The study includes the survey, focus groups, and interview sessions. Such information is integral to knowing the extent of the problem. States to assess the prevalence of workplace bullying. Gathering interpersonal relationships. Bullying can have disastrous effects on parent-child, spousal, and other coworkers who witness the acts. It diminishes workgroup productivity. Trauma Institute in Bellingham, Wash. have found that tremendous harm is done to targets through workplace bullying.

The ASU work is the first detailed academic study in the United States to assess the prevalence of workplace bullying. Gather such information is integral to knowing the extent of the problem. The study includes the survey, focus groups, and interview sessions.

It is designed to help the researchers learn about the prevalence of such interactions and assess its effects. They also want to find out where in corporate America these interactions take place. “The target of workplace bullying can eventually be made to feel alone and crazy,” says Alberts. “Targets usually cannot function properly in this type of environment. They say they are unable to defend themselves and stop the abuse.”

Concurrent with the survey, the researchers have conducted two focus groups of 12 people each. They want to assess some of the effects of bullying in the workplace and understand its nuances.

The ASU team is also conducting interviews with bully targets and witnesses, as well as family and friends of those who are bullied. They want to get a better understanding of the emotional effects resulting from this interaction. “We want to document the stories and experiences of the targets of bullying,” Pamela Lutgen-Sandvik explains. “We also want feedback from people who have witnessed workplace bullying. And we want to talk to family members of the target. The goal is to better understand how and why bullying occurs and how it may change the target’s behavior.”

Another goal is to learn more about the behavior and communication tactics of those doing the bullying and those bullied. The researchers are exploring workplace structures that encourage or “normalize” bullying behavior. They also want to understand the “bleed over” effects of bullying on both the organization in which it occurs and the families it impacts.

“Scandinavian and European countries have studied workplace bullying,” Alberts adds. “But as of yet there is little academic research on workplace bullying in the United States.”

The few completed U.S. studies have yielded interesting findings. Lutgen-Sandvik says. For example, 25 percent of employees reported being harassed, threatened, or physically attacked at work in the previous year. More than 90 percent of nurses report experiencing verbal abuse, she adds.

In addition, Gary and Ruth Namie at the Workplace Bullying and Trauma Institute in Bellingham, Wash. have found that tremendous harm is done to targets through workplace bullying.

The ASU researchers are planning a follow-up study. They want to query a larger representative sample of the American workforce.

Remember that nasty kid from your past? He was confrontational. Always looming large near your locker, an ugly sneer smeared across his face. She was mean and aggressive. Lurking and laughing at you in the lunchroom or making snide, cutting remarks at the bus stop. For many, these people were childhood icons we’d rather forget.

Unfortunately, schoolyard bullies do not vanish as we grow into adulthood. They still exist. Only now, the nasty ones have taken root in one of our most important institutions – the workplace.

Researchers at Arizona State University’s Hugh Downs School of Human Communication recently completed a survey to assess the prevalence of workplace bullying in the United States. They found that bullies are alive and well and active on many levels throughout corporate America.

“Workplace bullying is a repeated pattern of aggression and hostility directed at one or more persons over an extended period of time. Bullying is more encompassing but less well recognized than sexual or racial harassment,” says Sarah Tracy, assistant professor at the school.

Tracy worked on the survey with Professor Jess Alberts and doctoral candidate Pamela Lutgen-Sandvik. The ASU researchers found that the effects of bullying can be significant. Their results paint a picture of dread and despair for targets of workplace bullying.

“People bullied at work – the targets – report an oily, overpowering dread as they prepare for and travel to their jobs. Their stomachs churn and roll. Their bowels cramp threateningly. Temples pound and appendages deaden. And despite the fact that bullies perpetrate the aggression, like victims of domestic violence and child abuse, targets secretly blame themselves,” Alberts says.

“Targets often find themselves unable to escape, prevent, or stop bullies’ terror tactics. It can cause serious psychological, physiological, and occupational harm,” the ASU team writes.

Past research findings have linked bullying to suicide and post-traumatic stress disorder. Bullying erodes the health and commitment of coworkers who witness the acts. It diminishes workgroup productivity. Bullying can have disastrous effects on parent-child, spousal, and other interpersonal relationships.

The ASU work is the first detailed academic study in the United States to assess the prevalence of workplace bullying. Gathering such information is integral to knowing the extent of the problem. The study includes the survey, focus groups, and interview sessions.
Jess Alberts, Sarah Tracy, and Pamela Lutgen-Sandvik began their study of U.S. workplace behaviors in March 2004. That is when the ASU scholars launched the American Workplace Survey, a confidential Internet survey to assess workplace social interactions. The survey yielded more than 400 useable responses. The results provide an early glimpse into the prevalence of workplace bullying in the United States. Early data from the survey do show interesting trends:

- The three most common negative acts, as reported by targets of bullying, were exposure to an unmanageable workload, working below one’s level of competence, and having information withheld.
- The three industries where bullying is most likely to occur (as reported by targets) are administration and support, services other than public administration, and education. For witnesses, the three most likely industries where bullying occurs are health/social assistance, administration and support, and education.
- Those who had been either targets or witnesses of bullying reported greater job stress and lower job satisfaction. They also ranked their job experience more poorly than those who had been neither targets nor witnesses.
- Targets of bullying were more likely to be female than male. Bullies identified by targets (not witnesses) were more likely to be male than female.
- Talking to family or friends and talking to co-workers helped improve the target’s feelings. Leaving a job voluntarily did not. It was associated with a downturn in the target’s feelings. Working harder was associated with increased bullying.
- Survey participants were most likely to work in administration/support (14.8 percent), health/social assistance (14.3 percent), or education and related fields (14.1 percent).