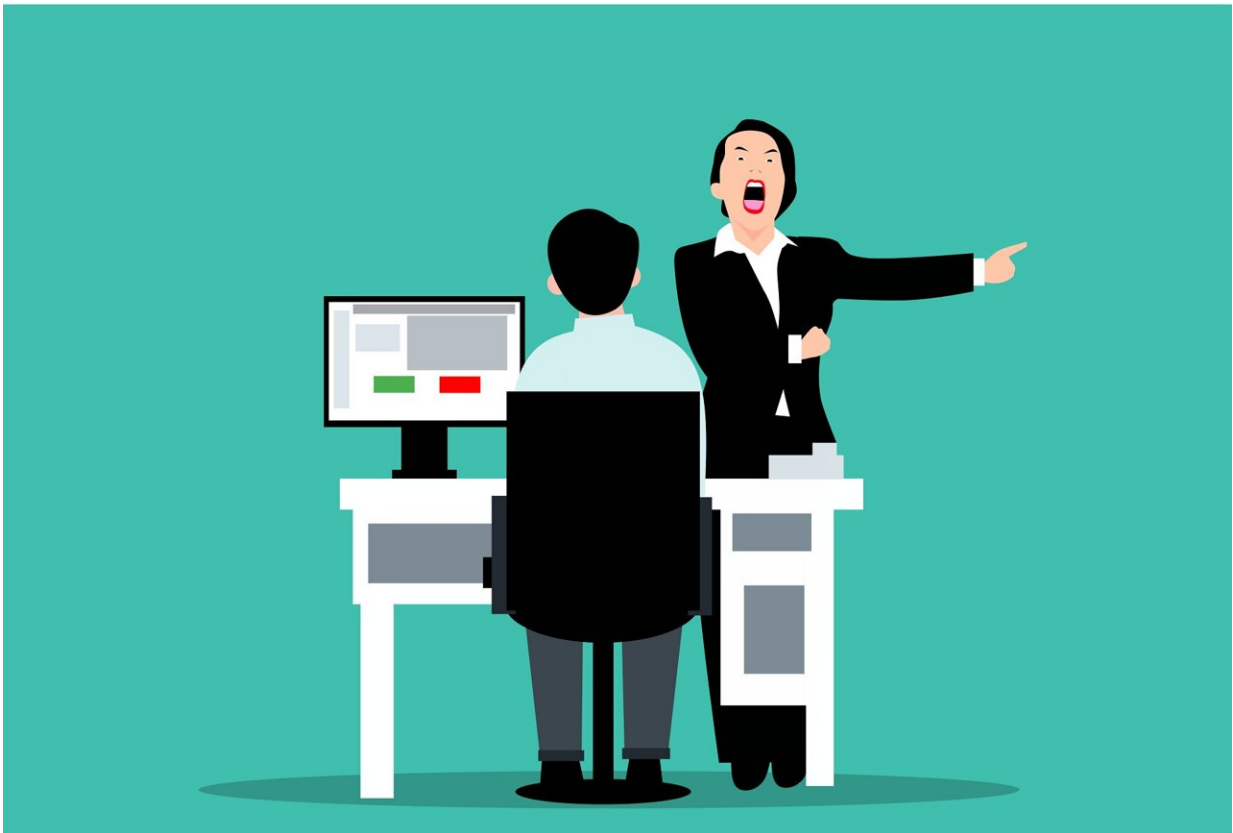


# HR departments 'not trusted' to deal with bullying, finds study

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Employees have little trust in Human Resources departments to deal fairly and effectively with workplace bullying, according to a new study [published](#) in the *Journal of Business Ethics*.

Researchers from Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) and Bishop Grosseteste University carried out an analysis of people's online reporting of their experiences of [workplace bullying](#). Among the responses, not a single person had anything positive to write about how their organization's Human Resources department had dealt with their bullying problem.

Bullied employees reported being ignored, victimized even further, and said HR routinely sided with "management bullies."

The paper is the first to apply a netnographic analysis, where the researcher watches and analyzes a string on on-line discussions and commentary as it emerges, to the problem of workplace bullying. It reveals HR departments fail to deal with workplace bullying to the satisfaction of workers, and suggests systemic failures due to several factors.

These include legal ramifications and reputational damage for an organization that admits a case of bullying; concern about losing perpetrators who are deemed to be "star performers" in terms of ability; and time lost to investigation and decision-making.

Workers describe bullying as pervasive, harassing, tormenting, manipulative, undermining, devastating, stressful, toxic, nightmarish, hellish and unconscionable. In contrast, they see HR departments as weak, complacent, cowardly, exploitative, complicit, corrupt, self-serving, ineffective and colluding.

Lead author Dr. Clive Boddy, Associate Professor in the Faculty of Business and Law at ARU, said,

"Our research shows workers to be critical of HR departments in dealing with the messier, darker side of organizational life.

"If there is an acceptance that internal procedures will not protect them, employees are less likely to report workplace bullying, and will suffer in silence—potentially causing damage to [mental health](#) and affecting productivity.

"It is in the interest of both employees and employers that strict codes of conduct are established and effectively policed by HR or alternative ways of dealing with workplace bullying will need to be found if HR is incapable of helping the workers who need it the most."

The comments analyzed appear to be predominantly from employees of commercial companies based in English-speaking countries across the world.

**More information:** Clive R. Boddy et al, HRM's Response to Workplace Bullying: Complacent, Complicit and Compounding, *Journal of Business Ethics* (2024). [DOI: 10.1007/s10551-024-05755-3](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-024-05755-3)

Provided by Anglia Ruskin University

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