

Research: even in hostile working environments, employees reluctant to leave jobs

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She never gets invited to lunch with the rest of her co-workers. He always gets publicly criticized for his mistakes.

But according to research by Kansas State University psychologists, neither of these workers is likely to leave the job.

Meridith Selden, a K-State doctoral graduate in psychology, and her adviser, Ron Downey, K-State professor of psychology, studied [workplace](#) hostility. They found that among workers reporting hostility in the current position, almost half -- 45 percent of them -- had no definite plans to leave their current job. In addition, 59 percent indicated that they either liked or did not dislike their current job.

And this research took place well before the [economic downturn](#).

"They might like the job, just not certain elements of it," Downey said. "That really surprised us, that people weren't ready to jump ship. We talk about the new workplace where people don't stay at the same job forever, but getting a job is difficult and people don't like to do it."

Selden and Downey presented the research in April at the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology conference in New Orleans.

The researchers had gathered the data through online surveys that

participants found through a Web site, Web searcher or word of mouth.

"Companies don't want to talk about workplace hostility," Downey said. "This is a common methodology when they don't want to let researchers in."

He and Selden asked workers about non-physical hostile behaviors that they experienced in the workplace. That included hostile behaviors that were both exclusionary and interfering. For example, exclusionary hostility is being reprimanded in front of others, having your contributions ignored or being excluded from activities like coffee breaks. Interfering hostility prohibits you from doing your job, such as being gossiped about or having your equipment sabotaged.

"Exclusion issues are the ones that bother people considerably," Downey said. "It's like if everyone goes to lunch routinely but doesn't invite you."

The researchers found that workers feel equally harmed by this hostility whether it comes from co-workers or supervisors.

"You would think that hostility from the supervisor would cause more worry, but it didn't here," Downey said. "Many people still thought that their supervisor was helpful and were no less satisfied with the supervisor."

Downey, whose other research has centered on workplace stress, said that the ramifications of hostile behaviors could be experienced later, even if [workers](#) remain positive for the time being.

"These kinds of behaviors just arouse stress for [people](#) at work," he said. "If you're talking about stress and get feelings of being upset while at the job, that leads to burnout. That's when you leave the job."

Downey said that many employers have specialized staff -- whether in the company or on contract -- who can mediate in these situations.

"By the time it gets to them, it has probably gotten way out of control," he said.

Source: Kansas State University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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