Workplace Bullying Experts Define Growing Epidemic
By Paula Levis Suita

One out of six employees in the United States is bullied, according to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, making it an occupational hazard, noted Gary Namie, PhD, social psychologist, and Ruth Namie, Ph.D. - a husband and wife team and co-founders of The Workplace Bullying & Trauma Institute in Bellingham, WA. The two experts spoke at a panel about bullying in the workplace at the Leadership Conference.

Noting that 80 percent of employees targeted for this mistreatment are female, the team observed that bullying presents a significant barrier to on-the-job satisfaction and performance.

“Intimidation instills fear and it fosters resentment,” said Dr. Gary Namie. Defining a bully as one who treats others abusively and affects by means of force or coercion, Dr. Namie said that it is repeated mistreatment that usually combines verbal abuse, threatening, and intimidating conduct. “Bullying prevents work from getting done,” he said. “Everyone thinks that bullies are tough managers. They are not – they are idiots. They are narcissistic, name calling, arbitrary, and capricious people.”

“Bullying is totally irrational,” he added. “It’s never about work. And our psyches are a lot more fragile than we think.”

The Results of Bullying

The results of workplace bullying can be disastrous to a company and include:

- Negatively affecting the firm’s culture;
- Promoting health issues in the bullied employees, including hypertension and heart disease, a compromised immune system, diabetes, anxiety and clinical depression; and,
- Millions of dollars lost in turnover, absenteeism, productivity, and efficiency.

Seventy-one percent of bullying is conducted top down, with 50 percent of bullies being women. “Why are women doing this?” the Namies asked. “Aren’t women typically nurturing and cooperative? Isn’t there a universal approach by women to women in the workplace?”

“The organization you’re in really makes a difference,” said Dr. Ruth Namie, mentioning that there were fewer issues, in general, in sexually-integrated firms, where women are in executive roles versus male-dominated firms, where women are in lower-level positions only.

“Women are forced into positions of competition for very few positions and they become either workaholics or coquettes,” the team observed, but “if women leaders do not stop
bulling, then who will?” they asked the audience, which was comprised primarily of women.

**Steps To Contain This Epidemic**

“Bullying is domestic violence in the workplace when the abuser is on the payroll,” and it needs to be directly confronted, stated Dr. Gary Namie.

Namie suggests that, just like the topic of sexual harassment, companies need to develop a policy for a bullying-free workplace that ensures a fair and credible enforcement process. The policy should be presented and endorsed by the president of the company, the board of directors, and all employees. Interventions need to be made, which will correct and restore civility in the workplace, as well as specialized education to the entire employee population.

**Word Count = 489 words**