

## Presenteeism in the Workplace and the Effect on Employees' Well-Being

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### Abstract

The advances in Information and Communication (ICT) and the need to perform efficiently have brought both advantages and disadvantages to the well-being of employees. The situation is further aggravated by the Covid-19 outbreak and the recent company downsizing trend. This persistent high level of anxiety may cause employees to become physically and mentally exhausted, which leads to sickness presenteeism and negative effect on employees' psychological wellbeing. Hence, the aim of this paper is to examine and establish a link between time pressure, constant connectivity, sickness presenteeism, and employees' psychological wellbeing. Results show that time pressure is positively related to sickness presenteeism and sickness presenteeism is negatively related to employees' psychological well-being. The result was then discussed and this research also proposed future studies to empirically examine the proposed relationship discussed in this paper.

**Keywords:** Sickness Presenteeism, Constant Connectivity, Psychological Well-Being, Time Pressure.

### Introduction

While the world praises the advantages brought about by the enormous advances in Information and Communication Technology (ICT), it may be a double-edged sword for the company's employees. The ceaseless communication between their co-workers and clients prevents them from taking a break outside of typical business hours (Yahaya et al., 2010). In addition, such constant connectivity has implicitly become part of the job responsibilities, particularly for those employees who are prioritizing job security in response to the unforeseen circumstances brought by the Covid-19 outbreak and the recent company downsizing trend (Johns, 2010). This persistent high level of anxiety may cause employees to become physically and mentally exhausted, resulting in sickness presenteeism. Sickness Presenteeism is described as when employees who should be resting at home due to mental or physical illness are instead at work (Halbesleben et al., 2014).

Important to realize, as much as a third to half of employees still report to work in the office even being ill, despite the fact that such presenteeism costs the company more than absenteeism (Haque et al., 2019; Taifor et al., 2011; Wee et al., 2019). For instance, in the United States, presenteeism costs the economy \$311.8 million yearly, while absenteeism costs only \$176.2 million (Haque et al., 2019). The cost of presentism in the United Kingdom was £15.1 billion while absenteeism only cost £8.4 billion (Wee et al., 2019). In Malaysia, the expenditures associated with presenteeism (MYR 5392.6) (US\$1296) were found to be 3.5 times higher than absenteeism (MYR 1,548.3) (US\$370)(Wong et al., 2020).

In addition to low productivity, past research indicates that presenteeism has long-term negative effects on physiological well-being. According to research conducted by Conway et al.(2014), presenteeism is connected with poor mental health and an increased risk of developing depression over time. Despite growing focus and research in other nations, there is a dearth of research on this workplace issue in Malaysia. In addition, the issue of sickness presenteeism has not been widely studied in the Malaysian context. Hence, there is a strong need to study presenteeism as it poses a negative impact on employees' well-being, which is costly to employers as well-being is often linked to work performance. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to investigate the presenteeism in Malaysia's workplace and the effect on employees' well-being.

## **Literature Review**

### *Time Pressure*

In the literature, Time Pressure is typically used to refer to employees are attempting to finish their assigned tasks faster than usual (Malik, 2015). It is a physiological urgency since the amount of the jobs are greater than the time allowed for completion (Rosenbloom, 2022). In other words, time pressure can be identified as a significant stressor for employees because they must achieve tight deadlines by fully expanding their energies to accelerate their working speed and decision-making process (Silla & Gamero, 2014; Teng et al., 2010). Such efficiency sound like a desirable trait for an employee, but the previous literatures were not in agreement. According to the research of Teng et al.(2010),it indicated that time pressure will not only increase the possibility that employees will make errors, but may also lead to negative emotions and emotional fatigue. Similarly, Murali (2017) also holds the view that time pressure would cause employees to experience physiological stress as well as hinder their ability to think strategically.

