

# Bullying makes men leave the labor market

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Credit: Aarhus University

Men and women are almost at an equal risk of being bullied in the workplace, but whereas bullying often causes women to go on prolonged sick leave or use antidepressants, men often choose to leave the labor market altogether for a period of time.

Bullying in the workplace doubles [women's sickness absence](#), leads to an increased use of antidepressants and affects women's health negatively and for a long time. On the other hand, men are twice as likely to leave the labour market for a period of time after they have been subjected to [bullying](#). This is the result of new interdisciplinary research from Aarhus BSS - Aarhus University and the University of Copenhagen.

In the study, seven per cent of the respondents reported that they are being subjected to bullying. Of these, 43 per cent are men. A total of 3182 people in both public and private organisations have participated.

"The million-dollar question is why men primarily react by leaving the workplace, while women react to bullying by taking prolonged sick leaves. If anything, this illustrates that men and women handle bullying differently," says Assistant Professor Tine Mundbjerg Eriksen from the Department of Economics and Business Economics at Aarhus BSS.

## **Bullying does not affect men's sickness absence - but their salary**

Together with her colleagues from the University of Copenhagen, Tine Mundbjerg Eriksen has recently published her research in the recognised journal of *Labour Economics*, and according to her, it was a surprise to learn that bullying does not seem to increase men's sickness absence.

"In fact, it seems that men who are bullied are more likely than women to go to work even though they're actually sick. At the same time, it appears that bullying affects men's salary level negatively, which indicates that the bullying hampers their opportunities for pay increases and promotions. One way of bullying is that your colleagues or your boss impede your ability to do your job properly, make changes to your work or hand the fun and important tasks to others."

When it comes to the type and frequency of bullying, the research shows that men are just as exposed to work or personal-related bullying as women, but are actually slightly more exposed to physical intimidation than women.

## **Bullying worse than violence and sexual harassment**

Previous studies have shown that bullying causes the same symptoms as post-traumatic stress disorder and that bullying causes more long-term sickness than e.g. violence, threats and [sexual harassment](#). Back in 2003, the organisation "Lederne" determined that bullying costs approx. two million work days a year.

A large part of the bullying in Danish workplaces will probably never come to light, which, according to Tine Mundbjerg Eriksen, simply underlines the gravity of the problem and the need for further research.

"There are still many things we don't know exactly. For example if the bullying follows the person or the workplace or both. But it's an expensive problem for society and for the individual, so we'd like to dig deeper," says Tine Mundbjerg Eriksen.

## **About the research:**

- All of the results in the new study remain the same, even when the researchers account for factors such as the person's previous sickness absence, attachment to the [labour market](#), personality, the workplace's characteristics, and so on.
- The research article "Long-term consequences of [workplace bullying](#) on sickness absence" has been published in the journal *Labour Economics*.
- Behind the interdisciplinary research is Assistant Professor Tine L. Mundbjerg Eriksen from the Department of Economics and Business Economics at Aarhus BSS, Professor Annie Høgh from the Department of Psychology at the University of Copenhagen and Åse Marie Hansen from the Department of Public Health at the University of Copenhagen.
- The research is based on a study from 2006, which has been compared with data on sickness absence from the years 2007-2011. The results are consistent with other international studies on the subject.

**More information:** Tine L. Mundbjerg Eriksen et al, Long-term consequences of workplace bullying on sickness absence, *Labour Economics* (2016). [DOI: 10.1016/j.labeco.2016.06.008](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2016.06.008)

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