

Violence and harassment at work in Denmark

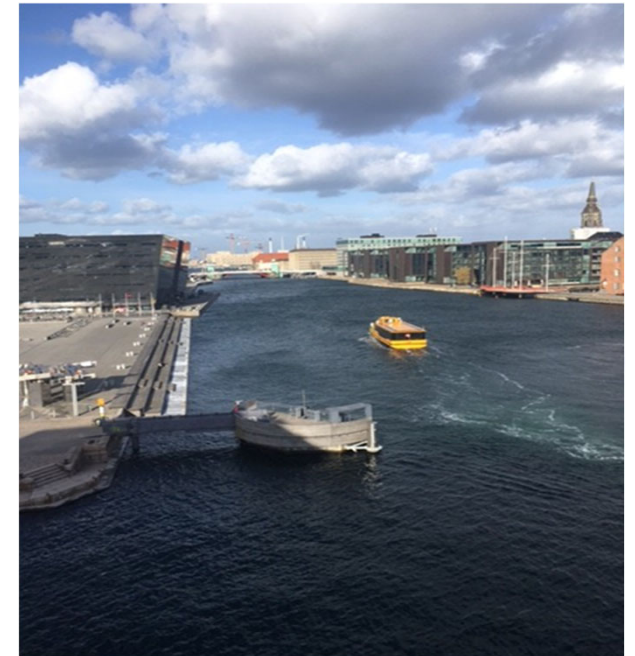
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**National Research Centre for the Working Environment,
Copenhagen, Denmark**

KNS-conference

Kommunalanställdas Nordiska Samarbete

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The National Research Centre for the Working Environment (NFA)

- Is a **sector research institution** under the Ministry of Employment
- Carries out **research and development projects** to help authorities, partners and companies to investigate and identify occupational health and safety problems and develop better prevention methods
- It serves as a **knowledge base** for the administrative and legislative work of the Ministry of Employment
- [About the NFA](#) (in English)
- [Om Det Nationale Forskningscenter for Arbejdsmiljø \(NFA\)](#) (in Danish)



Recent initiatives to improve the work environment in Denmark




The role of OSH legislation in tackling work-related violence and harassment in Denmark

- OSH in Denmark is regulated through a stand-alone OSH law called the Danish Working Environment Act
- The Act is further elaborated and implemented by Executive Orders
- Both the Act and Executive Orders are supervised by the Working Environment Authority (WEA)
- Until 2019 the Danish Working Environment Act implicitly addressed violence and harassment through its objective, which was to create *"a safe and healthy working environment"*.
- With its revision in 2019, the Working Environment Act explicitly included psychosocial risks; creating a *"safe and healthy physical and psychosocial working environment"* became its primary objective
- Obligations associated with such psychosocial risks were clarified and specified through the Executive Order on psychosocial working environment, which came into force in 2020.
- Among other things, this Order explicitly recognizes violence and harassment as a psychosocial risk and provides that, with regard to offensive actions and work-related violence, *"work must be planned, organised and executed responsibly with due regard to health and safety in both short and long term"*.
- Source:
[Preventing and addressing violence and harassment in the world of work through occupational safety and health measures | International Labour Organization 2024](#)

New law on the working environment in 2019

- **Increased focus on the psychosocial working environment**, which for the first time has its own **Executive order** (rules of law which are legally binding).
- This Executive order **provides a better overview of the requirements for the psychosocial working environment**.
- It follows from the Executive order that **it is always the employer's responsibility** to organise the work so it can be carried out in a **safe and healthy manner** in relation to influences in the psychosocial working environment.
- New approaches to **workplace inspection methodology: collaborative approach** and more **focus on prevention**

Work Environment in Denmark
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Home / Regulations / Executive orders / Psychosocial working environment

Executive order on psychosocial working environment

The Danish Working Environment Authority's Executive Order no. 1406 of 26 September 2020 on psychosocial working environment

[Gem i Mit AT](#)

Pursuant to Section 2 a, Section 17 (3), Section 39 (1), Section 41 (2) and (3), Section 43 (1) and Section 84 of the Danish Working Environment Act, cf. Consolidated Act no. 674 of 25 May 2020, the following is determined by law:

Part 1 - Scope and definitions

Section 1. The Executive Order concerns psychosocial working environment

Subsection (2). The Executive Order contains detailed rules supplementing working environment legislation

Section 2. The Executive Order applies to any work performed for an employer.

