

Breaking the bond: abusive supervision and workplace mistreatment as predictors of anti-work attitudes and turnover intentions

Samantha Sinclair

Linnaeus University, Växjö, Sweden

Artur Nilsson

*Linköping University, Linköping, Sweden and
Bergen University College, Bergen, Norway, and*

Kristoffer Holm

Malmö University, Malmö, Sweden

Received 25 March 2026
Revised 19 May 2026
Accepted 20 June 2026

Abstract

Purpose – In recent years, negative attitudes toward work have been spreading in online communities, yet research on the factors that shape these attitudes is scarce. One way in which negative attitudes toward work manifest is through anti-work orientation, a contentious rejection of work as a determinant of one's self-worth or worth to society. This study examined whether perceptions of abusive supervision and workplace mistreatment (bullying, cyberaggression, sexual harassment, physical violence, and threats of physical violence) predict anti-work orientation and turnover intentions.

Design/methodology/approach – A preregistered survey study was conducted with a stratified sample of Swedish employees ($N = 2,395$).

Findings – In line with our expectations, abusive supervision and workplace mistreatment predicted both anti-work orientation and turnover intentions. Mediation analyses further demonstrated that anti-work orientation partially mediated the effects of mistreatment and abusive supervision on turnover intentions.

Originality/value – This study is among the first to empirically examine the organizational antecedents of anti-work orientation – an emerging construct with growing societal relevance. The findings suggest that anti-work sentiments may emerge as a psychological response to interpersonal workplace mistreatment and that they may fuel increased intentions to resign.

Keywords Anti-work, Workplace mistreatment, Abusive supervision, Turnover intention

Paper type Research article

Recent dramatic changes in the work environment due to factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Kniffin *et al.*, 2021) and rapid advancements in automation (Frey and Osborne, 2017) are believed to have fueled a growing disillusionment towards work, contributing to the popularity of the so-called anti-work movement (Alliger and McEachern, 2023). A notable symbol of this movement is the online community “r/antiwork” on Reddit, which surged in membership from 13,000 in 2019 to 2.8 million just a few years later (Medlar *et al.*, 2022). Within this community, individuals share experiences of various injustices, ponder crises of meaning and the intrinsic value of work, express frustration regarding job conditions, and

© Samantha Sinclair, Artur Nilsson and Kristoffer Holm. Published by Emerald Publishing Limited. This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) licence. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this article (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this licence may be seen at <http://creativecommons.org/licences/by/4.0/>

Funding: This work was supported by Crafoordska Stiftelsen (award no. 20220590).



Journal of Managerial Psychology
Emerald Publishing Limited
e-ISSN: 1758-7778
p-ISSN: 0268-3946
DOI 10.1108/JMP-03-2026-0392

strategize on how to resist workplace norms in often unconventional ways (Scruggs, 2024). By the end of 2021, r/antiwork was the fastest-growing community on Reddit. At the same time, mainstream media covered the “Great Resignation” – an economic trend in which people voluntarily quit their jobs. This media coverage was credited with popularizing the subreddit and accelerating its growth (Medlar *et al.*, 2022). The anti-work sentiments also extend beyond online platforms, and industry workforce analysts predict that the anti-work movement could lead to significant, lasting changes in organizations and the global economy (Cheung, 2021).

Supporters of the anti-work movement challenge conventional norms such as the belief that work embodies virtue and character-building and position their beliefs and actions in opposition to these norms (Graeber, 2018). While other normative attitudes, such as work centrality, are similar in the sense that they express beliefs about how central work ought to be (Paullay *et al.*, 1994), they do not capture opposing, generalized beliefs against work. Hence, anti-work orientation and work centrality are both conceptually and empirically distinct (Scruggs, 2024). Importantly, low levels of protestant work ethic, work centrality, or a sense of calling do not necessarily indicate hostility toward work; they may simply reflect a lack of support or absence of belief. In contrast, anti-work orientation (Scruggs, 2024, p. 3), defined as a “contentious rejection of work as a determinant of one’s self-worth or worth to society”, reflects a broad and active form of *opposition* to work and work-promoting beliefs. The anti-work movement stems not from a single ideology, but rather from a mix of interconnected issues shared by both those on the political far left and far right, and its supporters are particularly found among younger and low-skilled workers (Sinclair *et al.*, 2025).

Presumably, anti-work attitudes may emerge in response to exclusion from meaningful or decent work (Scruggs, 2024) or as a form of resistance against challenging or toxic work relationships. For example, Olson *et al.* (2024) discuss the possibility that social injustices or mistreatment may shape an individual’s appraisal of work. When employees encounter repeated mistreatment, this can result in feelings of powerlessness and a lack of control over their situation (Colquitt *et al.*, 2014; Cropanzano *et al.*, 2001). Eventually, they might struggle to justify the value of work (Lepisto and Pratt, 2017) and instead seek meaning elsewhere. Collective opposition, such as expressions of hostility toward institutions, can provide mistreated individuals with an alternative sense of meaning in life (Elnakouri *et al.*, 2022). In this context, rejecting the idea of work as something valuable may become a meaningful stance that is shared with and validated by others. This aligns with reactance theory, which would suggest that when individuals feel restricted in their workplace, they may mentally reject work to regain a sense of autonomy (Rosenberg and Siegel, 2018). Consequently, those who endure ongoing mistreatment by supervisors or co-workers may turn away from work as a source of value and meaning, leading to the development of anti-work attitudes as an attempt to reclaim some level of control over their lives (Scruggs, 2024).

