

# Presenteeism at Workplace: A Turkish Idiom “Let Friends See You at Shopping”

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## **Abstract**

Businesses are operating in an intensely competitive environment today and they have begun to give importance to human resources rather than material resources in order to survive and to exist at the same time. Therefore, new applications have been started to be researched to use human resources more effectively and to improve working conditions or to reduce inefficient working elements. Presenteeism means that the employee has to go to work for different reasons, appear there but cannot work efficiently. In Turkish, this is explained by the phrase “let your friends see you in shopping”, which means “to show off, to pretend to work”. Presenteeism has also become one of the topics that have been started to be researched recently as an element that reduces productivity. Presenteeism is an important element that organizations have just realized. So, purpose of this chapter is to introduce the concept of presenteeism and to raise awareness against this negative work behavior.

## **1. Introduction**

Presenteeism refers to the fact that employees are not at work mentally even though they are physically at work. It is the situation experienced by individuals who have health problems, employees who cannot fully perform their duties due to management problems in the workplace or some other factors (Cooper, 1998; Johns, 2012).

Although there is no clear consensus on the rate of loss of profitability caused by presenteeism in organizations, scientists think that this rate is higher than absenteeism in organizations (Hemp, 2004:1; Çoban and Harman, 2012: 4). Employees may prefer to go to work instead of resting at home when they are sick due to fears of being fired or not being promoted. However, this preference may cause results such as slowdown in business, inability to use time efficiently, inability to focus on work, and low productivity. It can be said that the sick employee will negatively affect the

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work environment and decrease the productivity of his teammates. For this reason, it can be said that the costs of loss of profitability due to presenteeism are higher than absenteeism in organizations (Hemp, 2004:1).

Presenteeism is a new field of study. Studies on sectoral or occupational basis should be increased. It is thought that the negative effect of presenteeism on sectors such as education, health, construction, tourism is very high. Therefore, raising awareness about presenteeism and doing more fieldwork will increase knowledge. This information is likely to protect businesses from the negative effects of presenteeism. So, in this study, presenteeism was introduced and business managers were warned against this negative business behavior. In addition, the measures that can be taken against this negative behavior in the workplaces were examined.

## **2. The Concept of Presenteeism**

The concept of presenteeism is derived from the English word presenteeism and the word presence. The word Presence has the meaning of being, being there and appearance. It expresses the state of being physically present (Çiftçi, 2010: 155). Presenteeism means that employees are at work even though they cannot work with full efficiency due to illness and other health conditions (Martinez & Ferreira, 2012: 297). This concept is the appearance of employees working long hours (Cooper, 1998: 314).

Unavailability at work is usually the loss and absence from work due to health problems. Absence is the situations where people go to work but their work performance decreases, and absenteeism is the loss of productivity due to not being at work (Dewa et al., 2007:350). Unavailability at work (presenteeism) has been expressed as the opposite of absenteeism. Therefore, presenteeism increases when absenteeism decreases, and presenteeism decreases when absenteeism increases (Smith, 1970). From this point of view, presenteeism also shows that the employee who comes to work to avoid absenteeism is a workaholic (Günbeyi & Gündoğdu, 2010).

Presenteeism causes the productivity and quality levels of the work to remain below the standards, although the employees are physically at work (Koopman et al., 2002:1). Presenteeism is the employee's going to work when he/she is physiologically or psychologically ill (Aydın Tükeltürk et al., 2014: 282). This situation causes the employee to not be able to show their full performance despite being at work. According to another definition, presenteeism is the fact that employees are at work when they should not go to work because of their physical or mental illness. The result of presenteeism is that employees go to work even though they are unable to go to work due