Subsection (2). The Executive Order applies to

1. work in the employer's private household, with the exception of Sections 9-12, 28 and 31-34,
2. work carried out exclusively by the members of the employer's family belonging to the employer's household, with the exception of Sections 8-12, 22-24, 28 and 31-34; and
3. work carried out by military personnel, which can be considered as actual military service, with the exception of Sections 9-12, 28 and 31-34.
4. Subsection (3). The Executive Order also applies to work that is not performed for an employer, with the exception of Sections 9-12, 28 and 31-34.

Section 3. For risks of work-related violence outside working hours, Chapter 1, Sections 5-11, 25, 31-34 and Chapter 4 apply.

Subsection (2). Subsection (1) only applies to work performed for an employer, with the exception of the types of work for an employer mentioned in Section 2 (2).

Section 4. The obligation under this Executive Order rests with employers, business managers, supervisors and other employees, providers of services, designers and consultants, etc. in accordance with the general rules of the Danish Working Environment Act, cf. Section 2 and Chapter 4 of the Act.

[Link: Executive order on psychosocial working environment - Arbejdstilsynet \(at.dk\) \(in English\)](#)

The Executive Order on psychosocial working environment and ILO Convention 190 on violence and harassment

- Offensive actions (*krænkende handlinger*) are defined in the Executive Order as “*situations where one or more persons grossly or several times expose one or more other persons in the company to bullying, sexual harassment or other degrading behaviour in the workplace. The behaviour must be perceived as degrading by the person being subject to this behaviour*” (section 23).
- Meanwhile, work-related violence (*arbejdsrelateret vold*) refers to violent acts by third parties which include “*physical violence in the form of attacks against the body and psychological violence in the form of threats and other offensive behaviour, including harassment*” (section 25).
- These definitions are comprehensive enough to cover occurrences of violence and harassment as defined by Convention No. 190. Although gender-based violence and harassment (C.190, Art. 1.1(a)) is not explicitly mentioned in the Executive Order, it is implicitly addressed through the “degrading” characteristic of offensive actions.
- Source:
[Preventing and addressing violence and harassment in the world of work through occupational safety and health measures | International Labour Organization 2024](#)

Denmark has ratified the ILO Convention 190

International Labour Standards

Denmark ratifies the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190)

Convention No.190 is the first international labour standard to address violence and harassment in the world of work comprehensively

6 June 2024



Ratification ceremony of Convention No. 190 on 6 June 2024: Ms Ane Halsboe-Jørgensen, Minister for Employment of Denmark and Gilbert F. Houngbo, Director-General of the ILO

Convention No. 190 is the first international labour standard to address violence and harassment in the world of work comprehensively and affirms the fundamental right of individuals to a workplace free from violence and harassment.

Together with [Recommendation No. 206](#), it establishes a framework for action, and a unique opportunity to shape a future of work based on dignity and respect.

Political agreement in 2020 on national targets for the working environment

National target: Fewer employees should be exposed to extensive psychosocial strains

Workplaces should work actively to prevent and manage risks in the psychosocial work environment, in particular:

- imbalance between high demands and low influence at work, no possibilities for development
- **violence and harassment**

Sector specific focus:

Efforts for improvement should be **concentrated on sectors with particular high prevalence** of these psychosocial risks

