

Study shows social workers in Sweden face elevated risk of mental disorders

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A [recent study](#) from the Institute of Environmental Medicine published in the *Journal of Affective Disorders* shows worrying trends in common mental illness among social workers in Sweden.

Social workers play a crucial role in supporting vulnerable populations, but their own well-being often remains overlooked. The study found that social workers in Sweden had up to a 30% increase in the risk of common mental disorders, including depression and anxiety, compared to the general working population.

The study is based on Swedish national registers with approximately 3 million workers, including around 26,000 social workers, who were alive and residing in Sweden by 2015. Researchers followed them until they received diagnoses of depression or anxiety/stress-related disorders, or until the latest data available in 2020.

The research team observed several [gender differences](#). Among men, the risks were more pronounced, with up to a 70% increase in diagnoses of mental disorders. In contrast, women faced a more modest increase of up to 20%.

In addition, the study highlighted variations based on specific professional roles within social work, where male social workers with responsibility for assessing home care and personal assistance needs, had the highest risks.

Social workers in Sweden can encounter significant distress related to their work duties. Intimidation attempts, verbal and [physical violence](#), and high stress levels can contribute to the mental health burden. While previous studies hinted at potential risks, this study provides evidence of the elevated incidence of mental disorders among social workers in

Sweden.

Alicia Nevriana, researcher at the Institute of Environmental Medicine and first author of the study, says, "Our findings highlight the urgent need for targeted support and [preventive measures](#) for [social workers](#) to protect their psychological well-being."

More information: Carolina Knihs de Camargo et al, Diagnoses of common mental disorders among social workers in Sweden: A register-based cohort study, *Journal of Affective Disorders* (2024). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jad.2024.03.170](#)

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