EMPLOYEE ABSENTEEISM

1. Statistical Sources


The latest of several periodic surveys by the BNA of members of the Personnel Policies Forum on ways to measure absenteeism and turnover and on programs undertaken to reduce absenteeism and turnover. (National data on absence rates are also reported in BNA's *Quarterly report on job absence and turnover, bulletin to management* which is part of the BNA *Policy and Practices Series*. Purchased separately, each quarterly report costs $10.00 and is available through BNA’s Research and Special Projects Division.)


In this report, absence rates are shown for men and women, by sex, marital status and by race, as well as by occupation, industry and union coverage. Information on absences from work is obtained each May for the Bureau of Labor Statistics by the Bureau of the Census. An analysis of the data is subsequently published in the *Monthly Labor Review* as a *Special Labor Force Report* "summary." A reprint of this analysis, along with supplementary tables, is later issued as a *Special Labor Force Report* by the BLS.

2. Special Studies, Surveys, and Discussions


Allen constructs an economic model of work attendance decision and analyzes the effects of the outcome of that decision on productivity and individual earnings. Absence rate regression equations are estimated over individual survey data and a sample of paper industry establishments. Allen finds that absence likelihood of any worker decreases with the wage rate. It is significantly higher if the worker is young, white or a union member. Absence rates appear to be higher in jobs having inflexible

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Using regression analysis, Coce investigates the question of whether frequent absenteeism from work results in wage penalties for individual workers. To this end he examines among different racial and sexual subgroups of the population three distinct types of absenteeism—hours of work missed due to personal illness, hours of work missed due to illness of someone else in the family, and excess vacation hours taken. He also devotes particular attention to absenteeism because of family responsibilities, commonly thought to contribute to lower wages for working women. His results are summarized, and several tables are appended.


Job satisfaction and role pressures are considered as causative factors in absenteeism. In two field studies and an examination of the literature, job satisfaction as a primary source of absenteeism is questioned. Whether or not job satisfaction correlates with absenteeism seems to strongly depend on their sharing a common third factor—the attainment of valued rewards.


A study was conducted in a large auto plant employing about 1000 workers. The study was designed to gather information on several, frequently cited absenteeism factors. During the process, an interesting, additional factor was observed: workers who are able to achieve a set income for the fewest days in attendance by working overtime use this device to spend less time on the job. The authors conclude that absenteeism is reinforced by practices of this sort, and that programs should be set up instead to reinforce attendance.


This volume contains workshop proceedings of a group of industrial relations and human resource development executives discussing some of the environmental and personal factors influencing absence from work.
and some company programs and experiments designed to discourage employee absenteeism.


A model of employee attendance, based on a review of 104 empirical studies, is developed to examine in a systematic and comprehensive fashion various influences on employee attendance behavior. The model attempts to account for both involuntary and voluntary absenteeism. The model argues against assertions that absenteeism is mainly caused by job dissatisfaction and that absenteeism and turnover share common roots. Subsequent papers in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* ("An evaluation of some aspects of the Steers and Rhodes model of employee attendance" by Colin J. Watson, June 1981, pp. 381-389; and "Comments on employee absence/attendance as a dependent variable in organization research" by Peter G.W. Smulders, June 1980, pp. 368-371) discuss elements of the Steers/Rhodes model.


The psychiatric/psychological aspects of absenteeism among workers without legitimate medical reasons are examined from a variety of viewpoints in this collection of papers from a 1973 conference. The first group of papers focuses on the roles of labor, management, and the industrial psychologist, while the second set deals with specific medical and psychiatric concerns such as undetected mental illness and cigarette smoking.

3. Absenteeism controls and programs

Baum, John F. “Effectiveness of an attendance control policy in reducing chronic absenteeism.” *Personnel Psychology* (P.O. Box 6965, College Station, Durham, NC 27708), Spring, 1978. pp. 71-81, $8.00.

Following a brief survey of the literature on attendance control, Baum reports on a carefully controlled study of an attendance policy based on legal compliance in a large industrial organization. Results indicate that absenteeism can be effectively reduced by mandating more regular attendance as a condition of continued employment among chronic absentees.


Deitsch and Dils examine the costs of, the factors responsible for, and methods of reducing excessive absenteeism at General Motors. They suggest that casual absences represent rational employee response to contractually structured and/or administered incentives to stay away from the job. They recommend restructuring the contractual incentive system and
enforcing disciplinary contract provisions. Another version of this article entitled "To cut casual absenteeism: tie benefits to hours worked" is found in _Compensation Review_, First Quarter, 1981, pp. 41-46.


Parson’s Pine Products in Ashland, Oregon has developed a cash incentive program entitled "well pay" which functions the opposite of "sick pay". This system and three other company incentives (retro pay, safety pay, and profit-sharing pay) have reduced absenteeism by one third, practically eliminated lateness, and slashed accident costs.


The authors profile a company that deals with sick leave abuse by using a time-off-with-pay system, called the leave bank. Unused paid leave days can be converted to cash by a worker on his employment anniversary, and up to seven days of paid leave can be carried over to the next year. Absence of more than five days of paid leave comes at the expense of vacation days and holidays. This system reduced the company's absenteeism and paid overtime hours. (Additional articles addressing absenteeism controls and positive reinforcement experiments appear in the July, August, and September issues of _Personnel Administrator_.)


The "no-fault" system is a corrective rather than punitive approach to absenteeism control which avoids blaming the employee for not coming to work. With "no fault" each absence is regarded as a single occurrence. Consequently the employer avoids penalizing the employee who is genuinely ill for several days but does attend to the chronic absentee who accumulates several single day absences. A four-step disciplinary procedure linked to "no-fault" is outlined.


Winkler examines short-term absenteeism among teachers in California and Wisconsin in order to identify policies management can adopt to discourage abuse of sick-leave privileges by healthy employees. A model is used to control for personal and job characteristics. His study shows that large staff size and income protection plan coverage for teachers relate positively with absenteeism. However, policies requiring teachers to report each illness directly to the principal or to provide proof of illness reduce absenteeism.