

Better to be bullied than ignored in the workplace, study says

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Being ignored at work is worse for physical and mental well-being than harassment or bullying, says a new study from the University of British Columbia's Sauder School of Business.

Researchers found that while most consider [ostracism](#) less harmful than bullying, feeling excluded is significantly more likely to lead [job dissatisfaction](#), quitting and health problems.

"We've been taught that ignoring someone is socially preferable—if you don't have something nice to say, don't say anything at all," says Sauder Professor Sandra Robinson, who co-authored the study. "But ostracism actually leads people to feel more helpless, like they're not worthy of any attention at all."

The researchers used a series of surveys for their study. First they determined that people consistently rate workplace ostracism as less socially inappropriate, less psychologically harmful and less likely to be prohibited than [workplace harassment](#).

Additional surveys revealed that people who claimed to have experienced ostracism were significantly more likely to report a degraded sense of workplace belonging and commitment, a stronger intention to quit their job, and a larger proportion of [health problems](#).

The researchers also took an employment survey by a Canadian university that included feedback on feelings of workplace isolation and

harassment and compared it to turnover rates three years after the survey was conducted and found that people who reported feeling ostracized were significantly more likely to have quit.

"There is a tremendous effort underway to counter bullying in workplaces and schools, which is definitely important. But abuse is not always obvious," says Robinson. "There are many people who feel quietly victimized in their daily lives, and most of our current strategies for dealing with [workplace](#) injustice don't give them a voice."

More information: The study, "Is negative attention better than no attention? The comparative effects of ostracism and harassment at work", is forthcoming in the journal *Organization Science*.

Provided by University of British Columbia

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