Sectors with a high prevalence of violence and harassment in Denmark

Residential care institutions and home care

Hospitals

Education

Day-care institutions

Police, emergency services and prisons

Passenger transport

Hotel and camping

Together these seven sectors account for approximately

51 % of

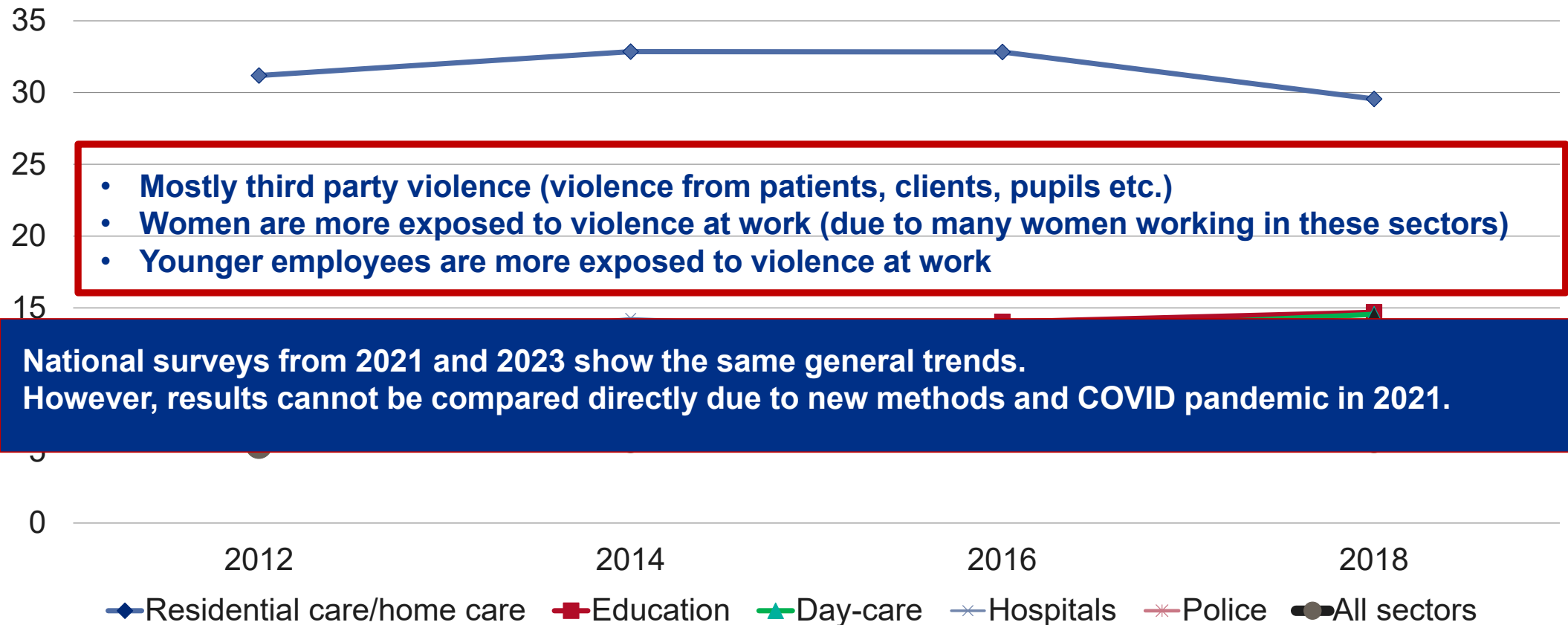
the national prevalence of employees reporting harassment, violence or threats of violence.

