

RTW expectations as predictor of RTW in Danish absentees

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Purpose To investigate differences in return to work (RTW) and employment trajectories in individuals on sick leave for either mental health reasons or other health related reasons.

Methods This study was based on 2,036 new sickness absence cases who completed a questionnaire on social characteristics, expectations for RTW and reasons for sickness absence. They were divided into two exposure groups according to their self-reported sickness absence reason: mental health reasons or other health reasons. The outcome was employment status during the following 51 weeks and was measured both as time-to-event analysis and with sequence analysis.

Results Individuals with mental health reasons for sickness absence had a higher risk of not having returned to work (RR 0.87 (0.80;0.93)). Adjusting for gender, age, education and employment did not change the estimate, however, after adding RTW expectations to the model, the excess risk was no longer present (RR 1.01 (0.95;1.08)).

Conclusion Individuals with mental health reasons have a higher risk of not returning to work compared to individuals with other health reasons, but when adjusting for RTW expectations the difference was no longer present. This emphasises the need to develop suitable interventions to facilitate RTW for this group of sickness absentees.