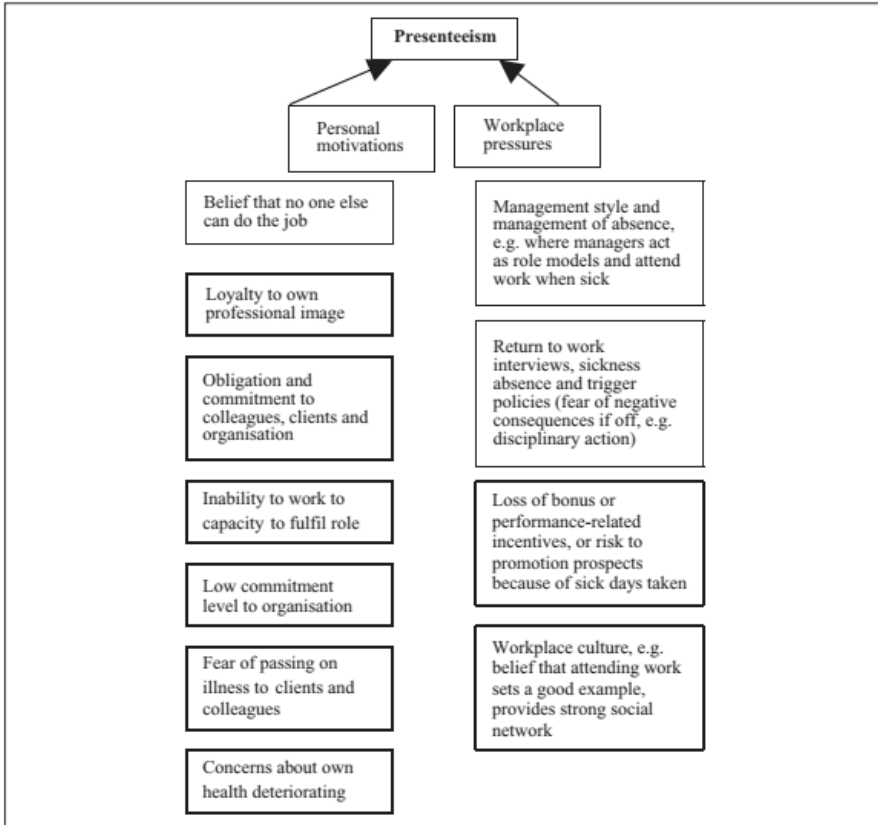
to career fears or the pressure of losing their jobs, also with, they cannot work efficiently in their jobs and show low performance (Koçoğlu, 2007). Presenteeism can cause the employee's commitment to the workplace to be questioned. Because, despite the fact that the employee is sick and unable to work, he actually harms the business by working inefficiently by going to work. According to Bayar (2016: 4-5), employees affiliated with the organization they work for are always willing to do what they do and they feel that they belong to the organization at heart. Employees who are not affiliated with the organization they work for, on the other hand, do not concentrate on working as a brain, even though they are in the work environment. During working hours, these individuals fill their working hours by directing their minds to different places, not by thinking about the work they do, but about the things they will do during the day or later, the places they will go, their children or their spouse.

The reasons for presenteeism include the downsizing of organizations, the policies of laying off employees due to mergers, and the feeling of pressure on the remaining employees. Even if the employee is uncomfortable with the fear of losing his job, he has to go to work. The cause of presenteeism can be work-related factors as well as personal factors. Among the work-related factors, there are factors such as strict supervision and time pressure on the employee, the lack of job guarantee, long working hours, personal factors such as family life, financial situation and psychological conditions of the employee. In addition, very strict policies on business continuity cause employees to go to work even if they are sick (Çelik and Atilla, 2019: 945; Çoban & Harman, 2012: 167). Among the behaviors of presenteeism, the employee spends time outside of work (surf) on the Internet while at work, communicates with friends or family members via the Internet, makes personal payments by making online transactions, makes appointments for personal affairs such as doctor and hairdresser appointments, watching television, playing computer games, listening music and shopping online (Çoban, 2015:17). It is very important to investigate how these behaviors harm the person and the job. In fact, it can be measured which behavior causes how much job loss. It will be effective in reducing this negative behavior if the managers learn the reasons that push people to this behavior in the workplace.