### *Constant Connectivity*

The definition of constant connectivity is the continuous connection to the organization throughout all work-related communication tools, regardless of work or non-work hours (Büchler et al., 2020). It is the new norm to stay connected to work via smart mobile devices from anywhere and at any time, yet it has become a burden because immediate feedback is expected (Loeschner, 2018). Under such the environment of high responsiveness and endless to message, employees are lacking time for personal activities and relaxation. Therefore, constant connectivity may be detrimental to the well-being of employees due to information overload, stress generated by higher work demands, and the restriction of recover (Ruhle et al., 2020). Similarly, Mazmanian (2013) also pointed that the lengthy duration of constant connectedness might lead to negative outcomes such as burnout, inability to disconnect from work, family tension, marriage issues, and loss of time for self-improvement.

**Sickness Presenteeism**

Oppose to sickness absenteeism, sickness presenteeism refers to employees who report to work even feeling ill (Aronsson & Gustafsson, 2005). Conway et al (2014) viewed sickness presenteeism as the phenomena in which employees continue to work despite being ill, despite the fact that they should be on sick leave and resting. Compared to absenteeism, presenteeism which represents accumulated tiredness, may have larger negative effects on not just employee productivity but also their health (Dietz & Scheel, 2017). The research conducted by Hansen & Andersen (2008) indicated that, in addition to a relatively low level of productivity, presenteeism increases the likelihood of a coronary event and a major health problem at a later stage. Lu et al (2013) agreed on presenteeism will not only bring a price tag of health consequences, but also cause employees have a tendency to loss their passion in their job by describing it as stressful and unsatisfying.

**Employee Psychological Well-being**

Well-being is more than the absence of disease yet it is optimal psychological functioning and a state of happiness (Chuah, 2019). The term Psychological well-being refers to the extent to which a person is satisfied with his or her life and mental health, as well as feeling hopeful, cheerful, and good about oneself (Momtaz et al., 2011). In fact, the positivity and enjoyment that psychological well-being generates would result in enhanced work performance. From the organization level perspective, the studies from Robertson & Cooper (2010) and Robertson et al (2012) found that that employees with higher levels of psychological well-being perform better at works since they are both mentally and physically healthier. To reach a high level of psychological well-being in the workplace, it is essential to have both a great working experience and a sense that their work is meaningful (Kundi et al., 2020). For this reason, it is essential for the company to monitoring and promoting the psychological well-being of employees that may be beneficial for the organization (Kundi et al., 2020).

**Hypothesis Development***Time Pressure and Sickness Presenteeism*

Time pressure is described as employees attempting to complete their tasks more quickly than usual (Malik, 2015). Employees that continually exert themselves to deal with time pressure, that could be caused by tight deadline or to prevent backlogs from taking medical leave, may experience burnout and resulted in sickness presenteeism (Hansen & Andersen, 2008; Teng et al., 2010). Also, recent studies done by McGregor et al (2016); Dietz & Scheel (2017); Nordenmark et al (2019) support that time pressure was positively related to sick presenteeism. Hence this study hypothesizes that:

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant positive relationship between time pressure and sickness presenteeism

**Constant Connectivity and Sickness Presenteeism**

Constant connectivity is defined as the perpetual connection with the organizational related parties, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across all communication channels (Büchler et al., 2020). Employees that experience constant connectivity may suffer from information overload and physical and mental strain, then resulted in insufficient rest and increasing the likelihood of sickness presenteeism (Ruhle et al., 2020). Surveys such as that conducted by

Ayyagari et al (2011); Ruhle et al (2020) have shown that constant connectivity was positively related to sickness presenteeism. Hence this study hypothesizes that:

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant positive relationship between constant connectivity and sickness presenteeism

### Sickness Presenteeism and Employee Psychological Well-being

The World Health Organization viewed psychological well-being as a indicator of health, and it plays a crucial role in presenteeism-related productivity outcomes (Brown et al., 2011). The studies of Collins et al. (2018) found that the employees with a high level of sickness presenteeism may have a difficulty to deal with organizational changes and job insecurity, which may lead to negative impact on employee health and wellbeing. It indicated that there is a direct association between presentism and both physical and mental health, which it would be worsened over the time (Lu et al., 2014). Therefore, it could conceivably be hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 3: There is a significant negative relationship between sickness presenteeism and phycological well-being.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

