

# Employees Absenteeism and Presenteeism in an Organization

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## ABSTRACT

*This article covers the concept of Absenteeism and Presenteeism of employees from their workplace. The impact of their absenteeism & presenteeism on the organization they are working with. The possible causes of the Absenteeism and Presenteeism of the employees are discussed as well as possible solutions are suggested. The challenges facing management regarding Establishing a system for tracking absences are highlighted.*

**Keywords:** Absenteeism, Presenteeism, sleep, shift- work, breaks, sick leaves

## Introduction

Absenteeism is a matter to think upon by industry and overlooking the factor can let to the downfall of the same. The scope of either preventing or curing absenteeism is very broad in the coming future due to increased expectation of workers and competition and opportunities in the environment. Absenteeism is probably one of the biggest problem that each and every organization has to handle on an ongoing basis as it impacts on service delivery, staff morale and could lead to financial losses. If the cause of the absenteeism is known and possible solutions are implemented but still the employee continues to be absent from his/her workplace then the possible solution can be normal disciplinary action taken against them.

It is generally accepted that in terms of common law a contract of employment is based on the agreement between two parties: an employer and an employee. The employee has a fundamental obligation to tender his/her services to the organization. If this is done then the employer is contractually obliged to pay the employee for services rendered. When an employee fails to report for work the employer would record this absence as absenteeism.

Absenteeism, however, usually has different meanings for employers and employees respectively. From employers perspective it impacts on service delivery, staff morale and could lead to financial losses. Now a question arises in our mind that "Are all absenteeism bad for an organization?" Robins argues that at times absenteeism could prove to be an advantage to the organization when an employee's productivity could be below standard due to fatigue which could have safety implications. Here we need to consider persons who should be alert when on duty, such as airline pilots, nuclear reactor personnel, and so on.

Usually most organizations require a low absenteeism rate to meet objectives. Do employees concur with the employer? Employees usually do not believe that they are failing to meet their fundamental obligation of service delivery when they are not allocated work stations doing what they are paid to do. They see themselves as being at work whereas the employer sees them as being unproductive and not focusing on the organization's goals and objectives.

## Definition of Absenteeism

**Absenteeism** is defined as the failure of a worker to report for work when he is scheduled to work. A worker is considered to be scheduled to work when the employer has work available for him and the worker is aware of it. Authorized absence is also treated as absence while presence even for a part of the shift is treated as presence for whole shift. Absence on account of strikes, lockout, layoff, weekly rests or suspension was not taken into account. Various authorities have variously defined absenteeism.

According to **Webster's Dictionary** "absenteeism is the practice or habit of being an "absentee" and an "absentee" is one who habitually stays away".

The **Encyclopedia of Social Science (Vol. I, 378)** define absenteeism as "the time lost by avoidable or unavoidable absence of employees, but the time lost by strikes, or lateness amounting to an hour or two is not included.

According to **S.A.S. Murthy** "absenteeism is the failure of workers to report on the job on any working day when they are expected to be present at work"

**Alphons Indana Cyril H.Khistry** has formulated a tentative definition of absenteeism on the basis of replies received by The Indian Labor Bureau from several employee's and employer's organization: "A worker is considered absent when he is schedule to work and the employer has work available for him and he does not turn up for work due to his own individual reason. Accordingly, the absence of such workers as may be on privilege, sick or casual leave with or without pay is also treated as absence"

**Seligman** refers absenteeism to its loss in industrial establishment by avoidable or unavoidable absence of employees.

**Mr. R.F. Billimoria** defined absenteeism as man-shift lost by workers due to avoidable reason and without obtaining prior permission of the superior.

Government of India define absenteeism as "the total man-shifts lost because of absentees as a percentage o the total number of man shifts scheduled" (Singh and Singh, 1966). This definition does not include absence on account of authorized leave, layoff, retrenchment, strikes, etc.

More specifically absenteeism refers to unauthorized absence from work. Unauthorized absence includes all cases where work is available, the worker knows about it but fails to report for duty and the employer has no prior information on workers not reporting for work. In literature on absenteeism a distinction is often made between "absence "and "absenteeism ". The term absence refer to all "stay away "from work whether authorized or unauthorized while absenteeism refer to only unauthorized absence (Vaid, 1966).

Possible reasons for absenteeism

The reason of absenteeism are many and include:

- Serious accidents and illness
- Low morale
- Poor working conditions
- Boredom on the job
- Lack of job satisfaction
- Inadequate leadership and poor supervision
- Personal problems (financial, marital, substance abuse, child care etc.)
- Poor physical fitness
- Inadequate nutrition
- Transportation problems
- The existence of income protection plans (collective agreement)
- Provisions, which continue income during periods of illness or accident.
- Stress
- Workload
- Employee discontent with a collective bargaining process and/or its results
- Low level of education.
- Alcoholism
- Lack of recreational facility.