### 3. Causes of Presenteeism

The causes of presenteeism have been classified differently by different authors. This situation can be classified as personal factors and work environment factors (Koçoğlu, 2007:14-22), marital status factors (such as marriage and deaths that cause stress) (MacGregor et al., 2008:607-615), personality and value conflicts factors with both colleagues and managers (Bierla et al., 2011: 106). For example, personality factor plays an important role in Presenteeism. In particular, the effects of personality on presenteeism were examined with the five factor model in the manufacturing industry, and it was determined that there was a positive relationship between personality traits and presenteeism (Ulu et al., 2016:176). The reasons for the emergence of presenteeism do not depend only on the employee himself. At the same time, there are reasons that arise regardless of the employee. The internal and external factors that cause the presenteeism problem should be determined. An examination should be made about where presenteeism originates (Çoban and Harman, 2012:161-162). Baker McClearn (2013) attributed the inability to be at work to two main reasons as personal and workplace pressure in general (Figure 1). Classifications, which are similar in essence, can be basically divided into two as individual and workplace origin. These factors directly or indirectly affect the employees and ultimately lead to non-existence in businesses. In general, these reasons arise from customers, business culture and policies, colleagues, and the structure of the business.

**Figure 1: Influences on Presenteeism: A Summary from International Published Studies**



**Source:** (Baker- McClearn, et al. 2010: 313).

Biron, Brun, Ivers, and Cooper (2006), reasons and percentages of not being at work; Fear of negative reaction (9.4%), not taking the disease seriously (15.1%), workload and deadline (31.6%), interest in work (2.8%), professionalism and guilt (27.7%) , to change oneself (27.7%) in the absence, to have difficulty in finding someone who will do their job (13.4%). According to the rates, the highest rate is to experience presenteeism due to workload and deadline. However, working time is a sensitive issue that employees constantly evaluate and in return, they come to a decision on whether to hire themselves or not (Demirbulat and Bozok, 2015:8). For this reason, the working hours of people at work should not be determined by very strict rules. If the person feels that he cannot give himself to work during the day, he should be able to take a break from his work. Maybe he

should be able to get away from his job for 2 hours and get back to work by relaxing. This can bring a productive work.

#### **4. The Results of Presenteeism**

Business managers attach great importance to the most effective and efficient use of available resources. It is very important to use the scarce resources in nature rationally and efficiently. Efficiency is the ratio of output to inputs as physical quantities obtained from production activities (Mucuk, 2014: 191). Therefore, in order to increase efficiency, it is necessary to achieve the highest level of output with the least possible input. For this, the factors that hinder productivity must be removed. Since unavailability and absenteeism at work directly affect performance, productivity and organizational welfare in organizations, organizations need to produce policies on these issues (Baker McClearn et al., 2010). Today's intense working conditions create increasing chronic health problems in individuals, which causes working inadequacy and loss of productivity. In addition, the problem of absenteeism is aggravated by the presence of chronic health conditions (Ribera, et al. 2008). Wang et al. (2003) examined the health problems that cause loss of productivity on different occupational groups and determined that the most common health problems in all occupations are seasonal allergies, chronic back/neck pain, chronic headache, hypertension, arthritis and depression.

Presenteeism is the loss of productivity in the workplace that occurs due to the fact that employees go to work despite being unable to go to the workplace for fear of being fired and not reaching their career goals, and therefore due to poor performance (Lowe, 2004). Presenteeism brings with it a decrease in performance and motivation, dissatisfaction, absenteeism and an increase in staff turnover (Dewa et al., 2007). There are always changes in the mental and physical health of individuals. Presenteeism has many different causes. It may not be possible to completely prevent it. However, if the reasons are tried to be understood, a precaution can be taken (Koçoğlu, 2007).

Employee dissatisfaction is the negative attitudes an employee has towards his or her job. This negative attitude can cause the employee to come to work late, be absent, take sick leave, and ultimately leave the job (Nwobia and Aljohani, 2017: 137-138).

