



Abstract: The Relationship Between Sickness Absences (SA) and Sickness Presenteeism (SP) for Icelandic Employees: Jónína Waagfjörð, VIRK Vocational Rehabilitation Fund, Iceland, Centre of Public Health Sciences, University of Iceland, Iceland.

Background: Research has demonstrated that employees reporting more sickness absences (SA) also report more sickness presenteeism (SP), or coming to work sick. SP is thought to cause more productivity loss and higher organizational costs compared to SA and are also believed to increase the risk of serious illnesses in the future. The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between SA and SP among a group of Icelandic employees in the public and private sectors.

Methods: Electronically administered cross-sectional survey collected the data from 566 women and 193 men. SP data was collected from a Yes/No question on SP in the last 3 months and SA data from a question on number of days absent in last 12 months. Multiple logistic regression analysis was used to study the relationship between SA and SP.

Results: 80% reported SA in the last 12 months and 56% reported SP in the last 3 months. Men reported no SA significantly more often than women (28%vs17%) and were also less likely to report SP (OR= 0.70, 95% CI= 0.50-0.97). Employees from the public sector were more likely to report SA and SP, OR=1.69, 95% CI=1.18-2.43 and OR=1.57, 95% CI=1.18-2.10, respectively. Significant relationship between high SP and high SA was demonstrated and remained after controlling for gender, age, education and employment sector (6-20days sick OR=2.01, 95% CI=1.31-3.11 and ≥ 21 days sick OR=2.48, 95% CI=1.09-6.22). This was also true for women and men separately except for men ≥ 21 days sick. Significant linear trend was demonstrated towards younger employees having a higher rate of SP than older employees ($p < 0.001$).

Conclusions: Significant relationship was demonstrated between high SP and high SA, emphasising the importance for managers to consider these two concepts together when dealing with SA. These employees can be in more danger of leaving the labour market because of serious illnesses and employers have the opportunity to identify them and intervene. Employees need also be aware of the possible consequences of high SP on their future SA figures.