Results from National Surveys



Workplace Violence in Denmark: Most Affected Sectors

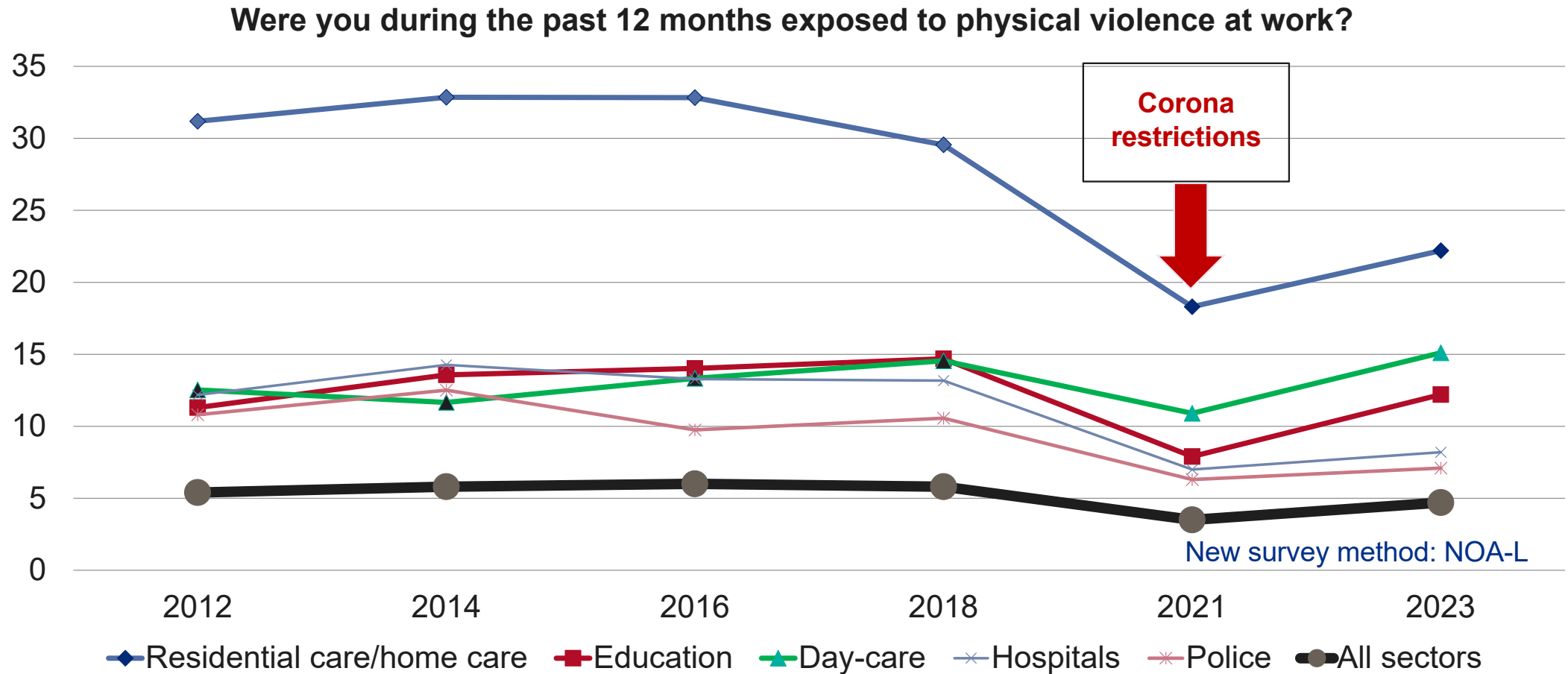
Were you during the past 12 months exposed to physical violence at work?



- Mostly third party violence (violence from patients, clients, pupils etc.)
- Women are more exposed to violence at work (due to many women working in these sectors)
- Younger employees are more exposed to violence at work

National surveys from 2021 and 2023 show the same general trends. However, results cannot be compared directly due to new methods and COVID pandemic in 2021.

Workplace Violence in Denmark: Most Affected Sectors



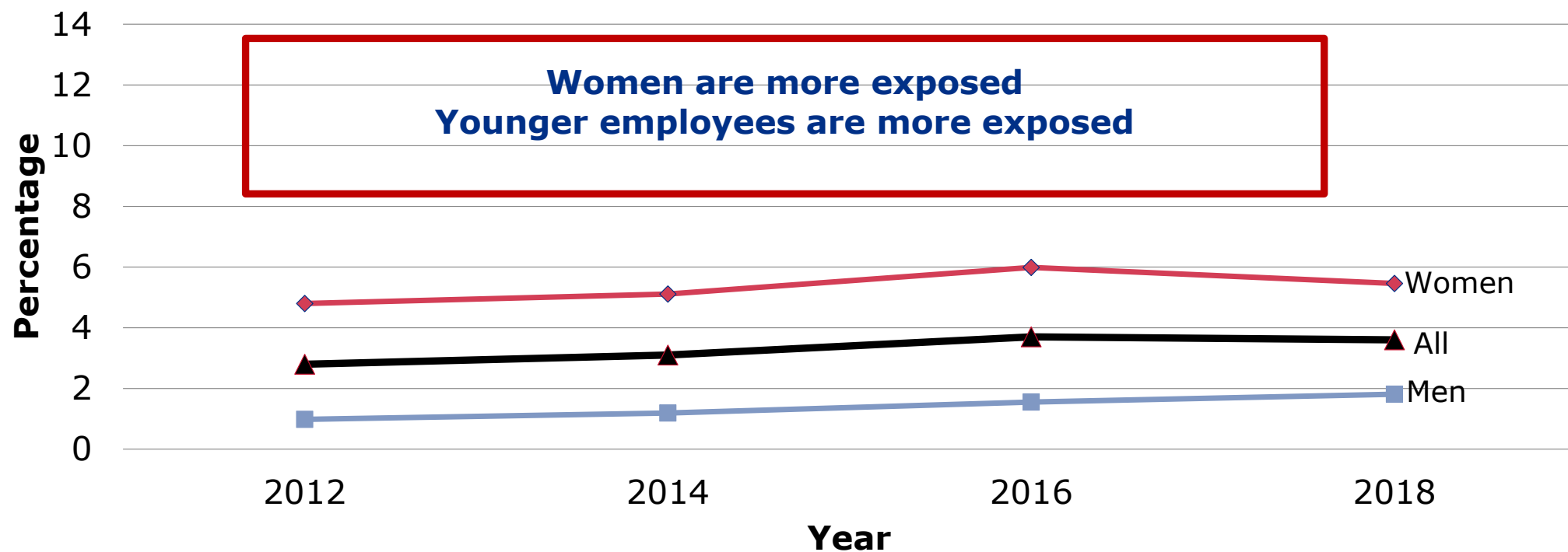
Were you during the past 12 months exposed to bullying at work?