Another factor, absenteeism, is closely related to presenteeism. Absenteeism is the absence of an employee from work except for annual leave and holidays (Sabuncuoğlu, 2009:49). Among the reasons for

absenteeism are illness, low wages, harsh working conditions, childcare of female personnel, and bad relations with work (Sabuncuoğlu, 2009:49-50). Individuals who are sick, especially those who have psychological disorders and need to rest, do not want to be labeled as mentally ill, and they want to continue their work even if they are not healthy (Dewa et al., 2007).

Another factor that causes presenteeism is work stress. The low level of communication and cooperation among employees causes stress and increases the apparent presence behavior in the workplace (Baker McClearn, et al. 2010). In addition, not being able to get support from colleagues, not being able to establish good relations with them, gossip and competition creates a source of stress for employees and causes them to appear in the workplace (Hansen & Andersen, 2008: 956). At the beginning of the diseases that cause presenteeism, infectious diseases such as flu and cold (Levin- Epstein , 2005: 1) and diseases such as headache, throat and back pain, insomnia, infections (Caverley et al., 2007: 314) can be counted.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

In today's global competitive environment, the most valuable asset for businesses is their employees. Getting even more productivity from employees keeps the business alive because it gains a competitive advantage. At this point, it is very important for managers to research ways to make employees productive and to identify the reasons for unproductive work. One of the inefficient ways of working is presenteeism. Presenteeism is when employees feel obliged to work despite having a health problem. Individuals with health problems become unproductive by working unhappy. In these situations, employees may have difficulties in obtaining permission from managers and authorities and may feel obliged to be present at work. This section aims to find a solution to the problem of presenteeism and to offer suggestions on how employees in businesses can be more productive.

Presenteeism can reduce the productivity of companies by at least a third (Hemp, 2004). It is thought that being an invisible problem causes more productivity loss than absenteeism (Galvao et al., 2016). For this reason, it is an issue that businesses need to take urgent measures. Since presenteeism is a negative business attitude, it has losses for businesses in particular and the entire economy in general. These losses, which occur in the form of costs, can take businesses back. Therefore, the factors that cause presenteeism should be determined and ways of prevention should be investigated.

According to Çiftçi (2010: 166), managers should objectively question whether there is presenteeism in their businesses, examine the reasons for

this, if any, and create an awareness about presenteeism in the workplace. Coping with presenteeism involves identifying its potential causes, designing and implementing interventions to prevent or mitigate, and monitoring and evaluating these interventions (Merrill et al., 2012). In order to manage the presenteeism correctly, its costs must be determined clearly.

Since the basis of presenteeism is health problems, it will be the most effective way to try to reduce the health problems of the employees. For this, it will be very beneficial to establish health programs within the enterprise, to establish rehabilitation centers, to organize health therapy sessions and even to organize individual symposiums and seminars on health protection for employees.

Diseases are sometimes caused by workload. Very long working hours can be alleviated with new working methods such as working from home, remote working, and virtual working (Yalın, 2005). These methods will provide more efficiency from the employee and prevent the damages of presenteeism. According to Çakır (2001), new working methods allow employees to better fulfill their responsibilities towards them by allocating more time to their families and themselves. Therefore, employees can establish a balanced order between family and work. With these new methods, the damage caused by negative business attitudes such as presenteeism to the business has been reduced and an annual income increase of 150 million dollars has been achieved in the productivity of the enterprises (Demirbilek, 2007).

In enterprises, an organizational culture should be created that can relieve some of the worries and fears of the employees. It should be accepted that there is no use in coming to work when you are uncomfortable. If the employee is sick, he should easily express this to his manager and the manager should be tolerant that the employee does not come to work that day. Çiftçi (2010) stated that people with such ailments will solve their problems in a shorter time, return to their jobs as healthy employees, and spend the time they spend at work to truly fulfill their duties.



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