Although anti-work attitudes appear to be quite widespread among contemporary workers in the USA (Scruggs, 2024), and Northern Europe (Sinclair *et al.*, 2025), research has yet to explore the factors that contribute to their emergence thoroughly. In the present study, we aim to examine whether experiences of workplace mistreatment and abuse correspond to higher levels of anti-work orientation, and whether anti-work orientation mediates the effects of these predictors on intentions to leave.

We draw on the Job Demands-Resources theory (JD-R; Bakker and Demerouti, 2017) as an overarching framework to understand how organizational stressors, such as workplace mistreatment and abusive supervision, might be related to anti-work attitudes and turnover intentions. The JD-R theory posits that job characteristics can be grouped into two categories: demands and resources (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). Job demands encompass physical, social, or organizational aspects of work that require continuous effort and are linked to physiological or psychological strain. Conversely, job resources refer to elements that support employees in achieving work objectives, alleviate the impact of demands, or promote personal growth and development (Bakker *et al.*, 2023). These categories give rise to two distinct psychological pathways: a health impairment process, where excessive demands may lead to stress and burnout, and a motivational process, in which resources enhance employees’

engagement at work. Within several empirical studies, workplace mistreatment has been conceived of as demands (e.g. [Ho, 2025](#); [van den Broeck et al., 2011](#)), with clear associations to strain-related outcomes (e.g. [Elovainio et al., 2001](#); [McCord and Yu, 2024](#); [Vignoli et al., 2015](#)), consistent with the health impairment path. Indeed, interpersonal relationships at work play a central role in shaping employee well-being, motivation, and organizational attachment. Research consistently shows that experiences of bullying or harassment reduce job satisfaction and weaken organizational commitment ([Tuckey et al., 2022](#)), as well as increase the intention to leave ([Nielsen and Einarsen, 2012](#)). When employees are exposed to bullying or harassment, they may interpret these events as a failure on the part of the employer to uphold its fundamental responsibility to provide a safe and respectful work environment ([Parzefall and Salin, 2010](#)). If such mistreatment is allowed to continue, organizational inaction can be perceived as a breach of the psychological contract (i.e. the implicit set of mutual obligations between employee and employer), resulting in feelings of betrayal and violation ([Morrison and Robinson, 1997](#); [Topa et al., 2022](#)).

Exposure to workplace mistreatment has been directly linked to higher levels of turnover intentions ([Sun et al., 2025](#)), suggesting demotivational outcomes of being subjected to mistreatment. Employee intention to leave is important for organizations because it often predicts actual turnover ([Kivimäki et al., 2007](#)). Additionally, even when employees who consider leaving actually end up staying, these intentions can increase the risk of absenteeism, counterproductive work behaviors, or reduced productivity ([Hom et al., 2012](#); [Liu and Eberly, 2014](#)). In the present study, we seek to extend previous work by examining whether mistreatment will have consequences not only for intentions to leave but also for a negative appraisal of work itself. Importantly, dissatisfaction stemming from workplace mistreatment does not necessarily remain confined to the relationship with the perpetrator. Instead, such experiences can prompt individuals to question the inherent value of their labor and their place within the workplace ([Ciulla, 2020](#); [Lips-Wiersma et al., 2020](#)). Employees who feel disrespected by supervisors or by the organization more broadly often experience a diminished sense of meaning in their work ([Pavlish and Hunt, 2012](#)), and negative feelings may generalize to the organization as a whole ([Salin and Notelaers, 2017](#)). We therefore propose that in some cases, these sentiments may expand even further, prompting individuals to question not only their employer or workplace but the institution of work itself. Supporting this perspective, [Scruggs' \(2023\)](#) content analysis of posts on the Reddit (r/antiwork) forum identified “abuse” as one of the dominant themes, capturing sentiments of being undervalued, disrespected, and mistreated by managers. These findings highlight the importance of examining interpersonal mistreatment as a potential explanation for the emergence of anti-work attitudes.

Aims and hypotheses

Although extensive research has documented that workplace mistreatment predicts disengagement and turnover intentions, these reactions remain job- and organization-specific. By contrast, anti-work orientation reflects a broader attitudinal stance toward work as a social institution, rather than dissatisfaction with a particular role, supervisor, or employer. To our knowledge, no previous study has examined whether concrete workplace experiences of mistreatment or abuse contribute to the emergence of such generalized anti-work beliefs. The present study addresses this gap by empirically testing whether workplace mistreatment and abusive supervision predict employees' anti-work orientation, and whether this orientation helps explain employees' intentions to withdraw from their current job. We focus on whether a broad range of interpersonal workplace mistreatment experiences—including workplace bullying, cyberaggression, sexual harassment, physical violence, threats of physical violence, as well as abusive supervision (openly hostile, harsh, or insulting behavior)—serve as antecedents to anti-work attitudes. By examining these diverse forms of mistreatment and abusive supervision, we aim to clarify whether negative interpersonal

experiences at work contribute to the development of broader disaffection toward work as a social institution. Based on the literature on workplace bullying, harassment, and abusive supervision outlined above, we hypothesized that:

- H1. Anti-work orientation is positively associated with experiences of (a) workplace mistreatment, and (b) abusive supervision.
- H2. Turnover intention is positively associated with experiences of (a) workplace mistreatment, and (b) abusive supervision.

Furthermore, we wanted to examine whether mistreatment and abusive supervision contribute to turnover intentions through anti-work orientation. We thus hypothesized that:

- H3. Anti-work orientation is positively associated with turnover intentions.
- H4. Anti-work orientation mediates the relationship between negative treatment ((a) workplace mistreatment; (b) abusive supervision) and turnover intentions.

