

Foreign-born run greater risk of workplace bullying

March 19 2021



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The risk of being bullied at work in Sweden is twice as high if you were born outside Sweden. And if you come from a culture that is culturally dissimilar to Sweden's, the risk is even higher. These are the results of a

study from Linköping University that was recently published in The International Journal of Human Resource Management.

Employers in Sweden have a duty to ensure that the workplace is safe, with a healthy atmosphere. Despite this, some employees are treated poorly, excluded and ignored. When such treatment has continued for a longer period, it is defined as bullying.

Researchers at Linköping University in Sweden wanted to see if people born abroad run a greater risk of being bullied at work.

"Our results show an [increased risk](#) of bullying for people who work in Sweden but were born in another country. The results also show the importance of addressing these issues. Bullying can cause serious problems for a person, and for the workplace where it occurs," says Michael Rosander, associate professor in psychology at Linköping University's Department of Behavioral Sciences and Learning.

Michael Rosander's research investigates what happens at different types of workplaces and how different organizational factors affect individuals, working groups and the organization as a whole. He conducted the study together with Stefan Blomberg, doctoral student at Linköping University.

In this study, the researchers investigated two types of bullying: work-related and person-related bullying. In work-related bullying, one is subjected to negative actions related to one's work, for example having responsibilities taken away, being given trivial work duties, or having one's work monitored excessively.

Person-related bullying, on the other hand, is being subjected to negative actions related to one's person. It can include being humiliated, ridiculed, or ignored and excluded from social contexts.

The results show that people who are born abroad are subjected to more person-related bullying than people born in Sweden. For foreign-born, the risk of being bullied at work is twice as high as for natives. And for people from cultures dissimilar to the Swedish, the risk is quadrupled. Most exposed are people born in Asia.

However, for work-related bullying the researchers found no increased risk for foreign-born, compared to Swedish-born.

Thus, the person-related bullying that foreign-born are subjected to is based on who they are—not on work-related factors.

"They are subjected to what we call predatory bullying. It doesn't matter what they do. Their very presence, the way they look, can be a reason for the negative treatment. It became clear in the study, says Michael Rosander.

To measure the experience of being bullied, the researchers used the Swedish version of the Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R), where the respondents estimate their exposure to bullying at work in various situations on a five-point scale. Using register data from Statistics Sweden, the researchers sent the questionnaire to a representative selection of the Swedish workforce. The questionnaire was completed by 1856 people from workplaces of 10 people or more. The majority of respondents (1625) were born in Sweden, while 229 were born abroad.

Because it was already known that poor working conditions can be a [breeding ground](#) for bullying, the researchers also looked at certain work-related factors, in order to ensure that the responses concerned bullying specifically, and were not just general workplace dissatisfaction. But the analysis showed that these people don't have worse work environments—they are at a greater risk of being bullied.

The study is part of WHOLE, a research project studying how different organizational factors are related to the organizational and social work environment. The aim is to analyze how different organizational factors affect how people perceive their employment, health, well-being, and their vulnerability at work.

More information: Michael Rosander et al. Workplace bullying of immigrants working in Sweden, *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* (2021). [DOI: 10.1080/09585192.2021.1891113](https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2021.1891113)

Provided by Linköping University

Citation: Foreign-born run greater risk of workplace bullying (2021, March 19) retrieved 26 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2021-03-foreign-born-greater-workplace-bullying.html>

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