

Members of ethnic minorities report lower levels of work-related depression

October 29 2021, by Martin Lasalle



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

When Christiane Kammogne left Cameroun after completing a bachelor's degree in management, the concept of work-related stress wasn't on her radar screen. In 2011, two years after arriving in France,

she was astonished to learn of suicides among employees at the company where she was employed as an HR advisor.

"I came from a country where work was the way to stay alive, and in France people were killing themselves because of their work," she recalls. "I couldn't understand it. But I suspected it might be possible to find correlations between suicide and [cultural background](#)."

Kammogne, an associate researcher at UdeM's Health and Wellness at Work Observatory, decided to investigate whether [cultural factors](#), particularly ethnicity and [immigration status](#), affect the work-depression link in Canada's workforce.

In her Ph.D. thesis, supervised by Prof. Alain Marchand of the School of Industrial Relations, she analyzed data from nine cycles of Statistics Canada's National Population Health Survey, from 1994 through 2011.

Data on a total of 6,477 employed persons was analyzed; 18% were immigrants and 8% belonged to visible minorities.

Positive effect of work for minorities

Kammogne factored in a wide range of variables to determine whether there is a link between [depressive symptoms](#) and cultural identity among employed persons, including:

- [personal characteristics](#) (gender, age, lifestyle)
- work-related characteristics (over-qualification, opportunity to use skills, decision-making authority, social supports, working time, etc.)
- family factors (marital status, number of children, household income, family tensions)

After controlling for confounding variables, the data shows that ethnicity and work-related factors operate independently on depressive symptoms.

"Contrary to what some other studies have found, our results show that employed persons from visible minorities report significantly fewer depressive symptoms than Caucasian workers," says Kammogne.

This finding seems paradoxical, as the analysis also shows that visible [minority](#) employees are more likely than white workers to be overqualified and have less opportunity to use their skills, less decision-making authority and less work autonomy.

"One possible explanation is that work has a more positive role for visible minorities, even if their job is not commensurate with their education or with the positions they may have held in their country of origin," Kammogne suggests.

People who have social supports at work are less likely to report depressive symptoms.

It is noteworthy that the immigrant respondents in the study population had been in Canada for an average of 20 years: "These are long-time immigrants who have had time to adjust and accept their fate." This may account for the divergence with some other analyses of immigrant populations.

Deskilling remains a societal issue

Christiane Kammogne found that deskilling is a continuing problem for visible minorities.

"The Statistics Canada surveys cover 17 years, and over that period things did not improve for ethnic minorities. After struggling to find

work, they end up in jobs with long hours, irregular schedules and poor conditions."

The findings might have been different had the analysis focused on [recent immigrants](#): "Studies show that immigrants are generally in good physical and mental shape when they arrive in Canada, but their health declines during the first five years. Often, their mental health becomes poorer than that of the general population. Deskilling may be an important factor in the deterioration."

Christiane Kammogne concludes that "it would be appropriate for interventions aimed at improving working conditions to be ethnically targeted, particularly with respect to overqualification, which seems to be a persistent problem in Canada's labor force."

Provided by University of Montreal

Citation: Members of ethnic minorities report lower levels of work-related depression (2021, October 29) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-10-members-ethnic-minorities-work-related-depression.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--