

Connection between exposure and long-term sick leave

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High levels of exposure lead to serious consequences for those who are exposed to gender-based or sexual harassment. A new large registry study shows a connection between exposure and long-term sick leave.

Based on data from the Swedish Work Environment Authority's work environment surveys between 1999 and 2013, Karolinska Institutet, in collaboration with researchers from Gothenburg, Stockholm and Uppsala universities, studied how exposure to gender-based [harassment](#) and sexual harassment interacts with long-term sick leave (longer than 21 days).

The results show an increased risk of long-term sick leave among both women and men who have been subjected to sexual harassment and/or gender-based harassment in the workplace. The study is unique in that it distinguishes between sexual and gender-based harassment, examines relationships with how often the victim has been exposed, and includes men as victims.

Younger women and men, as well as women in general, are more exposed to [sexual harassment](#) than older people. Men of non-Swedish origin are also more exposed to both sexual and [gender](#)-based harassment than men with parents of Swedish origin.

"There seems to be an ability to handle and resist harassment to a certain extent, and for several reasons, but when exposure to abuse in this sense is commonplace, it is more clearly linked to long-term sick leave," says Fredrik Bondestam, director of the Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research at the University of Gothenburg, who is one of several researchers in the study.

In order to actively prevent harassment at work, an active leadership is required, with commitment to fostering a transparent and inclusive work [environment](#), he says. The study also examines whether support from colleagues can reduce the risk of long-term sick leave, but the results are inconclusive.

"The significance of colleagues' support for those exposed to harassment

requires more research. What we do know though is that early detection and action are crucial in general when it comes to prevention of violence more generally. Therefore, it is necessary to be active as a manager and constantly ask for potential experiences of abuse among your employees," says Fredrik Bondestam.

An article about the study is published in the *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health*.

More information: Katrina Blindow et al, Sexual and gender harassment in Swedish workplaces: A prospective cohort study on implications for long-term sickness absence, *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health* (2021). [DOI: 10.5271/sjweh.3971](https://doi.org/10.5271/sjweh.3971)

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