Women bullied in the workplace

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"Bullying"—what thoughts come to mind when you read or hear that word? Most, if not all, of us have experienced bullying as children or perhaps have seen our own children bullied. We know what bullies can do to undermine our self-confidence or even destroy our happiness. Did you know, however, that bullying does not stop in childhood? It is carried on even into adulthood and often into our workplaces. Looking specifically at women's experiences of workplace bullying, a recent article by Mitsunori Misawa, Josie Andrews, and Kathy Jenkins ("A content analysis of women's experiences of workplace bullying since 2000," *Adult Education Research Conference*, Kansas State University Libraries, New Prairie Press, June 2018) revealed that women are the primary targets of bullying.

The authors noted that, according to a workplace bullying survey conducted in 2017 by the Workplace Bullying Institute, most Americans acknowledge that bullying occurs in the workplace and almost 20 percent have either experienced it or seen it happen. The Institute also discovered that nearly three-quarters of the bullies in the workplace are men, with 60 percent of that portion targeting women, and that over two-thirds of women who bully (referred to as "mean girls") target women.

Misawa and colleagues analyzed the content of 183 research studies to determine specific aspects of the experiences of women who were bullied in the workplace. These aspects include gender-based characteristics, how bullying affected women's lives, and the actions the women took in responding to the bullying. Many of the women bullied were in positions in which the balance of power favored the bully. They often faced ridicule or social rejection. To cope with the bullying, women admitted to taking actions such as praying, walking away from the situation, or completely denying it.

Bullying in the workplace affects women's mental and physical health, their social and work relationships, and their work environment. Bullying needs to be eliminated, but workplaces first need to recognize that it exists. Then they need to educate their managers and establish clear policies and guidelines against bullying. With the proper training, workers will know what to do when they encounter a bullying situation. The authors contend that by taking these steps, businesses will create "safer and optimal environments for women."