

# THE ISSUES OF ABSENTEEISM AND PRESENTEEISM IN TERMS OF THE RIGHT TO DECENT AND SAFE CONDITIONS OF LABOR

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**Annotation.** The right to work is a fundamental human right, whereas decent, safe and favorable conditions of labor are essential to its implementation. Today, decent labor implies efficient employment that provides a fair income, job security, and social protection. Approval of the concept of decent labor and its implementation in practice also means approval of the concept of respect for employees' rights and taking measures to improve conditions of labor.

The purpose of the study is to investigate the issues of absenteeism and presenteeism in terms of the right to decent and safe conditions of labor; to determine the interconnection between the improper fulfillment of the employer's obligations to create a safe labor environment on the one hand, and absenteeism and presenteeism in the workplace on the other.

The methodological basis of the research is the results of previously conducted foreign studies, scientific conclusions, and views on the concept, causes, consequences of absenteeism and presenteeism; legal acts and provisions of the International Labor Organization.

The authors of the article emphasize that today's labor activity carries more and more risks associated not only with the physical but also with the mental health of an employee. Therefore, modern safety and health management systems at enterprises, as well as legal norms, require constant transformation in the direction of the development of society, social values and employees' needs. The article identifies the main causes of absenteeism, presenteeism and their consequences, as well as concludes that an unsafe labor environment is one of the main factors resulting in presenteeism and absenteeism.

The article also points out that the implementation of certain programs (which aim at improving the balance between stress factors at work and work resources; supporting employees, taking care of their physical, mental, financial and social well-being; the formation of a safe, healthy, inclusive labor culture that increases productivity and work efficiency; the regulatory expansion of the content of the right to safe conditions of labor; the creation of additional guarantees for the employee in the field of occupational safety, in particular the safety of mental health and their consolidation at the local or legislative level) is now a necessity, a demand of society and a guarantee of the productive activity of enterprises and the growth of the economy as a whole.

**Key words:** absenteeism, presenteeism, occupational safety, mental health, labor.

## 1. Introduction.

In June 2022, the International Labor Conference amended paragraph 2 of the International Labor Organization's 1998 Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, namely, "safe and healthy labor environment" gained the status of a fundamental principle and fundamental right in the field of labor. The International Labor Organization's Declaration

on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization of 2008 and the Global Jobs Pact of 2009 were also amended accordingly.

In addition, the Occupational Safety and Health and Labor Environment Convention, No. 155 of 1981 and the Framework Convention concerning Safety and Health at Work, No. 187 of 2006 have gained the status of core instruments, whereas all member states of the International Labor Organization (hereinafter referred to as the ILO), even if they have not ratified these two Conventions, now have an obligation (arising from the very fact of membership in the ILO) to respect, promote and implement, in good faith, in accordance with the ILO Constitution, the principles concerning the fundamental right to a safe and healthy labor environment [1].

The fast pace of life, constant changes in labor market conditions, competition, economic crises, inflationary processes - all these factors force people to work more and more, often despite violations of their rights as employees, labor conditions and health.

Today, safe conditions of labor cannot be restricted to employers' obligations to use safe plant and equipment. It is also essential to prevent risks associated with the use of any objects or substances by employees, as well as from exposure to physical factors, noise and vibration; to instruct and train employees on occupational safety and health; to provide them with protective clothing and equipment (although these requirements are not always met). Since today's labor activity carries more and more risks associated not only with the physical but also with the mental health of the employee, modern safety and health management systems at enterprises, as well as legal norms, require constant transformation in the direction of the development of society, social values and employees' needs.

Mental disorders have become a major cause of long-term sickness absence and disability in most developed countries. They limit a person's participation in basic activities, including work. The most common and most debilitating form of mental disorders is depression [2]. It is the leading cause of disability worldwide, results in the loss of productivity, and is associated with increasing absenteeism and presenteeism [3]. In general, it has long been known that poor health, chronic diseases their and comorbidities, as well as frequent pain contribute to a decrease in labor market supply [4].