### **Trends in Absenteeism**

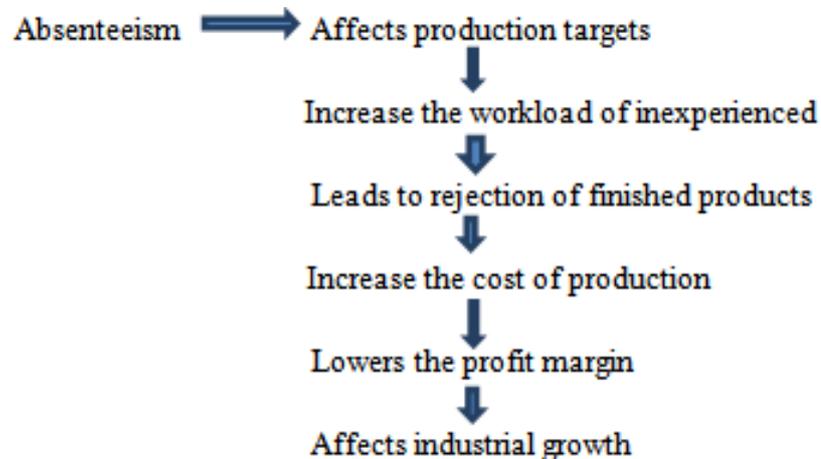
Recent surveys in different organization indicate the following trends in absenteeism.

- The higher the rate of pay and the greater the length of service of the employee, the fewer the absences.
- As an organization grows, there is a tendency towards higher rates of absenteeism
- Absenteeism is generally higher in the night shift than in the day shift.
- The rate of Absenteeism is the lowest on pay day; it increases considerably on the following the payment of wages and bonus.
- Single employees are absent more frequently than married employees
- Younger employees are absent more frequently than older employees but the latter are absent for longer periods of time.
- Unionized organizations have higher absenteeism rates than non-union organizations
- Absenteeism is higher during the sowing (March – April – May) and harvesting season.

Effects of absenteeism on industrial progress

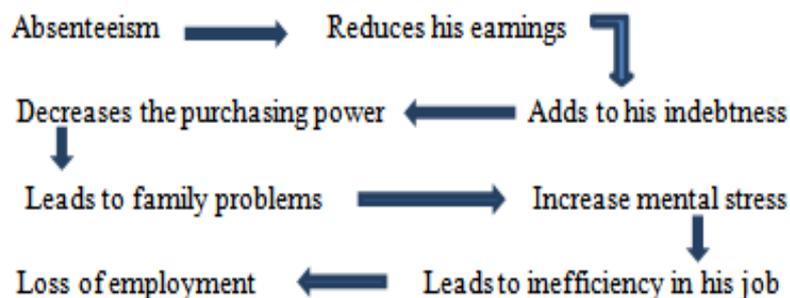
It is quite evident from the above that absenteeism is a common feature of industrial labor in India. It hinders industrial growth and its effect in two fold.

1) Loss to employers:



On other hand, the industry has to suffer a greater loss due to absentees. It disturbs the efficiency and discipline of industries consequently, industrial production is reduced. In order to meet the emergency and strikes, an additional labor force is also maintain by the industries.

2) Loss to employees:



Firstly due to the habit of being absenting frequently worker's income is reduced to a large extent. It is because there is a general principle of "no work – no pay."

### **Establishing a system for tracking absences**

Absenteeism policies are useless if the business does not also implement and maintain an effective system for tracking employee attendance. Some companies are able to track absenteeism through existing payroll systems, but for those who do not have this option, they need to make certain that they put together a system that can: 1) keep an accurate count of individual employee absences; 2) tabulate companywide absenteeism totals; 3) calculate the financial impact that these absences have on the business; 4) detect periods when absences are particularly high; and 5) differentiate between various types of absences.

How to reduce absenteeism in two steps

The rate of absenteeism usually reduces at the announcement that steps will be taken to check all cases of absenteeism.

Step- 1

Meticulously record:

- All types of absenteeism of each employee each year,
- Duration of each employees absenteeism,
- Reasons for absenteeism

Step- 2

Follow-up each cases of absenteeism:

- pay visits to sick employees, when necessary, such as those who have excessive sick leave records,
- write letters recording absenteeism which are handed to the relevant employees and prove of receipt is obtained,
- Conduct interview with returning employees.

