



BTAC BULLETIN

BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE | LAW ENFORCEMENT & COUNTERINTELLIGENCE | CYBERSECURITY | EMPLOYEE MANAGEMENT RELATIONS | THREAT ASSESSMENT & MANAGEMENT

HUMILIATION

DIGNITY & RESPECT AS MITIGATION

While humiliation and embarrassment are emotions everyone has experienced at some time, the experience of public humiliation in the workplace, whether it's from a job termination, a performance reprimand, or being subjected to unaddressed harassment/rumors, can be a damaging experience that can have a cascade of effects, especially for those who struggle with managing strong emotions and handling setbacks or criticism. While we might think of humiliation in the context of immature, adolescent bullying, in adulthood it can lead to resentment and—most importantly from an insider threat perspective—can fuel a powerful grievance. Challenges for leaders include monitoring for events that can cause humiliation, mitigating workplace humiliations through positive culture and actions, and managing the risks of long-term disgruntlement before it's too late.

THE EXPERIENCE OF HUMILIATION

In 2022, a night-shift manager at a Walmart in Chesapeake, Virginia opened fire and killed six co-workers while wounding four. Although there were several other factors, including mental health struggles as possible causes, he wrote in his "death note" about taking revenge for being "harassed by idiots...", being "mocked," and "his dignity being taken away beyond repair by [his] phone being hacked."¹

Public humiliation is defined as "the sense of being victimized by others in a manner where it is exposed in a public

way that the person is somehow deficient, which then in turn involves the internal emotions of shame and anger."²

"Few experiences are as damaging to the human psyche as public humiliation"²

Workplace humiliation can be especially impactful in that many of us place much of our self-worth on our work reputation and persona. Humiliation, along with anger and shame is one of the strongest emotions a human can experience and can motivate and individual to malicious acts.

4x INCREASED RISK

The FBI's Behavioral Analysis Unit's 2020 study of 63 active shooters found they were **four times more likely than other persons of concern (POC) to have experienced a publicly humiliating event.**³

The FBI's BAU recommends some best practices to promote a culture of dignity and safety:⁴

1 WORKPLACE CULTURE

- Provide constructive feedback and disciplinary actions in private.
- Promote a "respectful workplace" free of harassment, bullying, or anything that diminishes someone's social status.
- Hold individuals accountable who harass or bully fellow employees.

2 TRAINING & AWARENESS

- Leaders and managers should be trained on the importance of dignity preservation and preventing a humiliating event.
- Organizations should augment threat management teams by providing training related to public humiliations, separations, de-escalation, and grievance mitigation.

3 EMPLOYMENT SEPARATIONS

- Ensure that separations are respectful and avoid public humiliation. Use gracious and sympathetic language and seek ways to support individuals as they separate.
- In cases of concern, consider strategic extension of benefits and transition support and follow up.

1. Miller, M. (2022.) 'My God Forgive Me for What I'm Going to Do': Walmart Shooter's Chilling Manifesto Released. [Independent.com](https://www.independent.com).

2. Johnston, J. (2024). The Psychology of Public Humiliation. [Psychology Today](https://www.psychologytoday.com).

3. Gibson, K., Craun, S., Ford, A., Solik, K., Silver, J. (2020). Possible Attackers? A Comparison Between the Behaviors and Stressors of Persons of Concern and Active Shooters. *Journal of Threat Assessment and Management*, Vol. 7, No. 1-2, 1-12. 4. Gibson, K., Brubaker, L., Simons, A. (2024) Publicly Humiliating Events: A Precursor to Workplace Violence. [Security Management Magazine](https://www.securitymanagementmagazine.com).



DITMAC

DOD Insider Threat
Management and
Analysis Center