Prevalence of workplace bullying in the Danish workforce during the past 12 months

“Bullying occurs when a person is repeatedly subjected to unpleasant or negative actions at work over a long period of time. In order to call something bullying, the person being bullied must feel that it is difficult to defend themselves.”

Were you during the past 12 months exposed to sexual harassment at work?



Prevalence of sexual harassment in the Danish workforce during the past 12 months

Violence and harassment at work in Denmark

Who does it come from?

Type of violence and harassment at work	Colleagues and leaders	Others (patients, clients, pupils etc.)
Bullying	94%	6%
Sexual harassment	68%	32%
Threats	32%	68%
Physical violence	9%	91%

Source: Pejtersen & Holt (2021) A study of the extent of abusive behaviour and conflicts in the Danish labour market (in Danish)
 En undersøgelse af omfanget af krænkende handlinger og konflikter på det danske arbejdsmarked. VIVE (The Danish Center for Social Science Research)

General recommendations for preventing harassment and violence at work

Positive workplace culture

- Open communication, mutual respect, and inclusivity
- Handle conflicts in a constructive way
- Train employees and managers about recognizing, preventing, and responding to negative acts

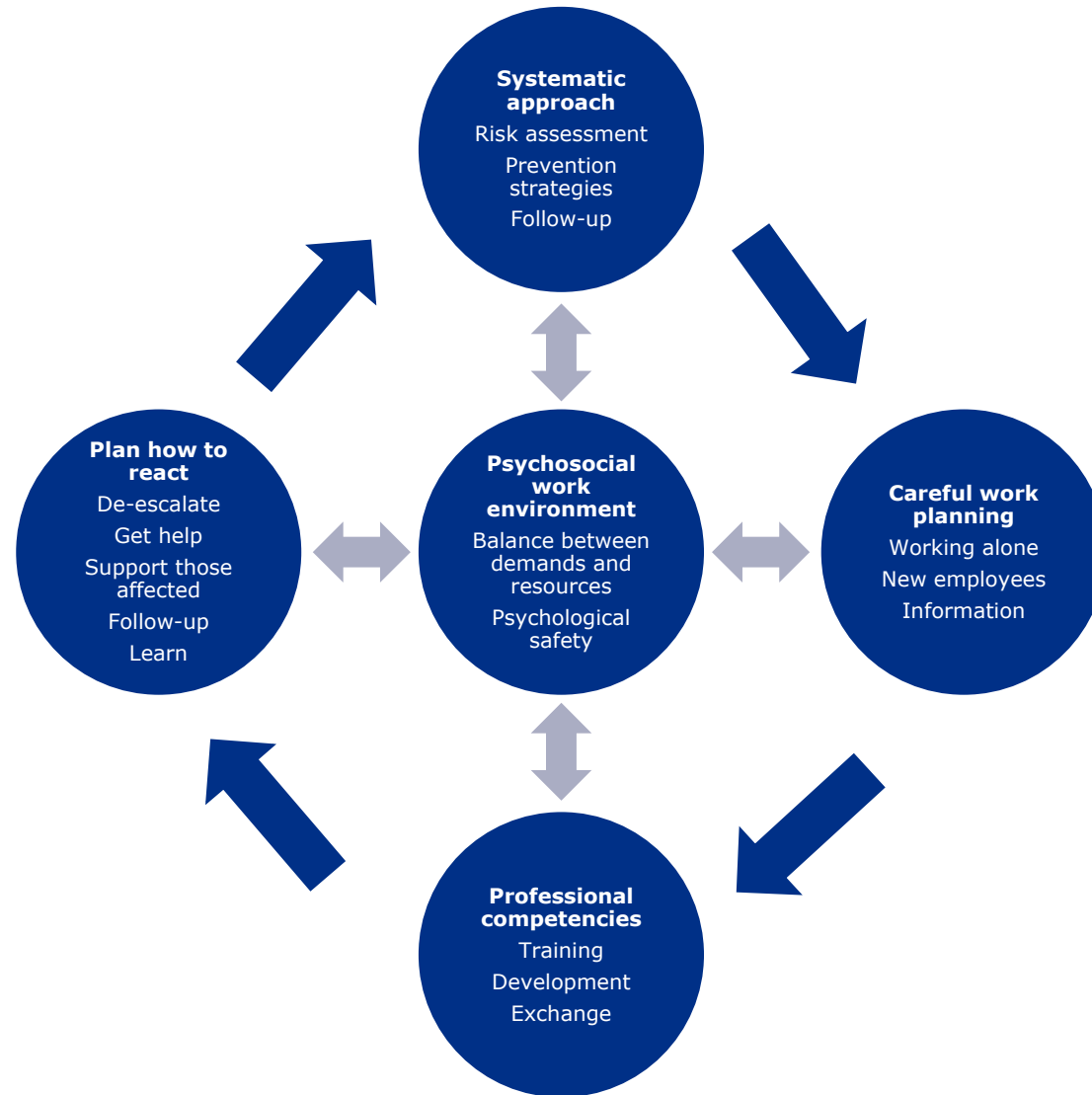
Clear policies and procedures

- Develop – together with employees - a comprehensive anti-bullying and workplace violence policy
- Clearly define unacceptable behaviors and outline consequences
- Ensure policies comply with legal and regulatory requirements

Effective Reporting and Response Systems

- Create safe and confidential channels for employees to report incidents
- Ensure prompt and impartial investigations of complaints
- Protect whistleblowers from retaliation

Important aspects for preventing violence from patients or clients



Take home message

