successful in stopping the bullying while 44 percent said it made no difference and 11 percent said the situation worsened.

Nearly one-third (32 percent) reported the bullying to their Human Resources department, but more than half of those who did (58 percent) said no action was taken.

Tips for Dealing With a Bully

1. Keep records of all incidents of bullying, documenting places, times, what happened and who was present.
2. Consider talking to the bully, providing specific examples of how you were treated unfairly. Chances are the bully may not be aware that he/she is making you feel this way.
3. Always focus on the resolution. When sharing examples with the bully or a company authority, center the discussions around how to make the working situation better or how things could be handled differently.

Survey Methodology

This survey was conducted online within the U.S. by Harris Poll on behalf of CareerBuilder among 3,372 workers (employed full-time, not self-employed, non-government) between May 13 and June 6, 2014 (percentages for some questions are based on a subset, based on their responses to certain questions). With a pure probability sample of 3,372, one could say with a 95 percent probability that the overall results have a sampling error of +/- 1.69 percentage points. Sampling error for data from sub-samples is higher and varies.

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