

# Psychological abuse at work ruins lives

## It's a misuse of power and control that violates workers' right to psychological safety

Workplace bullying and mobbing are forms of **psychological abuse** that violate an employee's inherent basic human right to dignity: repeated infliction of hostile and unethical words and/or actions, intentional or unintentional, direct or indirect, or omissions directed in a targeted and/or systematic manner that creates a hostile and offensive work environment a reasonable person would find unsuitable to perform regular duties and tasks. A single severe incident of such behavior may also constitute psychological abuse.

**Workplace psychological abuse is an issue of employee exploitation.** Employers are not explicitly liable for the psychological harm of their employees — nor do they want to be. At its root is avoidance of employer liability, so employers are negatively incentivized to address it even if they claim to value safe workplaces.

**Workplace psychological abuse is highly affiliated with physical and/or mental health injuries.** It is 4x more prevalent than sexual harassment alone. The phenomenon has been dubbed a silent epidemic and is a public health threat affecting over 60 million employees in the United States in 2017 (the equivalent of the entire population of Italy).

**Abuse of power is often a symptom of implicit bias** — a problem anti-discrimination law stopped helping since the '90s when courts moved from focusing on impact to intent. Intent is a high threshold that makes the law an epic failure when it comes to disrupting hierarchies at work around demographics.

### 1 HOW IT WORKS

**1 Workplace bullying typically begins when one employee, generally insecure and threatened by competence, targets an unsuspecting employee to minimize and/or eliminate the perceived threat the target poses.** The bully often abuses their power using psychological harassment to control the narrative and convince the target and other employees that the target is a problem. Common tactics include:

Taking away responsibility without just cause	Verbal abuse (put-downs, name-calling)	Ignoring or excluding someone
Withholding information without just cause	Persistent criticism	Unreasonably heavy workloads
False accusations, including bogus reviews	Rumors or otherwise damaging one's reputation	

**2 Employees generally don't feel safe speaking up about abuse.** They know representative employees act in the best interests of the company. In hostile work environments, higher-ups prioritize avoiding liability over well-being. When targeted employees *do* report abusive behavior to the proper workplace authorities in these environments, workplace mobbing begins. The employer's representative employees typically mislead the target to believe the employer has a legitimate complaint process in place to remedy the problem.

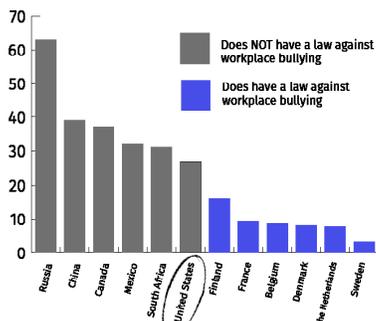
**3 The employer does not alter the target's work environment.** The employer/its representative employees never remove the stressor. The bully continues to harass and abuse the target without consequence or deterrent and feels emboldened. The representative employees string the target along by prolonging the complaint process. The targeted and further victimized employee voluntarily leaves, dies, or is fired after succumbing to the silent killer stress and its subsequent physical and mental injury. Game over. The employer wins. The threat of liability is gone.

**4 Trauma occurs in the aftermath.** When the targeted and victimized employee realizes both the absence of legal recourse and the institutional complicity of tampering with their health and forcing them off the payroll to avoid liability, trauma occurs. Who's picking up the tab for the long-term health care of millions of unemployed citizens and basic needs costs? You are: the taxpayer.

### ORGANIZATION COSTS

Higher absenteeism, turnover, training costs, and employee benefits costs  
Lower task performance, productivity, and morale

Percentage of employees who report experiencing bullying at work



### HUMAN COSTS

Psychological distress (anxiety, depression, burnout)  
Physiological outcome (heart disease, obesity, sleep problems, cancer, PTSD, suicidal thoughts, suicide)  
Job and/or career loss and other financial harm

**Workplace bullying rates decrease when countries have laws against it. But there are no legal protections from workplace bullying or mobbing in the United States except in Puerto Rico.**

**27% of employees in the United States reported experiencing psychological abuse at work. Countries with workplace anti-bullying laws have much lower rates of workplace bullying than the United States.**



**WORKPLACE PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY ACT**  
WorkplacePsychologicalSafetyAct.org

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