

# Examining the Impact of Presenteeism in Policing

Sebastien Therrien

## Introduction

Relevant literature has been analysed and reviewed to identify evidence surrounding presenteeism in this research paper. Organizations do not only suffer large costs stemming from individuals exhibiting absenteeism; literature in this research demonstrates that presenteeism, which precedes absenteeism, is an additional and marginally explored aspect that reflects hidden costs (Cancelliere & Cassidy, 2011). According to Ruskin (2016), the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) has paid its members more than \$1 billion of overtime since 2009; people who have recently retired from the RCMP testify that this has had a key impact on many who have been working long hours who are now stressed, overworked and depressed. This research has been conducted for the purpose of exploring characteristics and identifying solutions related to presenteeism in order to minimize and/or avoid future losses of productivity for businesses and workforces.

## Background

The primary aim in this research is the examination of causes leading to presenteeism. Police who are suffering presenteeism can have a negative impact on themselves, their co-workers, their department and the public (Leineweber et al., 2011). Essentially, decreased and losses in productivity and/or decreased levels of performances at work can stem from presenteeism. Deery, Walsh & Zatzick (2014) state that severe policies and severe disciplinary measures can make employees hesitate to take time off even when they sincerely need to. Furthermore, their study argued that “the fear associated with taking sick leave had made absenteeism a ‘risk-taking’ activity rather than a health promoting decision thereby encouraging presenteeism” (p. 355).

## Methods

The articles in the literature review portion was primarily researched through the Library SearchMe! Database system, accessible to students at the Justice Institute of British Columbia (JIBC). Non-scholarly articles such as news articles were also used for the literature portion to supplement the research.

A literature search was conducted and the following keywords and terms were used to find content: Presenteeism, Absenteeism, Anxious worker, Employee well-being, Work well-being, Social exchange theory, Conservation of resources theory, Emotional exhaustion, Overtime, Work Overload and Role Overload. Note that all these keywords were also tied with the terms “police” and/or “law enforcement” in order to narrow down and be more specific about the subject. The research was also refined by limiting the findings to full-text, peer-reviewed articles from 2007 to 2017.

## Results/Findings

According to Lerner (2016), it is difficult to identify someone experiencing presenteeism because of the following characteristics: It does not have a physical reality (height or weight); It is not entirely a characteristic of the person; it occurs with an exposure to a task/challenge/context; It has an experimental component (p. 8).

The main themes identified in the literature were attendance enforcement and the effects of overtime, work/role overload and inadequate management in a workplace. Duxbury & Higgins (2012) indicated that the typical police officer in one of their samples spent 53.5 hours in work per week overall (including supplemental work at home and commuting) and as such can be considered to be high risk with respect to high work-life conflict, stress, depressed mood, absenteeism and poorer physical health (p. 26). Research by Deery, Walsh & Zatzick (2014) concluded that both work overload and attendance enforcement were positively related to employees’ decisions to attend work while ill (p. 364). As demonstrated in Duxbury & Higgins’ (2012) study, “police officers who reported to a non-supportive manager are twice as likely as those who reported to a supportive manager to report high levels of stress and depressed moods” (p. 80).



Retrieved from <http://www.stresslessoffice.com/workplace-wellness/>

## Discussion

The elements that have been discussed in all of these themes all have shown to be contributors of presenteeism. It was determined that the adaptive coping strategies were used by employees who tried to view stressors through positive lens, who requested for social support and tried to eliminate their stressors. In contrast, a maladaptive coping strategy is the employee who will have the tendency to vent emotions, who will make use of drug or alcohol, or who will emotionally distance themselves from situations (Padyab, Backteman-Erlanson & Brulin, 2016). Results in lack of productivity is prominent in presenteeism and it is costly to employers.

Upon conducting the research, it was noted that not all the articles and data related to policing or law enforcement; most related to civilian workforces. Selecting the appropriate articles was challenging therefore close examination was crucial and the valued information gathered was then compiled and directly applied to information that came from law enforcement research.

## Conclusions or Recommendations

In order to identify individuals who suffer presenteeism Lerner (2016) recommends an indirect assessment relying on self-report. She created a test that relies on human responses, the Work Limitations Questionnaire (WLQ). Upon completing the questionnaire, assessors can determine the level of productivity that has been lost, in comparison to previous assessments.

In order to reduce presenteeism and reduce the human and economic burdens, Lerner (2016) recommends the “Be Well at Work Program” (BWAW). She indicates that the program is employee centered, uses a functional approach addressing the medical, psychological and work factors that influence outcome, care is customized to employee preferences and needs, and is coordinated with primary care and/or behavioral healthcare for depression (p. 22). Lerner’s (2016) findings concluded that their program was superior to usual care in restoring work performance and productivity and that it improved mental health to levels obtained with antidepressants (p. 27).

## References

Cancelliere, C., Cassidy, J. D., Ammendolia, C., & Côté, P. (2011). Are workplace health promotion programs effective at improving presenteeism in workers? *A systematic review and best evidence synthesis of the literature*. BMC Public Health, 11(1), 395. doi:10.1186/1471-2458-11-395

Deery, S., Walsh, J., & Zatzick, C. D. (2014). A moderated mediation analysis of job demands, presenteeism, and absenteeism. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 87(2), 352-369. doi:10.1111/joop.12051

Duxbury, L., & Higgins, C. (2012). *Caring for and about those who serve: Work-life conflict and employee well being within Canada's police departments*. [Ottawa, ON] Sprott School of Business, Carleton University

Leineweber, C., Westerlund, H., Hagberg, J., Svedberg, P., Luukkala, M., & Alexanderson, K. (2011). Sicknes presenteeism among Swedish police officers. *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, 21(1), 17-22. doi:10.1007/s10926-010-9249-1

Lerner, D. (2016) *The be well at work program helps workers with depression feel better and perform better*. [PowerPoint]. Retrieved from <http://www.cirpd.org/Webinars/Pages/Webinar.aspx?wbID=111>

Padyab, M., Backteman-Erlanson, S., & Brulin, C. (2016). Burnout, coping, stress of conscience and psychosocial work environment among patrolling police officers. *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology*, 31(4), 229-237. doi:10.1007/s11896-015-9189-y

Ruskin, B. (2016). *\$1B RCMP overtime bill proof of ‘exhausted and depressed’ members, retirees say*. Retrieved from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/rcmp-overtime-bill-burnout-police-health-retirees-1.3752805>

