

Half of British workforce ill-treated in past two years

November 2 2011

(PhysOrg.com) -- One million Britons experienced workplace violence in the last two years, while millions more were subjected to intimidation, humiliation and rudeness, new research has shown.

Surprisingly, managers and professionals in well-paid full-time jobs are among the groups most at risk.

The study by Plymouth and Cardiff Universities also shows that conventional employment policies are failing to deal with [workplace](#) ill-treatment.

The research, by Plymouth Business School and Cardiff's School of Social Sciences, is based on face-to-face interviews with nearly 4,000 employees who were representative of the British workforce. Key findings included:

- 4.9 per cent had suffered violence in the workplace – the equivalent of more than 1 million workers - with 3.8 per cent injured as a result
- Almost 30 per cent complained of impossible deadlines and unmanageable workloads
- Nearly a quarter had been shouted at or experienced someone losing their temper
- 13.3 per cent had been intimidated by somebody in the workplace

The study shows that violence is a more regular feature of working life than previously thought. Assault was a daily experience for 13 per cent

of those who reported violence. Most of the attackers came from outside the workplace, with 72 per cent of assailants being customers, clients or members of the public. Workers in health and social work, education, and public administration and defence, were most at risk. Workers in the private sector were more likely to suffer assaults by colleagues.

The study also shows that unreasonable treatment affects just under half of Britain's workforce in some form. Around seven to eight million British workers suffer from impossible workloads and not being listened to. While managers and supervisors were blamed for two-thirds of unreasonable behaviour incidents, staff in this category are also at risk of being victims themselves. The researchers found that permanent employees with managerial responsibilities were more likely to experience both unreasonable treatment and [workplace violence](#).

Results of the study are to be unveiled at a London seminar tonight (Wednesday, November 2) as part of the Festival of Social Science, organized by the Economic and Social Research Council, who also funded the research.

Professor Duncan Lewis from Plymouth University, one of the study authors said: "Contrary to received wisdom, our report reveals that it is not always the weakest employees who are on the receiving end of ill-treatment. For example, permanent staff with managerial responsibilities are more likely to experience both unreasonable treatment and workplace violence and better-paid employees are more likely to experience unreasonable treatment.

"Ill-treatment is not confined to backstreet employers and being in a workplace which is part of a larger organisation with a human resource function, and even trade union recognition, provides no special defence against it. Workers in the public sector are particularly at risk of both incivility and disrespect and violence and injury. Within the public

sector, employees in health and social care, public administration and defence, and education are especially at risk.”

Meanwhile, Professor Ralph Fevre of Cardiff University added: “Sadly, our study shows that violence, ill-treatment and unreasonable behaviour are all too common in Britain’s workplaces. Standard employment policies, like workplace behaviour statements and “one size fits all” dispute procedures, are plainly failing. Many managers saw staff welfare as low on their list of priorities, while some even felt ill-treatment of staff was expected of them. We suggest that managers need to have standards of good treatment and civility built in as an essential part of their roles. At the same time, employers need to recognise the pressures many managers are clearly under themselves, and give them the time and space to embed fairness in the workplace.”

Provided by University of Plymouth

Citation: Half of British workforce ill-treated in past two years (2011, November 2) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-11-british-workforce-ill-treated-years.html>

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