

# Study Finds Ties Between Workplace Bullying & Suicidal Thoughts



Being subjected to workplace bullying can impact workers in many ways, from [keeping them awake at night](#) to driving them to quit their jobs. And a [new study from Norway](#) has found that the victims of bullying on the job may also become more likely to contemplate suicide than people who don't experience a hostile office environment.

In the study, which was published online on Sept. 17, 2015 in the [American Journal of Public Health](#), the researchers surveyed a nationally representative sample of roughly 1,850 workers about their work environment and mental health, and followed them from 2005 to 2010.

Researchers defined three main characteristics of workplace bullying:

1. An employee must be the target of systematic, unwanted social behavior;
2. The exposure must occur over a prolonged period of time, often with increasing frequency and intensity; and
3. Targets feel they can't escape the situation or stop the unwanted treatment.

Over the course of the study, the average proportion of workers reporting bullying ranged from 4.2% to 4.6%, while the prevalence of suicidal thoughts varied from 3.9% to 4.9%.

Although less than 5% of participants reported thoughts of suicide during the study period, they were about *twice* as likely to do so *after* being victims of workplace bullying.

Although people who reported bullying early in the study were more likely to later report suicidal thoughts, the reverse didn't prove true. That is, workers who said they'd contemplated suicide at the beginning of the study were no more likely to later report bullying than participants who'd never considered killing themselves.

'Our study adds to the understanding of how bullying is related to thoughts about suicide by showing that the perception of being bullied at work actually is a precursor of suicidal ideation and not a consequence,' said lead study author Morten Birkeland Nielsen of the National Institute of Occupational Health and the University of Bergen.

'There are probably some workers who are more likely to consider suicide due to specific predispositions, whereas others are more likely to consider suicide due to their recent exposure to bullying,' Nielsen said.

So for at least some people, workplace bullying might be a tipping point toward considering suicide. (Read about [some cases](#) in which bullying did lead to a worker's suicide.)

These findings provide further support for the need for employers to [adopt proactive strategies to recognize and address increasing levels of workplace bullying and its costly impact](#).

The OHS Insider has additional information, tools and resources on workplace bullying and other forms of workplace violence and harassment, such as:

- Impact of bullying on the [bystanders who witness it](#)
- The [costs of permitting workplace bullies](#)
- How common [workplace bullying is in Canada](#)

- Information on [why employers can't tolerate bullying](#)
- A [workplace violence infographic](#).