

Longitudinal Trajectories of Presenteeism and Absenteeism: The Role of Trait Competitiveness in Early Career Researchers

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Abstract

Presenteeism (working while ill) and absenteeism (not working due to illness) are well-documented as contributors to detrimental health outcomes, such as exhaustion (Demerouti et al., 2009; Komp et al., 2021), and are linked to productivity losses (Harrison & Martocchio, 1998; Johns, 2011). While prior research has extensively examined situational predictors of these behaviors, little is known about how they evolve over time (Ruhle et al., 2020). This study investigates differences in the trajectories of presenteeism and absenteeism among pre- and postdoctoral researchers in Germany and examines the role of trait competitiveness in shaping these trajectories.

We analyzed data from three waves of a longitudinal survey conducted between 2014 and 2018, with yearly intervals, involving German pre- and postdoctoral researchers ($N = 334$; $n_{\text{PostDocs}} = 211$, $n_{\text{PreDocs}} = 123$). To address challenges common in applied research, including missing data due to dropout, small sample sizes, and non-normal distributions, we employed a combination of advanced statistical techniques: Latent Growth Curve Modeling, Multiple Imputation, and Scale Transformation and Categorization.

Our results reveal that presenteeism increases significantly among postdoctoral researchers over the three-year period ($\eta^2_{\text{Slope}} = 0.066$, $SE = 0.032$, $p = 0.038$). Additionally, trait competitiveness is associated with lower absenteeism during the first wave, but only among predoctoral researchers ($b = -0.044$, $SE = 0.022$, $p = 0.047$). These findings highlight that the trajectories of presenteeism and absenteeism vary based on career stage (pre- vs. postdoctoral researchers) and that trait competitiveness can mitigate absenteeism in early career researchers. However, long-term health consequences for highly competitive early career researchers need to be investigated in future research.

The study findings underscore the importance of early interventions in practice to address presenteeism and absenteeism effectively.

Methodologically, we demonstrate how the combination of several analyses features can be used to leverage survey data. At the conference, we will discuss the limitations of the study, including potential biases related to, e.g., the measurement of presenteeism and absenteeism, and offer implications for future research and practice.

Keywords

Presenteeism, Absenteeism, Work_Attendance, Longitudinal_Survey, Latent_Growth_Curve_Modeling

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