

The collective research programme on ‘Public managers’ role in creating workplace social capital (WSC) and its effect on employees’ well-being and health – a protocol of a longitudinal cohort study’ (PUMA-WSC)

Sickness absence in Denmark is a significant socioeconomic issue with potentially negative consequences for both the individual employee and for the organization as a whole (Danmarks statistik, 2013; Johansen & Lynge, 2008; Gustafson & Marklund, 2011; Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2008). Sickness absence is connected to several factors, including factors that are not directly related to the individual employee’s health, but rather the workplace (Lund et al., 2007; Lund et al., 2009; Alexanderson & Norlund, 2004). The psychological work environment contains a number of these factors, and many studies have proven that there is a connection between psychological work environment and sickness absence (e.g. Lund et al., 2006; Blank et al., 2008). Existing research indicates that both sound management and a good psychological work environment (for example in the form of high workplace social capital) have a positive effect on sickness absence (for example Török et al 2019; Framke et al, 2018, Meng et al, 2018; Kroll et al 2019; Murayama et al., 2012; Oksanen et al, 2010; Hasle et al., 2010).

However, empirical evidence to support these hypotheses is still missing, as are also systematic empirical studies of what sound management is when you wish to reduce sickness absence in the public sector.

The collective research programme ‘PUMA-WSC’ focuses on the connection between management, psychological work environment (workplace social capital) and sickness absence in a larger Danish public organization – Esbjerg municipality. The project builds on several thorough quantitative data sets that have been collected since 2016 in Esbjerg municipality. The project incorporates the data on psychological work environment and workplace social capital in Esbjerg municipality collected among employees at every organizational level with 360-degree management evaluations of all managers at all levels in Esbjerg municipality (in both surveys with samples of more than 8,000 respondents). These data will be correlated with data from the municipality’s registered sickness absence. These data are already collected, but there is an even bigger job in quality control and preparing data and doing systematic empirical analyses of them. Furthermore, Esbjerg municipality will, in the future, collect new data on management, psychological work environment and sickness absence, which will also be included in the project.

The research programme is expected to deliver a significant empirical contribution to the existing research within public management, psychological work environment (including workplace social capital) based on a unique database. Furthermore, the programme will also contribute with highly relevant knowledge on how public organizations can work to create a good psychosocial work environment and reduce sickness absence.

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