Method

Participants and preregistration

A sample consisting of Swedish adults, which was stratified on gender, age, and geographic location, was recruited from a nationally representative panel of survey respondents managed by an independent polling company. We excluded 110 participants who failed at least two attention check questions and another 24 who completed the study in less than a fourth of the median response time, which left us with a final sample of 2395 (46.7% men, 52.1% women, 0.5% other; age: $M = 42.2$, $SD = 12.1$). The median level of work experience was 16–20 years, and 93.5% of the participants were currently employed (78.8% full-time). Out of those who worked, 59.9% did so in high-skilled occupations. The level of education in the total sample was somewhat higher than the national average (37.0% had tertiary education and 59.9% had a university degree), while median income (300000–500000 SEK) was similar to the national average (Statistics Sweden, 2025).

The study and hypotheses were pre-registered. The pre-registration is openly accessible: https://osf.io/tkvhe/?view_only=7123ca449a354c1eb3550445c963e6e6

Measures

All participants responded to the anti-work orientation scale and demographic items. Participants who reported that they currently had a job ($n = 2240$) also reported their experienced mistreatment, abusive supervision, and turnover intentions.

Anti-work orientation and turnover intentions. We used a 10-item scale originally developed and validated in the US (Scruggs, 2023, 2024) and subsequently translated into Swedish (Sinclair et al., 2025). Similar to previous studies, it was highly reliable ($\alpha = 0.90$). Sample items include “We are manipulated into believing that work is foundational to our worth in life” and “I feel an urge to push back against the value we place on work”. The participants responded on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = “Do not agree at all” to 7 = “Completely agree”). Turnover intentions were captured with one item from the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ III; Burr et al., 2019): “How often do you consider looking for a new job?” (1 = “Never/rarely” – 5 = “All the time”).

Workplace mistreatment and abuse. Five items from the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (Burr et al., 2019) measured whether the participant had been the victim of workplace bullying, cyberaggression, sexual harassment, physical violence, and threats of physical violence at the workplace over the last 12 months. We constructed an index of general workplace mistreatment based on these items ($\alpha = 0.91$; corrected item-total correlation ≥ 0.72). Prior to this, we confirmed that each of the items correlated extremely similarly with

the anti-work orientation scale to make sure that combining them into an index would not mask variation in the relationships.

The participants responded to one additional item measuring exposure to abusive supervision (“My supervisor was abusive, saying or doing things to me that were openly hostile, harsh, or insulting”; Matthews *et al.*, 2022). All of these items were measured on a 5-point scale (1 = “Never/Rarely” to 5 = “All the time”).

Demographics. The participants reported gender, age, level of education, work experience, occupational status, income, and occupation. Annual income was indicated by ticking one of the following alternatives: “Less than 200,000 Swedish kronor”, “201 000–300 000”, “301 000–500 000”, “501 000–1000 000 or more”, “prefer not to respond/don’t know”. The occupations were subsequently coded into high-vs low-skilled (i.e. requiring vs not requiring higher education; Sinclair *et al.*, 2025). Because the data collection was part of a larger project, additional measures that fall outside the scope of this paper were also collected.

Analyses

We report correlations between workplace mistreatment, turnover intentions, demographic variables, and anti-work ideology, and the unique contributions of each variable to predicting anti-work ideology based on a hierarchical linear regression analysis. We ran a model with mistreatment and abusive supervision entered first, followed by demographic variables, to test the hypotheses. We ran mediation analysis using the “medmod” module in Jamovi 2.6. We report correlations, interaction effects, and indirect effects with 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals (10000 resamples) to deal with deviations from normality.

Results

Correlations between all variables are reported in Table 1. Anti-work orientation correlated with general workplace mistreatment [0.21, 0.28] and abusive supervision [0.30, 0.38], as well as turnover intentions [0.28, 0.36]. It also correlated negatively with work experience, income, and age (95% BcA CI; see Table 1). As expected, workplace mistreatment [0.24] and abusive supervision [0.38] correlated significantly with turnover intentions. These findings thus provide clear support for Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3.

Abusive supervision ($\beta = 0.29$) and, to a lesser extent, general mistreatment ($\beta = 0.10$) uniquely predicted anti-work orientation ($p < 0.001$; $R^2 = 12.5\%$), in line with H1. The effect of abusive supervision held up adjusting for demographic variables ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$) while the effect of general mistreatment did not ($\beta = 0.03$, $p = 0.30$); and work experience ($\beta = -0.18$, $p < 0.001$), income ($\beta = -0.07$, $p = 0.002$), and high (vs low) skilled occupation ($\beta = -0.05$, $p = 0.039$) once again had unique negative effects ($R^2 = 17.2\%$, tolerance ≥ 0.34).

Consistent with H4, mediation analyses revealed indirect effects of abusive supervision (indirect effect = 0.074[0.058, 0.091]; direct effect = 0.31[0.27, 0.35]; 19.2% mediation) and particularly general mistreatment (indirect effect = 0.113[0.089, 0.136]; direct effect = 0.28 [0.22, 0.34]; 28.6% mediation) on turnover intentions through antiwork orientation ($p < 0.001$). These results suggest that although abusive supervision is more strongly correlated with anti-work orientation, the effects of mistreatment on anti-work orientation are more likely to result in turnover intentions.

