

Lutgen-Sandvik, P. (2013). Adult Bullying: A Nasty Piece of Work, St. Louis, MO: ORCM Academic Press.

Chapter 2: Prevalence, Perception, Degree & Impact of Adult Bullying in the American Workplace (pp. 12-33).

“Workplace bullying is interpersonal aggression on the job that goes far beyond incivility or rudeness. Bullying occurs frequently, is intense and ongoing, and leaves victims feeling powerless. Bullying is a sort of hammering and chipping away at those targeted. This hammering away results in victims feeling isolated, demoralized, and unable to escape or stop the terrorizing tactics” (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2013, p 12).

Bullying can be a source of physical and emotional damage for the targets as well as witnesses, and it tends to happen in gradations or what the author labels as *bullying degrees*. But first, there are four general features that are specific to adult bullying at work: intensity, repetition, duration, and power disparity. Intensity means that there must be multiple negative acts that make up this type of abuse. Repetition indicates that it occurs frequently, usually once a week or more. The Duration means that the incidents occur over an extended amount of time; usually a six-month span is used to differentiate bullying from general negativity. The Power Disparity might exist from the onset or develop over time, but it means that the targets feel unable to stop or prevent the abuse.

There are a cluster of actions that are frequently associated with feeling bullied. Unlike general work stress and looming deadlines (common job pressures), aggressive acts that threaten identities (humiliation and ridicule), economic stability (hints to quit, withheld information), and physical safety (hostility, threats) are considered the escalating characteristics of bullying. The more these acts disrupt or transgress professional norms, the more likely they are to incite negative responses like fear and dread.

It is the intensity, frequency, and duration of the bullying that contribute to the notion of degrees, similar to that of a burn where the degree indicates the level of damage done. “Like sunburn, low levels of bullying can cause damage over time, but are common, potentially superficial, and usually quick to heal. More intensive, frequent, and persistent bullying is similar to second-degree burns, because the level is more painful and often requires professional treatment and intervention. Last, extremely escalated bullying is like getting third-degree burns. Such serious burns often result in deep scarring and permanent damage” (p 32-33). No bullying experience is universal. Bullying occurs in a variety of different ways with varying impact.

- Nearly 30% of US workers are bullied sometime during their work histories.
- In any given 6 month period, 1 in 10 US employees feel bullied at work.
- In any given 6 month period, 1 in 4 US workers experience aggression at work that is persistent and harmful, whether or not those workers identify as targets of bullying.
- Witnessing bystanders, even though they do not feel directly bullied, experience more aggression personally targeted at them than do employees working in settings without bullying present.
- As bullying increases, job satisfaction and overall job rating decrease and job-related stress increases – for targets and for witnessing bystanders.

Summary prepared by Erin Watley, ODR Graduate Assistant, Spring 2014