



IZA World of Labor REPORT: Sexual orientation affects labor market outcomes despite anti-discrimination laws

Despite anti-discrimination laws in some countries, gay and lesbian employees still encounter serious job market barriers, including lower pay and harassment in the workplace. Furthermore, a [revised IZA World of Labor Report](#) by Nick Drydakis of Anglia Ruskin University UK finds new evidence that experiencing school-age bullying as a sexual orientation minority is associated with later workplace bullying.

Currently, being gay or lesbian is illegal in almost 80 countries, meaning that 2.7 billion people live in countries where having a minority sexual orientation is a crime. Additionally, fewer than 20% of countries have adopted employment anti-discrimination laws to protect gay and lesbian employees. On average, Australia, Canada, the US, and the EU have the strongest protection of sexual orientation rights, including workplace anti-discrimination laws. But studies from these countries show that anti-discrimination laws are not sufficient to overcome the barriers people with a minority sexual orientation are facing when it comes to the workplace.

Gay and lesbian employees report more harassment and less job satisfaction than heterosexual employees, and gay men earn less than comparably skilled and experienced heterosexual men. Moreover, there is evidence that gay and lesbian employees are looked over for promotions to top-ranking positions, and that homosexuality-oriented jokes, bullying, and harassment are tolerated and reinforce power inequalities in the workplace. Globally, people who are identified as gay or lesbian during the initial stage of the hiring process are discriminated against in favor of heterosexual applicants with comparable skills and experience. This pattern is observed in Austria, Cyprus, Greece, Sweden, the US, the UK, and Toronto, Canada. Additionally, gay and lesbian employees report having to live with less freedom than their heterosexual counterparts and being reluctant to disclose their sexual orientation at work for fear of biased treatment.

Recent studies show that being a victim of bullying in the workplace often has its roots already in childhood: School-age bullying, when experienced by sexual orientation minorities, is associated with lower educational levels, and lower probabilities of working in white-collar jobs, plus lower job satisfaction. In addition, experiencing school-age bullying as a sexual orientation minority is associated with later workplace bullying, suggesting that bullying against sexual orientation minorities might persist over time.

For Drydakis these findings imply that legislative protection constitutes only a small step toward improving the employment circumstances and general well-being of people who are gay or lesbian and highlights the need for other policy interventions. Government can help through campaigns promoting respect and equality of treatment in the workplace and by publishing annual data on progress toward equality objectives. Firms should evaluate recruitment and promotion policies to ensure equality of opportunity and should address incidents of harassment. Importantly, Drydakis concludes: "In schools, stressors that negatively impact on sexual orientation minority children's human capital and progression should be minimized. Societies should secure for each child, regardless their sexual orientation, a smooth transition into adulthood and a successful working life."

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Notes for editors:

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The site offers relevant and succinct information on topics including diversity, migration, minimum wage, youth unemployment, employment protection, development, education, gender balance, labor mobility and flexibility among others.

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