## **Presenteeism**

**Presenteeism or working while sick** can cause productivity loss, poor health, exhaustion and workplace epidemics. While the contrasting subject of absenteeism has historically received extensive attention in the management sciences, presenteeism has only recently been studied.

Certain occupations such as welfare and teaching are more prone to presenteeism. Doctors may attend work while sick due to feelings of being irreplaceable. Jobs with large workloads are associated with presenteeism. People whose self-esteem is based on performance, as well as workaholics, typically have high levels of presenteeism. Presenteeism may have many motives. An employee may come to work because they simply need the money and cannot afford to take time off due to illness. Additionally, one could go to work due to a love and devotion to the job. In this case, presenteeism could be considered an act of organizational citizenship and inspire admiration from colleagues.

Presenteeism, as defined by researchers, isn't about malingering (pretending to be ill to avoid work duties) or goofing off on the job (surfing the Internet, say, when you should be preparing that report). The term—which has gained currency despite some academics' uneasiness with its somewhat catchy feel—refers to productivity loss resulting from real health problems. Underlying the research on presenteeism is the assumption that employees do not take their jobs lightly, that most of them need and want to continue working if they can.

“We're talking about people hanging in there when they get sick and trying to figure out ways to carry on despite their symptoms,” says Debra Lerner, a professor at Tufts University School of Medicine in Boston, who notes that presenteeism may be more common in tough economic times, when people are afraid of losing their jobs. “If every employee stayed home each time a chronic condition flared up, work would never get done.” That some managers hold a less generous view of worker attitudes serves as a backdrop to researchers' continuing efforts to document their findings more conclusively.

Many of the medical problems that result in presenteeism are, by their nature, relatively benign. (After all, more serious illnesses frequently force people to stay home from work, often for extended periods.) So research on presenteeism focuses on such chronic or episodic ailments as seasonal allergies, asthma, migraines and other kinds of headaches, back pain, arthritis, gastrointestinal disorders, and depression. Progressive conditions like heart disease or cancer, which require expensive treatments and tend to strike people later in life, generate the majority of companies' direct health-related costs—that is, the premiums a company pays to an insurer or, if the company is self-insured, the claims paid for medical care and drugs. But the illnesses people take with them to work, even though they incur far lower direct costs, usually account for a greater loss in productivity because they are so prevalent, so often go untreated, and typically occur during peak working years. Those indirect costs have long been largely invisible to employers.

Illness affects both the quantity of work (people might work more slowly than usual, for instance, or have to repeat tasks) and the quality (they might make more—or more serious—mistakes). Untreated allergies like Amy Farler's can impede concentration. The discomfort of gastrointestinal disorders—common but seldom-talked-about ailments such as irritable bowel syndrome and gastroesophageal reflux disease (also known as GERD, acid reflux disease, or, somewhat more prosaically, heartburn)—is a persistent distraction. Depression causes, among other things, fatigue and irritability, which hinder people's ability to work together. Arthritis makes manual labor more difficult.

Clearly, different conditions have different effects on different jobs. While depression may not seriously impair an auto mechanic's performance, lower-back pain might. An aching back may not be a big problem for an insurance salesperson, but depression is likely to be. The result in either case: a significant sapping of worker productivity.

### **Absence from workstation without permission**

Employees should be disciplined for poor timekeeping as this constitutes being absent from duty/allocated work stations which impacts on an organization's running costs and work ethics. Poor timekeeping includes:

- Arriving late for duty on a regular basis,
- Leaving work early,
- Taking extended tea, lunch breaks, or toilet breaks,
- Attending to private business during working hours; this could include sending and/or reading personal emails, surfing internet for non- work related matters, or any other activity that is of a private business nature.

### **Concluding remarks**

There are many contributing factors that impact on an organization's objectives but one of the most costly is absenteeism. Employers need to handle all forms of absenteeism in a fair and transparent manner to minimize disharmony in the workplace.

The management must first have a positive attitude towards absenteeism. Even though it not possible to eliminate absenteeism completely. The provision of various facilities to reduce absenteeism bound to involve substantial financial commitment for the management. The major causes for absenteeism in the organization are the activities and policies of the organization. So absenteeism invisible but proves fatal for the industry. So reduction in absenteeism will helpful in improving the productivity.

Employee's regular presence is a must to every company as work progress can take place effectively only if the employees are working without any break. Same wise an employee can excel in his job and can know his level of expertise in his job only he goes to work regularly. Studying the absenteeism helps to find out the reason for major absenteeism and eliminate them. There by the absenteeism rate is very low. And this benefits both the organization and the employee. If the management of the company overlooks this problem then the company is himself creating a big roadblock in the way of his success. Employees are most precious resources of any company and they should be taken care as their importance of most precious resource.