Discussion

The present study contributes to the limited but growing body of literature on anti-work attitudes by examining whether workplace mistreatment and abusive supervision predict these attitudes. Our findings suggest that experiencing abusive supervision and (to a lesser extent) other forms of workplace mistreatment, such as bullying or sexual harassment, is indeed linked to forming perceptions of work as harmful or negative. As expected, these experiences are also linked to increased consideration of looking for work elsewhere. Over time, it is possible that

Table 1. Zero-order correlations between antiwork orientation, mistreatment, abusive supervision, turnover intentions, and demographic variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Anti-work orientation										
2. Workplace mistreatment	0.24***									
3. Abusive supervision	0.34***	0.51***								
4. Turnover intentions	0.32***	0.24***	0.38***							
5. Work experience	-0.27***	-0.38***	-0.26***	-0.21***						
6. High (vs low)- skilled occupation	0.00	0.15***	0.07**	0.00	-0.18***					
7. Income	-0.13***	-0.05*	-0.03	-0.06*	0.16***	0.27***				
8. Education	-0.03	0.02	0.01	0.02	-0.12***	0.48***	0.19***			
9. Female (vs male) gender	-0.01	-0.09***	-0.08***	0.01	0.03	-0.04	-0.12***	0.00		
10. Age	-0.23***	-0.37***	-0.22***	-0.18***	0.79***	-0.14***	0.12***	-0.07***	0.79***	

Note(s): * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Source(s): Authors' own work

negative experiences such as these could eventually erode access to meaningful work (Kiefer, 2005) and affect well-being and mental health (Suggala *et al.*, 2021). In response, these employees may perceive the work system as broken, perhaps attributing the negative experiences to work itself. It would then make sense to increasingly distance oneself from viewing work as a measure of value or self-worth and consequently seek to live in ways that diverge from conventional societal norms (Weeks, 2011). As such, an anti-work orientation could be endorsed as a form of resistance or as a way to restore justice against the grievances imposed by interpersonal mistreatment. This would align with reactance theory (Brehm, 1966), which proposes that when individuals feel that their autonomy or freedoms are being restricted or taken away, they are driven to reclaim those freedoms, which often manifests as adopting beliefs and behaviors that contradict the perceived source of threat or limitation. If gaining access to better job opportunities is not feasible, one way to assert psychological agency when being mistreated is to mentally reject work itself and foster an oppositional stance against dominant belief systems that equate work with worth (Elnakouri *et al.*, 2022; Scruggs, 2024). In this process, individuals may regain a sense of autonomy, and viewing these belief systems promoting “work as worth” as pervasive and hegemonic (restricting freedom of thought, for instance) can further strengthen feelings of reactance.

These results align with prior research indicating that negative interpersonal experiences at work can erode employees’ psychological safety, trust in leadership, and sense of belonging (e.g. Bakker and Demerouti, 2017; Salin and Notelaers, 2017; Tuckey *et al.*, 2022). However, the emergence of anti-work attitudes as a distinct psychological outcome expands the scope of previously known consequences. Rather than merely disengaging or withdrawing from specific roles or organizations, affected individuals may generalize their negative experiences to the broader concept of work itself, potentially leading to cynicism, reduced career aspirations, or avoidance behaviors, such as actively seeking non-traditional work arrangements or rejecting conventional career paths.

We also examined whether workplace mistreatment and abusive supervision are linked to increased intentions to quit one’s job, through the formation of anti-work orientation. As expected, anti-work orientation was positively associated with turnover intentions. Moreover, abusive supervision had an indirect effect via anti-work orientation. This suggests that when employees experience abusive supervision, they are more likely to develop anti-work attitudes, which then increase their intention to leave. This aligns with past research showing that the quality of interpersonal treatment by supervisors has an immediate and emotionally resonant impact on employees (Dai and Xie, 2016). Moreover, we found that while abusive supervision was more strongly correlated with anti-work orientation, mistreatment has a greater total impact on turnover intentions through anti-work orientation. This means that when mistreatment broadly defined (e.g. bullying, sexual or physical harassment) fosters anti-work attitudes, these significantly drive turnover intentions, suggesting the possibility that the behavioral consequences of anti-work orientation may depend not only on its intensity, but also on the nature of the workplace experiences that give rise to it. For example, when anti-work beliefs develop in response to abusive supervision, they may reflect a highly salient but relationally bounded reaction (negative feelings toward one specific person), potentially leaving room for alternative coping strategies such as job redesign or supervisor change. In contrast, when anti-work orientation emerges in response to broader forms of mistreatment, such as bullying, harassment, or threats, it may reflect a more pervasive sense that work environments are fundamentally unsafe or illegitimate. In such cases, anti-work attitudes may be more closely tied to motivation to leave, thereby producing a stronger indirect effect on turnover intentions.

Our findings thus suggest that antiwork orientation is a meaningful psychological explanatory factor linking mistreatment and abusive supervision to turnover intentions. This indicates that anti-work attitudes may serve as a cognitive-emotional bridge between mistreatment and withdrawal behaviors, adding nuance to traditional models (e.g. the Job Demands-Resources theory; Bakker and Demerouti, 2017, or the unfolding model of turnover;

[Mitchell and Lee, 2001](#)) by showing how attitudinal shifts may precede behavioral intentions to leave. Importantly, our findings extend existing models of turnover by highlighting a qualitatively different psychological process underlying withdrawal intentions: Traditional models of turnover typically conceptualize turnover intentions as responses to dissatisfaction with one's current job, supervisor, or organization, often motivated by the pursuit of improved fit elsewhere. In contrast, anti-work orientation reflects a broader attitudinal shift in which negative workplace experiences are generalized beyond the immediate employment context to the institution of work itself. Rather than merely seeking a different role or employer, individuals high in anti-work orientation may become actively hostile toward dominant norms that frame work as a central source of worth and identity. From this perspective, turnover intentions may represent not only an intention to exit a particular job, but a deeper form of disengagement that reflects rejection of conventional career trajectories altogether. By identifying anti-work orientation as a mediator between workplace mistreatment/abuse and turnover intentions, the present study thus adds a novel attitudinal layer to theories of employee withdrawal, suggesting that interpersonal experiences at work may shape how individuals relate to work more generally, with implications that extend beyond organizational boundaries.