The ILO now emphasizes the importance of identifying each type of health hazard and risk in the workplace, ideally before it becomes an incident. This can be anything ranging from mine collapses and factory fires to stress and overwork [5].

The modern approach assumes that overwork and stress are not individual but organizational problems of the employee and often arise due to non-compliance with safe conditions of labor. A stressful labor environment, especially in the absence of support and good communication, causes emotional burnout, which, in turn, affects psychological and physical health.

## **2. Analysis of scientific publications.**

In Ukraine, the issues of absenteeism and presenteeism in employees' labor activity have not been studied at all, and only in recent years there have been published some works that turn to these issues within the corporate culture of an enterprise. However, in Europe and the United States, the issues of absenteeism and presenteeism have been studied since the 1990s and remain relevant to this day. After all, absenteeism and presenteeism are complex problems that lie in the areas of psychology, sociology, labor law, etc. In particular, the issues of absenteeism and presenteeism are reflected in the scientific works by N. Andrew, C. Ammendolia, B. Brunner, H.C. Cancelliere, D. Cassidy, J. Christensen, M. Deady, A. Emmermacher, S. Evans-Lacko, M. Global, N. Glozier, S.B. Harvey, M. Henderson, L. Hiltrud, I. Igic, D.A. Johnston, A.C. Keller, P. Langley, I. Madan, J. Nowak, J. Pergolizzi, J. Wendsche, etc.

### 3. The aim of the work.

The purpose of this work is to study the issues of absenteeism and presenteeism in terms of the right to decent and safe conditions of labor; to determine the interconnection between improper fulfillment of the employer's obligations to create a safe labor environment on the one hand, and absenteeism and presenteeism in the workplace on the other.

### 4. Review and discussion.

The loss of productivity due to work-related stress is a significant economic burden. Work stress is referred to as the impact of an unfavorable combination of high work stressors and low work resources. Loss of labor productivity can be a consequence of poor health, as well as may result from absenteeism and presenteeism [6]. Maintaining a healthy and productive labor force is becoming increasingly challenging on account of ongoing structural changes in the labor environment, an ageing labor force, and an increase in the number of employees suffering from work-related stress [7]. The results of the research show that the accumulation of high job demands and low job rewards is harmful to mental well-being in work units [8].

Labor safety has become (should become) one of the top priorities for organizations around the world, as safe workplaces also mean a high level of productivity for the employee and the company as a whole.

One of the problems that arise largely due to violations of employees' rights to decent and, most importantly, safe labor conditions, and lead to the loss of productivity, economic losses, and disorders of employees' physical and mental health are presenteeism and absenteeism.

Despite the fact that the issues of absenteeism and presenteeism have already existed and have been known for a long time, they were not regarded as serious. However, the current labor realities require their more detailed study in various respects.

All in all, presenteeism is a phenomenon in the workplace when employees are actually physically present but cannot be productive or work normally due to illness, personal problems, fatigue or exhaustion, etc.

The economic crisis and the phenomena it leads to, such as restructuring, downsizing, financial problems, and fears of dismissal due to the absence from work have a significant impact on employees' decisions about whether to continue the work despite poor health or stay at home [10]. Various studies indicate that the economic costs of presenteeism amount to tens of millions of dollars per year [11] and significantly exceed the costs of absence due to sickness (absenteeism).

The causes of presenteeism are quite diverse and can be related to both the individual and the work itself. They include: unpaid, low-paid sick leave; fear of losing a job (especially during pandemics, economic instability, wars, military conflicts); heavy workload; lack of sleep; concern about one's financial situation; desire to work hard (especially for young people at the beginning of their career); explicit/implicit expectations or pressure on the part of the employer [12]; professionalism; holding leadership positions; feelings of guilt and commitment to the organization or work as such; interest and satisfaction from work [13].

Presenteeism may have such negative consequences as the loss of productivity, individual fatigue, tension, anxiety, depersonalization, depression, injuries, illness, emotional burnout in the workplace, spread of infectious diseases, etc.

