

ISF Report 2013:16

The Swedish Social
Insurance Agency's Case
Handling of Sickness
Benefit

From a Gender Perspective

Swedish Social Insurance Inspectorate

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Summary

The Swedish Social Insurance Inspectorate (Inspektionen för socialförsäkringen, ISF) is an independent supervisory agency for the Swedish social insurance system. The objectives of the agency are to strengthen compliance with legislation and other statutes, and to improve the efficiency of the social insurance system through system supervision and efficiency analysis and evaluation.

The ISF's work is mainly conducted on a project basis and is commissioned by the Government or initiated autonomously by the agency. This report has been commissioned by the Government.

Background

The difference in sickness rates between men and women in Sweden has increased in recent years. More women than men are on sick leave and women tend to have longer sickness spells than men. The Government has therefore given several agencies different missions in order to obtain a better understanding and explanation of this situation.

Objectives

The objectives of this report are firstly to explore how the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, henceforth referred to as the Agency, ensures gender mainstreaming in their organisation and secondly how the Agency ensures gender equality in their case handling with regard to sickness benefit.

Methods

The study uses a quantitative and a qualitative approach. Register data, from the Agency, which contains information on sickness spells that began during the period of 2010–2012 in combination with information on measures taken in each case with regard to men and women, has been analysed. In addition, semi-structured interviews have been conducted with case officers handling sickness benefit cases and have been analysed using content analysis. In order to analyse the Agency's work with regard to the gender mainstreaming in their operations, document studies have also been carried out.

Findings

The study shows that differences between men and women can be identified in the Agency's handling of cases. Women are more likely to receive early and active measures when on sick leave than men. Furthermore, men are more likely to return to work earlier, which leaves women receiving sickness benefits for longer spells. These differences may be justifiable, but this information can be of value for the Agency to take into consideration in their efforts to ensure gender equality.

Another major finding is that the Agency's efforts to achieve gender mainstreaming have not affected internal management. Gender equality is seen as part of the Agency's efforts to ensure equal treatment. As a consequence, gender mainstreaming and gender as a concept have almost been removed from the Agency's governing documents. It has therefore been difficult to follow what is being done in the area of gender equality in social insurance, especially in the case of sickness insurance. It is also difficult to follow how the Agency ensures gender equality in its handling of cases related to sickness benefit. The Agency needs to clarify the role of gender perspectives in its efforts to bring about equal treatment.