Practical implications

Anti-work attitudes are complex and likely to be shaped by a range of psychological, social, and structural factors, many of which may fall outside the direct influence of employers. However, the present study is concerned with identifying antecedents of these attitudes that fall within the organization's sphere of control. By focusing on the quality of interpersonal relationships and interpersonal treatment at work, our findings offer implications for human resource practices. Specifically, they highlight the importance of fostering respectful and decent work environments as a means of reducing anti-work sentiment and promoting more positive employee attitudes toward work. This might be accomplished by implementing robust anti-harassment policies and leadership training.

Importantly, organizations should recognize that the impact of mistreatment extends beyond immediate performance metrics and may have the power to alter how individuals relate to the concept of work itself, as well as withdrawal intentions. Interventions should thus not only aim to prevent mistreatment but also to restore positive work identities among those affected. Interventions aimed at fostering a strong social community (i.e. high-quality interpersonal relationships and a sense of connectedness among employees; [Kozlowski and Ilgen, 2006](#)) may mitigate feelings of alienation that could otherwise contribute to anti-work sentiment.

As anti-work orientation differs from previously studied outcomes such as job dissatisfaction or organizational cynicism in that it entails a generalized rejection of work as a meaningful or morally valuable pursuit, this distinction also has implications beyond individual organizations. If adverse workplace experiences foster negative attitudes not only toward specific jobs but toward work itself, this may contribute to broader societal shifts in how work is valued, justified, and integrated into personal identity. In this way, organizational practices may play a previously underappreciated role in shaping public attitudes toward work, with potential implications for labor market participation and workforce engagement.

The demographic patterns observed in this study further suggest that efforts to address anti-work sentiment may benefit from sensitivity to employees' career stage and economic position. Younger or less experienced employees, who may simultaneously face higher expectations and fewer resources to buffer negative experiences, might be particularly vulnerable to developing generalized negative beliefs about work following mistreatment. Accordingly, interventions aimed at improving workplace treatment may have differential importance across career stages.

Finally, our findings revealed a link between anti-work orientation and turnover intentions. Together with recent research showing that individuals scoring high on anti-work orientation

are less engaged in their work because they experience low levels of enjoyment and personal value (intrinsic motivation), and may even feel indifferent about their work (Sinclair and Holm, 2026), a desirable next step for future research is to investigate long-term consequences beyond self-reported intentions and engagement, such as actual turnover and disengagement from the labor market. If attitudinal shifts in beliefs about work precede turnover or disengagement, this allows for proactive retention strategies.

Limitations and future directions

The primary limitation of the present research is its cross-sectional design, which restricts the ability to draw causal inferences. Although it is theoretically more plausible that experiences of workplace mistreatment would precede the development of anti-work attitudes, the reverse cannot be definitively ruled out. For instance, employees who already exhibit high levels of anti-work orientation and who might be experiencing emotional exhaustion and cynicism, may retrospectively interpret past events as derogatory or as signifying ill treatment. Moreover, such individuals may be predisposed to perceive future workplace experiences as disrespectful (Scruggs, 2024), consistent with research linking negative affect to heightened perceptions of unfair treatment (Barsky and Kaplan, 2007; Lang *et al.*, 2011). Additionally, the potential influence of unmeasured third variables cannot be excluded. These could be micro-level, such as individual differences in, for example, trait neuroticism, or meso- or macro-level, if factors such as precarious employment conditions or a low organizational justice climate simultaneously lead to both increased mistreatment risk and undermined beliefs that work is fair or meaningful. Longitudinal research is therefore needed to clarify the presumed causal pathways and to examine the temporal stability of anti-work orientation. Specifically, future research should explore the longitudinal trajectory of anti-work orientation and its potential reversibility through organizational interventions. Additionally, qualitative studies could enrich our understanding of the lived experiences of mistreated employees and the symbolic meanings they attach to work.

A further limitation is the exclusive reliance on self-report measures, which may introduce common method bias (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2012). If possible, future studies may want to consider employing multi-method approaches, such as behavioral or peer-report data, to mitigate this concern. Finally, examining cross-cultural differences in experiences of mistreatment and anti-work orientation may reveal important contextual factors that shape these relationships and offer a more global perspective on the impact of workplace dynamics on anti-work attitudes.

Conclusive remarks

The findings presented here suggest that when employees are subjected to persistent workplace mistreatment by supervisors or co-workers, they may begin to perceive work not as a source of fulfillment or identity, but as a harmful and aversive domain. That anti-work orientation is predicted by experiences at work, such as being exposed to workplace mistreatment, challenges the theoretical accounts where anti-work orientation has been conceptualized as an ideological perspective or even a philosophy (Alliger and McEachern, 2023). Scruggs (2024) highlighted that a distinct feature of anti-work orientation is that it is not just a sensation or experience related to the current job, but a more pervasive belief about work in general. Conversely, Olsen *et al.* (2024) argued that anti-work should rather be seen as an attitudinal appraisal of work, which indeed can be shaped by workplace experiences. This aligns more with the differentiation between work and noxious work proposed by Lefkowitz (2024). By empirically linking everyday interpersonal mistreatment at work to the emergence of anti-work orientation, the present study demonstrates that how people are treated at work may shape not only their employment decisions but also their broader beliefs about the value of work in society. These findings underscore the importance of distinguishing between qualitatively different responses to adverse work experiences. For some individuals, negative

