

Worker Absenteeism and Employment Outcomes: A Literature Review

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Key Findings and Policy Implications

This paper is a comprehensive literature review on worker absenteeism, including days absent from work for health reasons, and productivity declines from continued workplace presence while sick (referred to as “presenteeism”). The study outlines the aspects of absenteeism and presenteeism that would be most important to understanding their role in transitions to SSDI. Among the key findings and common themes from past research:

- The baseline rate of absenteeism and presenteeism for healthy workers is fairly low. Presenteeism in the workplace, while more difficult to measure, appears to be more prevalent than absenteeism and could be more costly to the employer.
- Absenteeism and presenteeism rates vary across diagnoses and worker characteristics. Mental health conditions are particularly predictive of higher rates of both absenteeism and presenteeism. Other conditions associated with absenteeism and presenteeism include allergies, arthritis, hypertension, migraines, cancer, respiratory disorders, COPD, heart disease, gastrointestinal issues, obesity, and diabetes.
- Access to paid leave has a significant impact on individuals’ propensity to be absent, and on the duration of their absences. Among the policies that affect absence rates are sick leave, partial or short-term disability benefits, medical benefits, vocational rehabilitation, and wellness programs.

The policy importance of the study is in better understanding the early patterns of health decline that may ultimately deteriorate to work departure and SSDI enrollment. Worker absenteeism is a strong early indicator of how health affects work. This paper reviews past research on these effects, their relationship to paid leave and early intervention policies, and their potential role in predicting more permanent work departure and SSDI enrollment.

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