

Disabled employees more likely to be attacked and bullied at work, research finds

March 5 2013

Employees with disabilities are twice as likely to be attacked at work and experience much higher rates of insults, ridicule and intimidation, a new study has found.

Research from the universities of Plymouth and Cardiff found people with physical or psychological disabilities or long-term illness reported higher rates of 21 types of ill-treatment than did other workers.

This included higher levels of physical and [verbal abuse](#) from managers and colleagues, but also from customers and clients they came into contact with.

Professor Duncan Lewis, Chair in Management at Plymouth University's Business School, said: "These findings have major implications for how employees with disabilities and long-term health conditions are managed at work. With more emphasis from government to tackle its benefit expenditure, managers and HR officers are likely to encounter many more employees with these personal circumstances entering the employment landscape in the years ahead."

The research, published in the journal *Work, Employment and Society*, was conducted by Professor Lewis and Professor Ralph Fevre, Dr Amanda Robinson and Trevor Jones, all from Cardiff University.

They examined responses to interview questions given by 3,979 people, 284 of them with a disability or long-term illness. Among the 284:

- 10.5% said they had suffered [physical violence](#) at work, compared with 4.5% of people without disabilities or long-term illness;
- 7.4 % said they had been injured at work as a result of aggression, compared with 3.5% of people without disabilities or long-term illness;
- 12.3% said they had been humiliated or ridiculed at work, compared with 7.4% of people without disabilities or long-term illness;
- 24.3% said they had been insulted at work, compared with 14.3% of people without disabilities or long-term illness;
- 34.5% said they had been shouted at, compared with 23.1% of people without disabilities or long-term illness.

Workers with a psychological or [learning disability](#) usually fared worse than those with physical disabilities or long-term physical health problems, with 21.2% saying they were victims of physical violence, 44.2% said they had been insulted and 56.9% said they had been shouted at.

The research, which uses data from the British Workplace Behaviour Survey, found those with disabilities or long-term illness said managers were responsible for 45% of the more serious ill-treatment, customers or clients responsible for 28% and colleagues for 18%. The researchers noted people with a disability or long-term [illness](#) reported higher levels in all the 21 categories of ill-treatment they looked at.

The researchers said: "Any one of these forms of ill-treatment could have an adverse effect on their productivity and, in turn, shore up assumptions about the lack of productive worth of people with disabilities. The efforts employees with disabilities make to escape ill-

treatment may also exacerbate their marginalisation in less productive, and less well paid jobs, or even lead to their withdrawal from the labour market altogether."

Up to now, some researchers have assumed ill-treatment in the workplace was causing disabilities and health problems, but the current work suggests ill-treatment happens to employees who already have disabilities or health problems.

In their paper, the authors offer various possible reasons for the higher level of ill-treatment, including conflict with managers over sickness absence and the interpretation of anti-discrimination legislation. However, the authors note some of the ill-treatment came from colleagues and clients, and not managers. Another possibility was simply "stigma and discrimination" against people with [disabilities](#), the researchers say.

Provided by University of Plymouth

Citation: Disabled employees more likely to be attacked and bullied at work, research finds (2013, March 5) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-03-disabled-employees-bullied.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--