

Workplace harassment might make employees sick, according to study

January 8 2015, by Marc Ransford

Workplace harassment is directly tied to a variety of physical and psychological problems suffered by victims, including stress, loss of sleep, depression and anxiety, says a new study from Ball State University.

"Workplace Harassment and Morbidity Among U.S. Adults" also found that [victims](#) were more likely to be female, obese, multiracial, and divorced or separated. The report is based on an analysis of 17,524 people who participated in the 2010 National Health Interview Survey and was recently published by the Journal of Community Health.

Jagdish Khubchandani, a [community health](#) education professor at Ball State and the study's lead author, said the results clearly show that bullying at the workplace hurts everyone.

"Harassment or bullying suffered by American employees is severe and extremely costly for employers across the country," he said. "Harassment harms victims, witnesses and organizations where such interactions occur."

The humiliation and ridicule of workplace harassment causes victims to have low self-esteem, concentration difficulties, anger, lower life satisfaction, reduced productivity and increased absenteeism, said Khubchandani, who coauthored the study with James Price, a faculty member at the University of Toledo.

The study found that over a 12-month period:

- About 8 percent of all respondents said they were threatened, harassed or bullied in the workplace.
- Females were 47 percent more likely to be bullied or harassed than males.
- Individuals reporting higher rates of harassment included hourly workers, state and local government employees, multiple jobholders, night shift employees and those working irregular schedules.
- Victims of harassment were more likely to be obese and smoke.
- Female victims reported higher rates of distress, smoking, and pain disorders like migraine and neck pain.
- Male victims were more likely to miss more than two weeks of work and suffer from asthma, ulcers and worsening of general health. In addition, male victims were more likely to be diagnosed with hypertension and angina pectoris.

Despite heightened awareness of the problem and an outpouring of support for victims of workplace bullying in the last decade, the study shows that American companies have a long way to go to eradicate such acts, Khubchandani said.

"Workplace harassment could be significantly reduced by American organizations if they were willing to accept the prevalence of the problem and acknowledge the high costs for employees and employers," he said. "Interventions to address [workplace harassment](#) should be comprehensive. Practices and policies should protect employees at risk, and there should be protocols to assist employees who are victimized."

To protect all [employees](#)—not just those at risk—Khubchandani said there should be periodic education and reinforcement of policies across the organization.

More information: "Workplace Harassment and Morbidity Among US Adults: Results from the National Health Interview Survey." *Journal of Community Health*, November 2014. link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10900-014-9971-2

Provided by Ball State University

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