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# New evidence on absenteeism and presenteeism

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## Abstract

This paper provides a statistical method to explore both absenteeism and presenteeism from the same data set. It allows us to elicit the link between these phenomena and then to put under light new evidence on them. We clarified the effect of several known variables (gender, age, cost of absence, etc.). Moreover, we were able to balance these effects on both absenteeism and presenteeism, which still remains uneasy when operating separate treatments.

Keywords:

absenteeism | commitment | presenteeism | statistical analysis

# Notes

1. Concerning 98 journals (in the field of economics, management science and HRM) listed at the first rank of classification (rank A) by the French Evaluation Agency for Research and Higher Education. We proceeded in two steps. We first searched the following keywords (and their derivatives) in the titles and abstracts of the articles issued between 1970 and 2009: ‘absenteeism’, ‘absence’, ‘sickness’, ‘illness’ and ‘attendance’. Then, if in doubt, we read the abstract of the article to ensure that absenteeism was really the main subject.

2. Employees holding a position equal or beyond the fifth hierarchical level, who in addition are responsible for a business unit, are considered as workers with ‘high responsibilities’. It includes heads of department and heads of agency.

3. However, salary elements are rarely relevant for absenteeism/presenteeism studies. The salary is indeed a composite variable: it depends on hierarchical level, age, seniority, gender, etc. As all of these variables also play a role in predicting absences, salary can no longer be introduced as an explanatory variable.

4. By default, absences for illness are recorded as ‘short-term illness’ absences. When employees suffer from a serious disease, they can claim from a commission for being considered in ‘long-term illness’. If so, it provides them additional advantages (especially a larger wage compensation). But, as long as the commission did not pronounce itself, these employees still remain considered in ‘short-term illness’. As a consequence, they can show ‘short-term’ absences longer than 100, 150 or even 200 business days per year. Obviously we must exclude them from an absenteeism/presenteeism study. As we actually see a drop in frequencies for absences longer than 70 business days, we decided to ‘cut the tail’ at this level.

5. For example, we expect a positive correlation between age and absence: as age rises, health worsens and absence should lengthen. If we find (resp. do not find) such a link, we can conclude that age is responsible (resp. is not responsible) for absence. But if we find a negative correlation (meaning that younger people show longer absences), then we must conclude that age is responsible for absenteeism. Indeed the link suggests that younger people shirk more frequently.

6. Technically, the profile of ‘presenteeist’ employees is estimated according to the difference between the predicted value calculated by the counting equation and the

real absence value. This gap rises when employees attend work while ill and, therefore, is a signal of presenteeism. Moreover, this estimation is made only for employees exhibiting nil absence values (as presenteeism behaviour mainly 'inflates' the frequency of nil value). Then, based on the resulting profile (i.e. the coefficients of the explanatory variables), the probability of presenteeism is computed for each employee, whatever his absence value is. Therefore (and as defined), an employee with a high presenteeism probability can exhibit a positive (and potentially large) absence value. In our data set, even if we assume the strong hypothesis that only individuals with a probability higher than the third quartile value are presenteeists, we find that 26% of the presenteeists do not have a nil absence value.

7. Employees benefit from five days off if they have to look after their ill child. Thus, they are supposed not to take 'short-term illness' leave in that case. These days are fully compensated.

8. The effect depends on the values taken by all the variables. Nevertheless, for an 'average' worker (a 40-year-old man, working full time and without 'high responsibilities'), the gap is about 20 points.

9. The effect is about 15 points for an 'average worker' (see previous note).

10. As underlined previously, the effect depends on the values taken by the variables. For a 40-year-old man, working full time, without 'high responsibilities', the gap is about three days. It means that fixed-term contract workers have absences approximately cut by a third.

11. This effect goes from three days (level 5) to seven days (level 9). It means a cut in absences from about 35% (level 5) to 90% (level 9). Coefficient for level 10 is even smaller but not significant (due to the small number of employees at that level). There is no difference between coefficients under level 5.

12. The effect is about 10 points for an average worker.

13. This result clearly shows the need to analyse absenteeism and presenteeism together, as this effect would not have been elicited otherwise.

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