

## Mental health

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### **INSTRUMENTAL AND EMOTIONAL SOCIAL SUPPORT AT WORK AND LEISURE TIME: ASSOCIATION WITH SELF-RATED HEALTH AND SICKNESS ABSENCE IN A LONGITUDINAL CONTEXT**

Anna Falkenberg, Mats Nyfjäll, Carina Hellgren, Eva Vingård *Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden*

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**Objectives** Potential associations between sickness absence, self rated health and social support are highly relevant for the current public health research and our aim is to investigate how different aspects of social support at work and in leisure time are associated with SRH and sickness absence.

**Methods** The longitudinal study group consists of 821 employees from the public sector in Sweden 2005–06. Lifestyle factors, subjective ratings of health and social support at work and in leisure time was measured by questionnaires and sickness absence data was derived from the employer's administrative system. The longitudinal effects of five dimensions of social support, at work and during leisure time, on self-rated health and sick absence was calculated, using a proportional odds model.

**Results** The majority had good instrumental support at work and good emotional support in leisure time and only one third had good emotional support at work and one out of ten had zero or only one source of support. Social support was strongly associated with SRH but not with sickness absence; a reason can be that sickness absence is a multifactorial outcome, caused by many complex and interrelated factors.

**Conclusions** Social support was strongly associated with SRH in this longitudinal context and more strongly if the individuals had support from several sources, both at work and during leisure time. Strengthening social support at work and including this concept into work group development can improve SRH of employees. This is important both for managers and co-workers to understand and contemplate.