

# ADULT BULLYING: SURVEY FINDS 31% OF AMERICANS HAVE BEEN BULLIED AS AN ADULT

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Bullying doesn't always end with high school. Some lunchroom bullies grow up to become office or social bullies.

A recent survey conducted by Harris Poll on behalf of the American Osteopathic Association found that adults are being [bullied](#) at levels similar to adolescents, and the health consequences may be reducing Americans' ability to function.

The online survey of more than 2,000 U.S. adults, conducted in October, found 31 percent of Americans have been bullied as an adult and many (43%) say the behavior has become more accepted this past year. The survey **defined bullying as being subjected to repeated, negative behavior intended to harm or intimidate.**

## The health impact of bullying in America

Victims of bullying reported significant negative impacts on their health. The poll found of those who have been bullied as an adult:

- 71% suffer from stress
- 70% experience anxiety/depression
- 55% report a loss of confidence
- 39% suffer from sleep loss, 26% have headaches and 22% experience muscle tension or pain
- 19% reported a mental breakdown
- 17% noted an inability to function day-to-day, i.e. calling in sick frequently

Other health responses to the emotional strain induced by bullying include gastrointestinal changes, nausea, elevated blood pressure and cardiovascular issues, according to osteopathic physicians.

Typically understood to be a problem children face and outgrow, the new findings show that bullying, and its subsequent impact on mental and physical health, continues long into adulthood—often in the workplace, home and educational setting.

## How to identify adult bullying

The poll found a quarter of adults (25%) have experienced the "silent treatment" from an individual or group on a repeated basis as an adult, while about 1 in 5 (21%) have had someone spread lies about them that no one refutes. (Ed. Some call these methods "The Delaire Way". Anyone recognize themselves?)

"Bullying is a coping strategy used to assert control when faced with personal limitations, whether intellectual, physical or otherwise," said Charles Sophy, DO, a Los Angeles-based psychiatrist and medical director for the County of Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services. "A bully gains power in a relationship by reducing another's, and shows little regard for the consequences to a victim's health or well-being."

Behavior from adult bullies is more subtle and sophisticated than what a child might employ, according to Dr. Sophy. Gaslighting is a common yet poorly understood tactic in which a person makes a victim question their own reality. This controlling behavior is done slowly over time through small manipulative words or actions. The victim begins to doubt their memory, judgment and abilities, ultimately limiting their ability to confidently perform tasks in the workplace or their personal life.

"If you feel your power being diminished by another, it's time to question the health of the relationship," said Dr. Sophy. "Bullies operate everywhere and can be partners, professors, colleagues or grown children."

## Recovering from a bully

"A clear takeaway from this poll is **bullying is not limited to children**," says Sophy. "As physicians and as bystanders, we must proactively confront the problem or it will continue to damage the emotional and physical health of our nation."

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Of course, physical assaults cannot be ruled out.  
**[Watch this unprovoked attack](#)** on a Delaire member  
at the Town Hall meeting on December 9, 2018.