

# Study Finds that Job Pressures May Drive Employees to Work When Sick



Why do employees come to work when they're sick and should stay home to recover and avoid infecting their co-workers? According to a new study from researchers at Concordia University in Montreal and the University of East Anglia in the UK, high job demands, stress and job insecurity are among the main reasons for what's called 'presenteeism.'

Previous studies have linked presenteeism with lower performance, exacerbation of health problems and impacts on wellbeing, with more productivity loss than absenteeism. (Read more about the impact of 'presenteeism' on the workplace.)

Presenteeism can also impact workplace safety. For example, read about an incident in the Northwest Territories in which presenteeism had tragic consequences.

The new study, 'Going to work ill: a meta-analysis of the correlates of presenteeism and a dual-path model' was published in the *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* on Nov. 9, 2015. Its goal was to improve understanding of the key causes of presenteeism, and to make managers more aware of the existence of the growing phenomenon, what triggers the behaviour and what can be done to improve employees' health and productivity.

The researchers analysed data from 61 previous studies involving more than 175,960 participants from 34 countries using a model to identify the most significant causes of presenteeism and absenteeism.

Job demands, such as workload, understaffing, overtime and time pressure, along with difficulty of finding cover and personal financial difficulties, were found to be key reasons why employees might not take a day off when ill.

But the study also found that presenteeism stems from not only ill health and stress, but also raised motivation, such as high job satisfaction and a strong sense of commitment to the organisation, which may motivate people to 'go the extra-mile' even when sick.

In addition, employees who had a supportive work environment, such as supportive colleagues and a good relationship with managers, felt they didn't have to go to

work when ill and were both more satisfied with their jobs and healthier. But optimism was linked to presenteeism, in that those with a positive outlook were more willing to carry on with their work while ill.

One of the significant links to presenteeism is the severity of company policies used to monitor or reduce staff absence, such as strict trigger points for disciplinary action, job insecurity, limited paid sick leave, or few absence days allowed without a medical note.

Lead author Dr Mariella Miraglia, a lecturer in organisational behaviour at UEA's Norwich Business School, says, 'Working while ill can compound the effects of the initial illness and result in negative job attitudes and withdrawal from work. However, the possible negative consequences of being absent can prompt employees to show up ill or to return to work when not totally recovered. Organisations may want to carefully review attendance policies for features which could decrease absence at the cost of increased presenteeism.'