

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SICKNESS ABSENCE AND HEALTHCARE UTILIZATION AMONG THE EMPLOYEES IN SERBIA

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Background: Workplace absenteeism significantly impacts productivity and employee well-being. This study examines the relationship between sickness absence and healthcare utilization (general practitioners and specialists) among employees in Serbia, focusing on the public healthcare sector. Understanding these associations can inform policies to improve workplace health and reduce absenteeism.

Methods and Objectives: This secondary data analysis from the 2019 Serbian National Health Survey involved 3746 employees aged 18-65. Participants were categorized based on sickness absence duration (≤ 30 days or > 30 days) and their visits to general practitioners and specialists. Descriptive analyses and Chi-square tests explored relationships between absenteeism and healthcare utilization.

Results: In total, 1319 (49.6%) participants did not visit a general practitioner; 39.4% had no sickness absence, 8.8% had ≤ 30 days and 1.4% had > 30 days. Those who did visit were primarily in the public healthcare sector (34.4%), with higher proportions experiencing prolonged sickness absence: 44.5% had no sickness absence, 8.3% had ≤ 30 days, and 2.7% had > 30 days. Similarly, 829 (50.0%) did not visit a specialist; 36.7% had no sickness absence, 8.1% had ≤ 30 days and 3.4% had > 30 days. The majority who visited a specialist were in the public sector (40.3%): 28.8% had no sickness absence, 8.1% had ≤ 30 days, and 3.4% had > 30 days. Significant statistical differences were found for visits to general practitioners ($p = 0.003$) and specialists ($p = 0.005$).

Conclusions: This study highlights that increased healthcare utilization is associated with prolonged sickness absence. Targeted healthcare interventions could help address absenteeism and improve health outcomes for employees in Serbia. This study provides a foundation for future research and policy-making to enhance workplace health and reduce absenteeism.

Keywords: employees, sickness absence, healthcare, occupational health, Serbia