- Denmark has a long tradition for focussing on and measuring developments in the psychosocial working environment - including the prevention of violence and harrassment
- Despite many efforts further improvements are still needed
- Therefore a number of national initiatives have been started in 2019/2020



An executive order for psychosocial working conditions



More dialogue focused workplace inspection tools



Sector specific targets for improvement

The effects of these initiatives (and a variety of other activities related to them) will be followed by the national survey NOA-L which will be conducted every other year

[National Overvågning af Arbejdsmiljøet blandt Lønmodtagere - Arbejdstilsynet](#)

Thank you very much for your attention!

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Links and References



Links

- Political agreement on national targets for the working environment (in Danish)
[Regeringen og arbejdsmarkedets parter er enige om nye mål for arbejdsmiljøet \(bm.dk\)](#)
- The new working environment law expands WEA's toolbox (Danish Working Environment Authority, WEA), enabling companies that are actively engaged in improving the working environment to enter into agreements with WEA to solve their working environment problems. To this purpose new types of injunctions and offers have been introduced. See more details here: [Bekendtgørelse om psykisk arbejdsmiljø - Arbejdstilsynet \(at.dk\) \(in Danish\)](#)
- [Executive order on psychosocial working environment - Arbejdstilsynet \(at.dk\)](#)
- Recommendations from the Expert Committee on the Evaluation of Work Environment Efforts (September 2018).
[Ekspertudvalg om arbejdsmiljø afleverer anbefalinger til regeringen \(bm.dk\) \(in Danish\)](#)
- [Reports, tools and articles about violence at work from NFA: Vold og trusler på arbejdet](#)

Some related references

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