

PhD Candidate: Social Unsafety in Organisations

Are you intrigued by questions concerning social safety in the workplace, and are you interested in conducting sociological research that will increase our understanding of this societal problem? Then the Sociology Department is looking for you! We offer you the opportunity to develop and carry out your own PhD project within the areas of expertise of supervisors Dr Bas Hofstra, Dr Ashwin Rambaran and Prof. Niels Spierings.

The project will be funded by a Starters Grant from the research institute Radboud Social Cultural Research (RSCR) awarded to Dr Bas Hofstra and Dr Ashwin Rambaran. Social unsafety (encompassing a host of undesirable behaviours) in the workplace is a widespread phenomenon in many organisations, which comes at great costs for both employees (low well-being, low motivation, poor performance, attrition) and organisations (loss of trust and reputation, and high turnover). The research project aims to understand the causes and consequences of social unsafety in the workplace through a sequential mixed methods design combining insights from sociology, psychology, network science, and organisation science. Particular focus is on social unsafety prevalence, why some groups (i.e. marginalised groups) are targets for social unsafety, possible ameliorating factors, and its consequences.

What are the causes of social unsafety, and what are its consequences, and for whom? Organisation research emphasises the role of structure (lack of resources, power differentials), culture (interpersonal communication, accountability), and system (procedures and regulations). However, how do these contextual factors work out for individual people? And does this differ between persons with different backgrounds? People monitor, process and respond differently to socially safe versus threatening situations in their social environment, but how this differs is largely unknown. For instance, the undesirable impact of social unsafety can be countered by resources such as social support and the performance of colleagues, but these resources are unlikely to be equally distributed across all employees. Often (intersectionally) marginalised groups are disadvantaged in this respect.

While there is some insight into the causes and consequences of social unsafety in the workplace, our understanding is still limited, as most research is descriptive or practical. While these studies can be useful to scope the size of the problem or find solutions for a single organisation, they are less useful for developing and testing theories that pinpoint the causes (and their relative impact) and consequences of social unsafety. Such theories are needed to draw reliable and valid conclusions for the general population of organisations and employees. Importantly, theory and research do not differentiate between the processes in organisations for marginalised groups of people, including people with intersecting identities.

As a PhD candidate you will contribute to these research gaps, and apply a sequential mixed-methods design in which an intersectional descriptive paper is followed by a qualitative theory generating study using focus studies, which feed into explanatory quantitative studies, using existing large-scale survey data from Statistics Netherlands (CBS) using multilevel analysis to discern explanations and outcomes at the individual and organisational levels. In addition, you will contribute to teaching Bachelor's students within the Sociology Department (10% of your working time).