***Press release from the British Sociological Association***

**Embargoed until 0001 Tuesday 5 March 2013**

**Disabled employees twice as likely to be attacked at work**

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

Researchers from Cardiff and Plymouth universities found that people with physical or psychological disabilities or long-term illness reported higher rates of 21 types of ill-treatment than other workers did, often from their managers and colleagues.

These included being given impossible deadlines and being ignored, gossiped about or teased.

The research, published in the journal Work, Employment and Society, today [Tuesday 5 March], 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.

*(full statistics below)*

The research, which uses data from the British Workplace Behaviour Survey, found that those with disabilities or long-term illness said managers were responsible for 45% of the more serious ill-treatment they had suffered and that customers or clients were responsible for 28%, and colleagues for 18%.

The lead researcher, Professor Ralph Fevre, of Cardiff School of Social Sciences, said: "Up to now, researchers have generally assumed that ill-treatment in the workplace was causing disabilities and health problems. Our work suggests ill-treatment happens to employees who already have disabilities or health problems."

In their paper ‘The Ill-treatment of Disabled Employees in British Workplaces’, Professor Fevre, Dr Amanda Robinson, and Trevor Jones of Cardiff University, and Professor Duncan Lewis, of Plymouth University, note that people with a disability or long-term illness reported higher levels in all the categories of ill-treatment they looked at.

Among workers with a disability, those with a psychological or learning disability usually fared wore than those with physical disabilities or long-term physical health problems. Among those with a psychological or learning disability, 21.2% said they were victims of physical violence, 44.2% said they had been insulted and 56.9% said they had been shouted at.

“Workers with disabilities were far more likely to be ill-treated at work and experienced a broader range of ill-treatment,” the researchers say in their paper, which is one of the few quantitative assessments of the scale of the problem.

“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.”

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 that 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.

The research was carried out as part of an ESRC funded study, Workplace Bullying and Harassment in Britain with Special Reference to Race and Ethnicity. Full details are available at: <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/my-esrc/grants/RES-062-23-0312/read>

*Work, Employment and Society* is published by the British Sociological Association and SAGE.

-ENDS-

**For more information, please contact:**

Tony Trueman  
British Sociological Association  
Tel: 07964 023392   
[tony.trueman@britsoc.org.uk](mailto:tony.trueman@britsoc.org.uk)

**Notes to Editors**

**1**. The authors used data from the British Workplace Behaviour Survey during 2007/08 which involved face-to-face interviews with people about their work in England, Scotland and Wales. The results are:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Type of ill-treatment** | **No disability or long-term illness** | **Having a disability or long-term illness** | **Having a physical disability**  **(subset of total disabled)** | **Having a psychological/learning disability**  **(subset of total disabled)** | **Other disability**  **(subset of total disabled)** |
| 1 – Someone withholding information which affects your performance | 14.1 | 17.2 | 14.5 | 21.6 | 17.4 |
| 2 – Pressure from someone else to do work below your level of competence | 11.8 | 17.3 | 16.1 | 23.1 | 16.5 |
| 3 – Having your opinions and views ignored | 26.9 | 34.3 | 33.3 | 43.1 | 31.3 |
| 4 – Someone continually checking up on you or your work *when it is not necessary* | 17.2 | 24.3 | 23.9 | 29.4 | 22.4 |
| 5 – Pressure from someone else *not* to claim something which by right you are entitled to | 8.5 | 15.5 | 11.1 | 19.2 | 18.1 |
| 6 – Being given an unmanageable workload or impossible deadlines | 28.8 | 38.7 | 40.2 | 44.2 | 34.8 |
| 7 – Your employer not following proper procedures | 20.4 | 33.8 | 29.9 | 39.2 | 35.3 |
| 8 – Being treated unfairly compared to others in your workplace | 14.5 | 20.4 | 18.8 | 40.4 | 13.0 |
| 9 – Being humiliated or ridiculed in connection with your work | 7.4 | 12.3 | 8.5 | 17.6 | 13.0 |
| 10 – Gossip and rumours being spread about you or having allegations made against you | 10.0 | 18.7 | 16.2 | 25.5 | 18.1 |
| 11 – Being insulted or having offensive remarks made about you | 14.3 | 24.3 | 17.9 | 44.2 | 22.4 |
| 12 – Being treated in a disrespectful or rude way | 21.8 | 31.0 | 23.9 | 42.3 | 33.0 |
| 13 – People excluding you from their group | 7.6 | 13.0 | 9.4 | 23.5 | 12.1 |
| 14 – Hints or signals from others that you should quit your job | 6.9 | 13.3 | 12.8 | 17.3 | 11.3 |
| 15 – Persistent criticism of your work or performance which is unfair | 11.1 | 19.3 | 17.9 | 25.0 | 18.1 |
| 16 – Teasing, mocking, sarcasm or jokes which go too far | 10.8 | 15.1 | 12.8 | 26.9 | 11.3 |
| 17 – Being shouted at or someone losing their temper with you | 23.1 | 34.5 | 30.5 | 56.9 | 28.4 |
| 18 – Intimidating behaviour from people at work | 12.7 | 22.9 | 19.7 | 32.7 | 22.4 |
| 19 – Feeling threatened in any way while at work | 10.6 | 17.6 | 17.1 | 33.3 | 11.3 |
| 20 – Actual physical violence at work | 4.5 | 10.5 | 8.5 | 21.2 | 7.8 |
| 21 – Injury in some way as a result of violence or aggression at work | 3.5 | 7.4 | 7.7 | 5.8 | 7.8 |

**2. The Cardiff School of Social Sciences** is established as one of the leading interdisciplinary social science centres in the UK. In the 2008 RAE the School was rated first for research power and within the top five centres on most other indicators. Its reputation lies in world leading research, but also in the quality of its professional training, postgraduate and undergraduate programmes.  
[www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi](http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi)

**3.The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)** is the UK's largest organisation for funding research on economic and social issues. It supports independent high quality research which has an impact on business, the public sector and the third sector. The ESRC's total budget for 2012/13 is £205 million. At any one time the ESRC supports over 4,000 researchers and postgraduate students in academic institutions and independent research institutes. [www.esrc.ac.uk](http://www.esrc.ac.uk)

**4. SAGE** is a leading international publisher of journals, books, and electronic media for academic, educational, and professional markets. Since 1965, SAGE has helped inform and educate a global community of scholars, practitioners, researchers, and students spanning a wide range of subject areas including business, humanities, social sciences, and science, technology, and medicine. An independent company, SAGE has principal offices in Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore and Washington DC. [www.sagepublications.com](http://www.sagepublications.com)

**5. The** **British Sociological Association**’s mission is to represent the intellectual and sociological interests of its members. The BSA is a Company Limited by Guarantee. Registered in England and Wales. Company Number: 3890729. Registered Charity Number 1080235  [www.britsoc.co.uk](http://www.britsoc.co.uk)