workplace experiences may result in adaptive reprioritization, such as seeking greater work–life balance or reducing the centrality of work without rejecting its legitimacy. For others, it may lead to traditional job withdrawal, motivated by the pursuit of better employment conditions elsewhere. Anti-work orientation reflects a more radical trajectory. Rather than merely disengaging from a specific role or employer, individuals high in anti-work orientation appear to adopt an oppositional stance toward work as a social institution, questioning its moral authority and its role in conferring worth. This active antipathy toward work represents a distinct psychological outcome that extends beyond existing models of disengagement and withdrawal. Consequently, the present study adds important nuance to the current debate on the nature and antecedents of anti-work sentiments as well as their importance for turnover. While much work remains to be done on the emergence and impact of anti-work sentiments, the present study suggests that it is not just a belief developed in isolation from work experiences, but possibly also a result of them.

Appendix

The 10-item anti-work orientation scale:

We are manipulated into believing that work is foundational to our worth in life

Most of society wrongly tells us that work is the only way to make something of ourselves.

We are brainwashed into believing that the path to a good life is through one's work.

Most of society incorrectly tells us that work is the only way to feel good about ourselves.

Most of society incorrectly teaches us that the best way to find meaning is through work.

We are wrongly taught that the best way to contribute to society is through working.

I feel an urge to push back against the value we place on work.

I dislike the idea of “working for a living”.

I have a contentious relationship with the idea of “working for a living”.

I think it is wrong when people place so much emphasis on their work.

This scale was originally developed and validated in the US (Scruggs, 2023, 2024). We used a Swedish translation (see Sinclair *et al.*, 2025).

References

- Alliger, G.M. and McEachern, P.J. (2023), “Anti-work offers many opportunities for I-O psychologists”, *Industrial and Organizational Psychology: Perspectives on Science and Practice*, Vol. 17 No. 1, pp. 1-30, doi: [10.1017/iop.2023.49](https://doi.org/10.1017/iop.2023.49).
- Bakker, A.B. and Demerouti, E. (2017), “Job demands–resources theory: taking stock and looking forward”, *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, Vol. 22 No. 3, pp. 273-285, doi: [10.1037/ocp0000056](https://doi.org/10.1037/ocp0000056).
- Bakker, A.B., Demerouti, E. and Sanz-Vergel, A. (2023), “Job demands–resources theory: ten years later”, *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 10 No. 1, pp. 25-53, doi: [10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-120920-053933](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-120920-053933).
- Barsky, A. and Kaplan, S.A. (2007), “If you feel bad, it's unfair: a quantitative synthesis of affect and organizational justice perceptions”, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 92 No. 1, pp. 286-295, doi: [10.1037/0021-9010.92.1.286](https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.92.1.286).
- Brehm, J.W. (1966), *A Theory of Psychological Reactance*, Academic Press, New York, NY.
- Burr, H., Berthelsen, H., Moncada, S., Nübling, M., Dupret, E., Demiral, Y., Oudyk, J., Kristensen, T.S., Llorens, C., Navarro, A., Lincke, H.J., Bocéréan, C., Sahan, C., Smith, P. and Pohrt, A. and

