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The most extensive German study on bullying and cyberbullying among adults conducted to date

- 28 percent of those surveyed have been victims of bullying
- Women are much more susceptible to bullying than men
- 39 percent of all bullying attacks persist for more than one year
- 72 percent of all incidents occur at the workplace
- High costs for business enterprises: Victims of bullying miss five more workdays due to illness than others

Bullying and cyberbullying are not confined to young people and the school environment. Adults are affected to a significant extent as well. At work or in the Internet – attacks by and against adults are no longer seldom. These are the results of the study entitled “Bullying and Cyberbullying among Adults” conducted by the Bündnis gegen Cybermobbing e.V. (Alliance against Cyberbullying) with the support of ARAG SE.

The study presents the most current available data on the scope, manifestations, reactions, consequences and prevention of bullying and cyberbullying in Germany. According to these findings, Germans regard the two issues as an increasingly urgent social problem. 28 percent of those surveyed reported having been victims of bullying, while 8 percent have been the targets of cyberbullying attacks. Attacks on women are especially frequent: 33 percent of the women surveyed stated that they had been the targets of bullying attacks at least once. According to the study, women are 1.5 times more likely to experience bullying attacks than men.
Bullying among adults has a severe impact on the workplace. 72 percent of all bullying incidents are registered at work. According to the victims surveyed, envy and rigid hierarchies are the most frequent causes of bullying and cyberbullying at work. Nearly one out of every three perpetrators of bullying attacks indicated that they had acted out of a desire to have fun – that is, without concrete cause. According to the study, supervisors are involved as perpetrators or accomplices in over half of all cases of bullying at the workplace. Yet bullying is not restricted to the work environment. One-third (31 percent) of all incidents occur in a private context.

The often severe consequences may affect the mental and physical health of victims and extend to their personal and occupational environment – and lead in extreme cases to an existential crisis. Nearly 50 percent of those who have suffered from bullying and cyberbullying complain of personality disorders and depression. Extreme manifestations include diminished self-esteem, compulsive disorders and attempts to escape through excessive consumption of alcohol or other addictive substances. More than one out of every ten victims admit to suicidal tendencies. Out of a sense of shame or powerlessness, many victims seek help very late – or often not at all – in spite of the intense agony they experience. 23 percent of those surveyed chose not to react at all.

Bullying and cyberbullying also have economic consequences. On average, victims of bullying miss 5 to 6 more days of work per year due to illness than other employees. According to the study, over two-thirds (68.3 percent) of all victims would prefer to change employers. German business enterprises incur consequential costs of illness directly attributable to bullying incidents amounting to roughly 3 billion EUR per year.

Yet companies in Germany apparently have yet to recognize the urgency of the problem. Only in very rare cases do employers offer preventive measures, even though the absenteeism resulting from bullying and cyberbullying and the associated costs are immense.
The consequential costs of illness – i.e. the costs of visits to physicians, therapy sessions, medications and missed days of work – are directly measurable and can be expressed in monetary terms. Added to these are indirect costs associated, for example, with reduced efficiency and diminished productivity at the workplace. As early as 2001, the European Parliament estimated the total loss to the German economy resulting from bullying at between 15 and 20 billion EUR per year.

Based on the findings of this study, Uwe Leest, Chairman of the Board of Bündnis gegen Cybermobbing (Alliance against Cyberbullying AaC), has issued the following recommendations for action by business enterprises, political institutions and society as a whole: “In order to make employees more aware of the issue of bullying and cyberbullying and educate them accordingly, organizations are advised to conduct training courses, seminars and information events. Moreover, strong emphasis should be placed on improving the work climate. The work climate is a key factor in the prevention of bullying incidents. Helpful in this context, for example, is an in-house “agreement” that establishes rules and requirements for respectful and non-violent conduct of employees toward each other.

It would also be in the interest of everyone concerned – both in the working environment and the social context in general – to set up a nationwide network of counseling centers and anonymous hotlines for victims of bullying. The same applies to legal matters.

Apart from business enterprises and society at large, government must also assume responsibility in this context. The AaC also calls for the enactment of an anti-(cyber)bullying law designed to protect the victims.

“This study shows that the phenomenon of bullying has a severe negative impact on the work environment. The findings contribute to enhancing knowledge about bullying and cyberbullying and heightening awareness of the problem at the workplace. It now become more and more important to expand the range of counseling and mediation services offered by German companies,” notes Klaus Heiermann, Chief Representative of ARAG SE, with respect to the study.
About the study:

The “Bullying and Cyberbullying among Adults” study was conducted by the AaC with the support of ARAG SE from 11 to 24 November 2013. A total of over 6,200 individuals over the age of 18 were surveyed. Following the study entitled “Cyberbullying among School Students” (2013), this is the second study issued by the AaC.

The results of the study are available for downloading here:
Further information and graphics are provided at:
http://www.arag.de/die-arag/engagement/cybermobbing/

About ARAG SE:

The ARAG Group is the largest family enterprise in the German insurance industry. ARAG has positioned itself as a versatile quality insurer. In addition to specializing in legal insurance, ARAG also offers its customers needs-based products and services from a single source and through its strong subsidiaries in the German composite, health and life insurance segments as well as international branches, subsidiaries and affiliates in 13 other European countries and the U.S. – many of which hold leading positions in their respective legal insurance markets. With 3,500 employees, the Group generates revenue and premium income amounting to over 1.5 billion EUR.

The ARAG Group exercises its social responsibility by promoting equal opportunity. We help people assert their rights – both in and out of court. Thus the Group is actively involved in promoting efforts to combat bullying and cyberbullying and to protect safe cyberlife. ARAG also supports projects devoted to conflict management in schools.

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About the Bündnis gegen Cybermobbing e.V.:

The “Bündnis gegen Cybermobbing” (Alliance against Cybermobbing) was founded in July 2011. Its membership is composed of people who have been personally affected by the phenomenon, either at work or in their personal lives, and are devoted to combating cyberbullying and violence in the Internet. The Alliance is a network of committed parents, educators, legal experts, physicians, researchers and many concerned citizens. It is supported by prominent figures from the political, sports and media communities in Germany and abroad. The Alliance is linked through Board Member Katzer with the I-KiZ (Child Protection Center) of the German Federal Government and at EU level with the COST Action ISO801 “Cyberbullying.” The organization also cooperates with Stanford University and the European Business School (EBS) Reichartshausen and is supported by regional educational institutions, educational initiatives and the Malteser Hilfsdienst e.V. Deutschland.

In addition to educating the public about cyberbullying, the Alliance also promotes the development of media competence in schools through parent-teacher meetings and information events and provides help in the Internet. Sources of assistance include the newly designed website http://www.buendnis-gegen-cybermobbing.de.

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