At the same time, some researchers have identified positive consequences of presenteeism. For example, it is believed that performing labor duties while being sick ultimately leads to a greater productivity of the enterprise than if employees stayed at home. Other positive aspects include the reduction in the workload of other employees who would have to replace them, as well as the acceleration of the recovery and rehabilitation process [13]. Nevertheless, the latter idea is rather controversial, for certain

types of diseases, on the contrary, require the employee to be absent from the workplace and follow the appropriate treatment regime.

In contrast to presenteeism, absenteeism is the absence of an employee from the workplace. It is important that absenteeism should be viewed in terms of employee's consistent fails to show up for work at the time scheduled. Absenteeism becomes a problem when it happens over and over again. It is not appropriate to mention absenteeism in the actions of an employee if he/she is absent from work due to illness, emergency or vacation, and such actions are of a single nature rather than systematic. In other words, absenteeism is a phenomenon whereby an employee is regularly absent from work without valid reasons.

The main reasons of absenteeism include: illness; bullying, intimidation or harassment at the workplace; unfair treatment, spreading false rumors, humiliation, lack of motivation; mental health problems (stress, related to exhaustion or overwork, family, financial or personal problems; depression, anxiety, other illnesses), serious illness, family problems, vacation, drug addiction; age (the older a person is, the less likely he/she is to have avoidable absences, including those due to chronic illness); travel problems (missing work hours due to bad weather, public transportation delays, construction, car problems or accidents); poor relationships with management.

Just like presenteeism, absenteeism has negative and positive consequences. The negative consequences include: decrease in productivity; increase in workload of other employees/employee; low quality of work (overworked employees); financial losses for the company and the employee (reduced salary); lack of labor discipline; accidents; negative impact on the company's corporate culture. As for the positive consequences, these include: rest, stress reduction, receiving overtime pay for performing additional tasks (applies to employees who temporarily perform the duties of an absent employee).

## 5. Conclusions.

The constant and rapid development of society and its transformation make adjustments to the employees' labor activity. The need to work overtime, multiple jobs in hazardous conditions, the loss of balance between personal life and work, constant search for a better job, stress, overwork, emotional burnout in the workplace, depression - these are becoming the norms and at the same time a global problem. Besides, the parallel process of reassessing human values, a new, broader view of occupational safety, safe and decent conditions of labor suggest creating a labor environment that prioritizes not only physical health of the employees, but also mental one, because today's frantic pace of life and work, in particular, has a greater impact on our mental health than ever before.

It is clear that the issues of absenteeism and presenteeism are not the result of a lack of safe conditions of labor, as they are often directly related to personal factors that are not associated with work. Nevertheless, an unsafe labor environment is one of the main factors that leads to the development of presenteeism and absenteeism.

Employers who want to prevent or delay the development of presenteeism and absenteeism should offer healthy labor conditions, a comfortable labor environment, as well as optimize the level of requirements they set for their employees. This includes reducing excessive workload, overtime, pressure from employers (managers), etc. The improvement of labor conditions and occupational safety will ultimately lead to an increase in productivity and help achieve a balance between stress factors at work and labor resources.

In times of economic instability, armed conflicts, and war, employers, on the contrary, seek to minimize any additional costs, such as education, social packages, trainings, and health programs; to increase the employees' workload due to the reduction in the number of employees or the increase in production; to reduce payroll costs. It is clear that under such conditions, employees' safety, health, absenteeism, and presenteeism are far from being of primary importance. However, in fact, supporting employees in times of crisis saves much more money in the long run than avoiding all additional costs. After all, employees who are satisfied with their labor conditions work better, are

more productive, and feel emotionally stable, which means fewer absences (without cause), sick leaves, dismissals, etc.

Hence, the implementation of certain programs (which aim at improving the balance between stress factors at work and work resources; supporting employees, taking care of their physical, mental, financial and social well-being; the formation of a safe, healthy, inclusive labor culture that increases productivity and work efficiency; the regulatory expansion of the content of the right to safe conditions of labor; the creation of additional guarantees for the employee in the field of occupational safety, in particular the safety of mental health and their consolidation at the local or legislative level) is now a necessity, a demand of society and a guarantee of the productive activity of enterprises and the growth of the economy as a whole.

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