-
- International COPSOQ Network (2019), "The third version of the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire", *Safety and Health at Work*, Vol. 10 No. 4, pp. 482-503, doi: [10.1016/j.shaw.2019.10.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.shaw.2019.10.002).
- Cheung, B. (2021), "'Antiwork' movement may be long-run risk to labor force participation: Goldman Sachs", *Yahoo! Finance*, available at: <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/antiwork-movement-may-be-long-run-risk-to-labor-force-participation-goldman-sachs-165417840.html>
- Ciulla, J.B. (2020), "The moral conditions of work", in Ciulla, J.B. (Ed.), *The Search for Ethics in Leadership, Business, and beyond*, Springer International Publishing, Cham.
- Colquitt, J., Long, D., Rodell, J. and Halvorsen-Ganepola, M. (2014), "Adding the 'in' to justice: a qualitative and quantitative investigation of the differential effects of justice rule adherence and violation", *The Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 100 No. 2, pp. 287-297, doi: [10.1037/a0038131](https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038131).
- Cropanzano, R., Byrne, Z.S., Bobocel, D.R. and Rupp, D.E. (2001), "Moral virtues, fairness heuristics, social entities, and other denizens of organizational justice", *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, Vol. 58 No. 2, pp. 164-209, doi: [10.1006/jvbe.2001.1791](https://doi.org/10.1006/jvbe.2001.1791).
- Dai, L. and Xie, H. (2016), "Review and prospect on interactional justice", *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 4 No. 1, pp. 55-61, doi: [10.4236/jss.2016.41007](https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2016.41007).
- Elnakouri, A., Hubley, C. and McGregor, I. (2022), "Hate and meaning in life: how collective, but not personal, hate quells threat and spurs meaning in life", *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 98, 104227, doi: [10.1016/j.jesp.2021.104227](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2021.104227).
- Elovainio, M., Kivimäki, M. and Helkama, K. (2001), "Organizational justice evaluations, job control, and occupational strain", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 86 No. 3, pp. 418-424, doi: [10.1037/0021-9010.86.3.418](https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.86.3.418).
- Frey, C.B. and Osborne, M.A. (2017), "The future of employment: how susceptible are jobs to computerisation?", *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, Vol. 114, pp. 254-280, doi: [10.1016/j.techfore.2016.08.019](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2016.08.019).
- Graeber, D. (2018), *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory*, Penguin Random House UK, London.
- Ho, H.C. (2025), "A one-year prospective study of organizational justice and work attitudes: an extended job demands-resources model", *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, Vol. 40 No. 1, pp. 21-36, doi: [10.1108/JMP-02-2024-0113](https://doi.org/10.1108/JMP-02-2024-0113).
- Hom, P.W., Mitchell, T.R., Lee, T.W. and Griffeth, R.W. (2012), "Reviewing employee turnover: focusing on proximal withdrawal states and an expanded criterion", *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 138 No. 5, pp. 831-858, doi: [10.1037/a0027983](https://doi.org/10.1037/a0027983).
- Kiefer, T. (2005), "Feeling bad: antecedents and consequences of negative emotions in ongoing change", *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 26 No. 8, pp. 875-897, doi: [10.1002/job.339](https://doi.org/10.1002/job.339).
- Kivimäki, M., Vanhala, A., Pentti, J., Lämsä, H., Virtanen, M., Elovainio, M. and Vahtera, J. (2007), "Team climate, intention to leave and turnover among hospital employees: prospective cohort study", *BMC Health Services Research*, Vol. 7 No. 1, 170, doi: [10.1186/1472-6963-7-170](https://doi.org/10.1186/1472-6963-7-170).
- Kniffin, K.M., Narayanan, J., Anseel, F., Antonakis, J., Ashford, S.P., Bakker, A.B., Bamberger, P., Bapuji, H., Bhawe, D.P., Choi, V.K., Creary, S.J., Demerouti, E., Flynn, F.J., Gelfand, M.J., Greer, L.L., Johns, G., Keesebier, S., Klein, P.G., Lee, S.Y., Ozelik, H., Petriglieri, J.L., Rothbard, N.P., Rudolph, C.W., Shaw, J.D., Sirola, N., Wanberg, C.R., Whillans, A., Wilmoth, M.P. and Vugt, M.v. (2021), "COVID-19 and the workplace: implications, issues, and insights for future research and action", *American Psychologist*, Vol. 76 No. 1, pp. 63-77, doi: [10.1037/amp0000716](https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000716).
- Kozlowski, S.W.J. and Ilgen, D.R. (2006), "Enhancing the effectiveness of work groups and teams", *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, Vol. 7 No. 3, pp. 77-124, doi: [10.1111/j.1529-1006.2006.00030.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1529-1006.2006.00030.x).
- Lang, J., Bliese, P.D., Lang, J.W. and Adler, A.B. (2011), "Work gets unfair for the depressed: cross-lagged relations between organizational justice perceptions and depressive symptoms", *The Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 96 No. 3, pp. 602-618, doi: [10.1037/a0022463](https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022463).

- Lefkowitz, J. (2024), "Does the antiwork perspective contribute to understanding and improving the nature of work?", *Industrial and Organizational Psychology: Perspectives on Science and Practice*, Vol. 17 No. 1, pp. 31-35, doi: [10.1017/iop.2023.76](https://doi.org/10.1017/iop.2023.76).
- Lepisto, D.A. and Pratt, M.G. (2017), "Meaningful work as realization and justification: toward a dual conceptualization", *Organizational Psychology Review*, Vol. 7 No. 2, pp. 99-121, doi: [10.1177/2041386616630039](https://doi.org/10.1177/2041386616630039).
- Lips-Wiersma, M., Haar, J. and Wright, S. (2020), "The effect of fairness, responsible leadership and worthy work on multiple dimensions of meaningful work", *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 161 No. 1, pp. 35-52, doi: [10.1007/s10551-018-3967-2](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-018-3967-2).
- Liu, D. and Eberly, M.B. (2014), "When do turnover intentions fuel workplace deviance? A cross-cultural investigation", *Academy of Management Proceedings*, Vol. 1, p. 12635, doi: [10.5465/AMBPP.2014.179](https://doi.org/10.5465/AMBPP.2014.179).
- Matthews, R.A., Pineault, L. and Hong, Y.H. (2022), "Normalizing the use of single-item measures: validation of the single-item compendium for organizational psychology", *Journal of Business and Psychology*, Vol. 37 No. 4, pp. 639-673, doi: [10.1007/s10869-022-09813-3](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-022-09813-3).
- McCord, M.A. and Yu, J. (2024), "Abusive supervision and burnout: investigating the impact of susceptibility and exposure to a stressor", *Deviant Behavior*, Vol. 45 No. 8, pp. 1095-1108, doi: [10.1080/01639625.2023.2271628](https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2023.2271628).
- Medlar, A., Liu, Y. and Głowacka, D. (2022), "Nobody wants to work anymore: an analysis of r/antiwork and the interplay between social and mainstream media during the great resignation", *ArXiv*, abs/2210.07796.
- Mitchell, T.R. and Lee, T.W. (2001), "The unfolding model of voluntary turnover and job embeddedness: foundations for a comprehensive theory of attachment", *Research in Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 23, pp. 189-246, doi: [10.1016/S0191-3085\(01\)23006-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-3085(01)23006-8).
- Morrison, E.W. and Robinson, S.L. (1997), "When employees feel betrayed: a model of how psychological contract violation develops", *The Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 22 No. 1, pp. 226-256, doi: [10.2307/259230](https://doi.org/10.2307/259230).
- Nielsen, M.B. and Einarsen, S. (2012), "Outcomes of exposure to workplace bullying: a meta-analytic review", *Work and Stress*, Vol. 26 No. 4, pp. 309-332, doi: [10.1080/02678373.2012.734709](https://doi.org/10.1080/02678373.2012.734709).
- Olson, A.M., DeSimone, J.A., Mills, M.J., Ford, M.T. and Butler, S. (2024), "A tale of two antiworks", *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 17 No. 1, pp. 79-84, doi: [10.1017/iop.2023.90](https://doi.org/10.1017/iop.2023.90).
- Parzefall, M.-R. and Salin, D.M. (2010), "Perceptions of and reactions to workplace bullying: a social exchange perspective", *Human Relations*, Vol. 63 No. 6, pp. 761-780, doi: [10.1177/0018726709345043](https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726709345043).
- Paullay, I.M., Alliger, G.M. and Stone-Romero, E.F. (1994), "Construct validation of two instruments designed to measure job involvement and work centrality", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 79 No. 2, pp. 224-228, doi: [10.1037/0021-9010.79.2.224](https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.79.2.224).
- Pavlish, C. and Hunt, R. (2012), "An exploratory study about meaningful work in acute care nursing", *Nursing Forum*, Vol. 47 No. 2, pp. 113-122, doi: [10.1111/j.1744-6198.2012.00261.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6198.2012.00261.x).
- Podsakoff, P.M., MacKenzie, S.B. and Podsakoff, N.P. (2012), "Sources of method bias in social science research and recommendations on how to control it", *Annual Review of Psychology*, Vol. 63 No. 1, pp. 539-569, doi: [10.1146/annurev-psych-120710-100452](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-120710-100452).
- Rosenberg, B.D. and Siegel, J.T. (2018), "A 50-year review of psychological reactance theory: do not read this article", *Motivation Science*, Vol. 4 No. 4, pp. 281-300, doi: [10.1037/mot0000091](https://doi.org/10.1037/mot0000091).
- Salin, D. and Notelaers, G. (2017), "The effect of exposure to bullying on turnover intentions: the role of perceived psychological contract violation and benevolent behaviour", *Work and Stress*, Vol. 31 No. 4, pp. 355-374, doi: [10.1080/02678373.2017.1330780](https://doi.org/10.1080/02678373.2017.1330780).
- Scruggs, J.P. (2023), "Not about the grind: emergence and consequences of employee anti-work orientation", *Academy of Management Proceedings*, Vol. 2023 No. 1, 10019, doi: [10.5465/AMPROC.2023.27bp](https://doi.org/10.5465/AMPROC.2023.27bp).