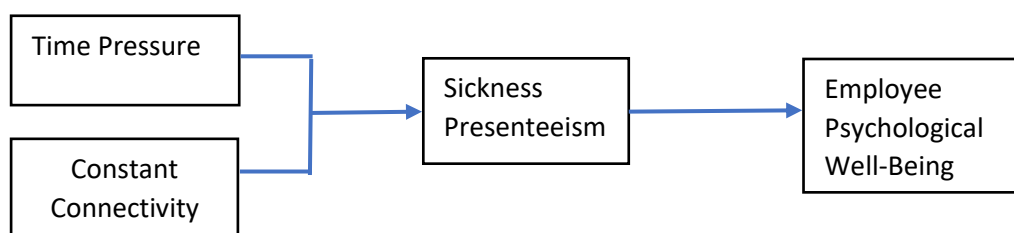


Figure 1 depict the conceptual framework in this study where the time pressure and constant connectivity posed an effect on sickness presenteeism. The study then proceeds to examine the influence of sickness presenteeism on employees' psychological well-being.

## Methodology

### *Sampling and Data Collection*

A quantitative approach has been utilized by collecting cross-sectional data to test the hypotheses. The targeted population in this research is employees working in Malaysia. Data were collected using an online survey questionnaire. Convenience sampling method were used in this study. A total of 135 employees responded to the survey and their responses were then subsequently analyzed.

### *Measurement*

All the items in this study were adopted from previous studies. Items measuring the perception of respondents' level of time pressure were adopted from (Malik, 2015). The items measuring constant connectivity were adopted from (Buchler, 2020). Sickness presenteeism items were adopted from (Lu et al., 2013). As for employee well-being, psychological well-being was adopted from WHO (2004).

### *Data Analysis*

In this study, both Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 and Smart PLS 3.3.9 were used to conduct the analysis. SPSS software was utilized to calculate the descriptive analysis, mean, kurtosis, skewness, and standard deviation. This research used the structural equation modeling approach via Partial Least Square (PLS-SEM). In this study, the Smart PLS 3.3.9, which was developed by Ringle et al (2015) was to establish the validity and reliability of the data. The study then proceeds to test the proposed hypotheses.

### **Result**

#### *Common Method Bias (CMB)*

CMB refers to the variance that may arise due to methods used (Campbell and Fishke, 1959). CMB usually occurs when data were collected from a single source in which all variables are collected at the same time using a similar format such as consistent Likert-type scales (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986; Jordan & Troth, 2019). As the data in this study were collected from a single source, the concern of CMB needs to be addressed. A full collinearity test was utilized to determine the variance inflation factor (VIF). The result indicated that the VIF value for all the constructs in this study was between 1.029-1.219 which is well below the value of 3.3 as suggested by Kock and Lynn (2012). Thus, CMB is not a major concern in this study.

#### *Measurement Model*

This study proceeds to assess the measurement model by examining the average variance extracted (AVE), consistency reliability CR, and discriminant validity. As shown in Table 1, the convergent validity was accessed through the average variance extracted (AVE). The AVE values ranged from 0.624 to 0.913 which exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2017). In relation to internal consistency, composite reliability was used and the values ranged from 0.833 to 0.955 which exceeded the recommended level of 0.7 as recommended by Hair et al (2017), thus establishing internal consistency reliability. Next, this study proceeds to determine the discriminant validity through the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations. The results show that all the HTMT values are below the 0.85 thresholds as recommended by (Kline, 2015).

Table 1  
*Results of Measurement Model*

	Mean	Std Deviation	Loading	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Composite Reliability (CR)
Constant Connectivity	5.074	1.418		0.676	0.912
CC1			0.674		
CC2			0.889		
CC3			0.821		
CC4			0.794		
CC5			0.913		
Sickness Presenteeism	3.263	1.253		0.913	0.955
SP1			0.951		
SP2			0.960		
Time Pressure	3.538	0.859		0.624	0.833
TP1			0.820		
TP2			0.769		
TP3			0.780		
Psychological Well-Being	3.575	0.745		0.678	0.913
PWB1			0.826		
PWB2			0.888		
PWB3			0.711		
PWB4			0.803		
PWB5			0.876		