- Scruggs, J.P. (2024), "The rejection of 'Work as worth': the conceptualization, antecedents, and outcomes of employee anti-work orientation" Doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania.
- Sinclair, S. and Holm, K. (2026), "Money for nothing? The impact of anti-work orientation on work motivation and engagement", *Scandinavian Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, Vol. 11 No. 1, pp. 1-12, doi: [10.16993/sjwop.461](https://doi.org/10.16993/sjwop.461).
- Sinclair, S., Nilsson, A. and Holm, K. (2025), "The worth of work: socio-political and demographic correlates of anti-work orientation", *Social Sciences and Humanities Open*, Vol. 11, 101565, doi: [10.1016/j.ssaho.2025.101565](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2025.101565).
- Statistics Sweden (2025), available at: <https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/sverige-i-siffror/utbildning-jobb-och-pengar/medianloner-i-sverige/Retrieved2025-12-04>
- Suggala, S., Thomas, S. and Kureshi, S. (2021), "Impact of workplace bullying on employees' mental health and self-worth", in Dhiman, S. (Ed.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Workplace Well-Being*, Palgrave Macmillan/Springer Nature, pp. 799-818, doi: [10.1007/978-3-030-30025-8_30](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-30025-8_30).
- Sun, S., Chen, H., He, Y., Yu, F., Yang, Y., Chen, H. and Tung, T.-H. (2025), "Workplace bullying and turnover intentions among workers: a systematic review and meta-analysis", *BMC Public Health*, Vol. 25 No. 1, p. 2394, doi: [10.1186/s12889-025-23339-2](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-025-23339-2).
- Topa, G., Aranda-Carmena, M. and De-Maria, B. (2022), "Psychological contract breach and outcomes: a systematic review of reviews", *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, Vol. 19 No. 23, 15527, doi: [10.3390/ijerph192315527](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph192315527).
- Tuckey, M.R., Li, Y., Neall, A.M., Chen, P.Y., Dollard, M.F., McLinton, S.S., Rogers, A. and Mattiske, J. (2022), "Workplace bullying as an organizational problem: spotlight on people management practices", *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, Vol. 27 No. 6, pp. 544-565, doi: [10.1037/ocp000033](https://doi.org/10.1037/ocp000033).
- van den Broeck, A., Baillien, E. and De Witte, H. (2011), "Workplace bullying: a perspective from the job demands-resources model", *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, Vol. 37 No. 2, pp. 1-12, doi: [10.4102/sajip.v37i2.879](https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v37i2.879).
- Vignoli, M., Guglielmi, D., Balducci, C. and Bonfiglioli, R. (2015), "Workplace bullying as a risk factor for musculoskeletal disorders: the mediating role of job-related psychological strain", *BioMed Research International*, Vol. 2015, pp. 712642-712648, doi: [10.1155/2015/712642](https://doi.org/10.1155/2015/712642).
- Weeks, K. (2011), *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*, Duke University Press, Durham, doi: [10.1215/9780822394723](https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822394723).

Corresponding author

Samantha Sinclair can be contacted at: samantha.sinclair@lnu.se