Table 2  
*Discriminant validity (HTMT)*

	Constant Connectivity	Sickness Presenteeism	Time Pressure	Psychological Well-Being
Constant Connectivity				
Sickness Presenteeism	0.19			
Time Pressure	0.175	0.52		
Psychological Well-Being	0.088	0.243	0.33	

### *Structural Model*

A bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 subsamples was utilized in the testing of the proposed hypotheses. Table 3 shows the summary of the results of hypothesis testing. Based on Table 3, it was found that time pressure positively influences sickness presenteeism ( $\beta = 0.405$ ,  $t$  value 5.447). This study also found that sickness presenteeism has a negative effect on psychological well-being ( $\beta = -0.231$ ,  $t$ - value 2.984). Hence hypotheses H1 and H3 were

accepted. The  $R^2$  for H1 and H3 is 0.192 0.053 with the effect size  $f^2$  of 0.199 and 0.056 respectively.

Table 3

*Summary of results for hypotheses testing*

			Beta	Std Deviation	T Stat	P Values	Remark
H1	Time Pressure ->	Sickness Presenteeism	0.405	0.074	5.447	0	Supported
H2	Constant Connectivity ->	Sickness Presenteeism	0.121	0.087	1.386	0.166	Not Supported
H3	Sickness Presenteeism ->	Psychological Well-Being	-0.231	0.077	2.984	0.003	Supported

**Discussion**

The aim of this study is to determine the factors that would lead to sickness presenteeism. In addition, this study also endeavors to examine the effect of sickness presenteeism on employees' psychological well-being. The results indicated that H1 was supported, hence providing an insight that time pressure is a factor that would lead to sickness presenteeism. Secondly, it was found in H3 that sickness presenteeism poses a negative effect on employees' psychological well-being.

The result of this study is in line with previous research on sickness presenteeism, (Nordenmark et al., 2019; Dietz & Scheel, 2017) indicating a high level of time pressure exerted will lead to higher sickness presenteeism among employees. Thus, it is important for the organization to plan and have a proper system for monitoring and managing employees' work progress. On the other hand, flexibility and the empowerment of employees in managing their time schedules and planning tasks also can prevent presenteeism (Kottwitz et al. 2018). Furthermore, team, supervisor, and leadership support is essential in reducing the stress stemming from time pressure. In addition, it is also pertinent for the management to assess the current work culture, on whether it is encouraging sickness presenteeism in the workplace, e.g., promoting longer work hours in the workplace.

Next, pertaining to the relationship between sickness presenteeism and employees' psychological well-being, it was found that the higher the level of sickness presenteeism, will lead to lower the level of employees' psychological well-being. Employees psychological well-being must be given priority as it poses an effect on work performance based on previous studies done by (Kundi et al., 2020; Sahin et. al., 2018). The result is also supported by other studies done by (Brown et al., 2011; Collins et al., 2018).

However, a puzzling finding found in this study was that no significant relationship between constant connectivity and sickness presenteeism. This result is in contrast with the mainstream results whereby constant connectivity was seen as one of the factors that lead to sickness presenteeism. A further contemplation might shed some light on this finding. Firstly, constant connectivity enables employees to anticipate and plan beforehand the activities needed to be done before reaching the office, hence providing them the flexibility and empowerment to plan and schedule their job. Secondly, constant connectivity enables employees to have better communication with team members, managers, and customers.



Hence, reducing sickness presenteeism as matters can be solved with better communication among the stakeholders when employees take leave due to sickness.

### **Limitation and Recommendation for Future Research**

One of the limitations of this study is that it focuses only on employees working in Malaysia. While the results provide an overall overview of employees in Malaysia, it would be interesting if the comparison between employees from different industry can be made. Secondly, it is suggested that future research could adopt a longitudinal study. In addition, future research may consider examining other moderating factors such as teamwork, supervisory support, and types of personalities (e.g., Big Five).

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study provides insights in relation to the contributing factors that influence sickness presenteeism. This study conveys an important message to organizations on the importance to stop and prevent the prevalence of sickness presenteeism in particular the need to manage and plan employee work schedules. The findings also highlight the implication of sickness presenteeism on employees' psychological well-being, which may lead to lower work performance and job satisfaction.

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