

Can non-medical factors trigger sick leave?

March 23 2011

According to UK government statistics over 8 million working days per year are lost due to illness and about a third of these are due to minor ailments such as coughs, colds, sickness and diarrhea. Yet two individuals who are equally ill do not necessarily both report sick. New research published in BioMed Central's open access journal *BMC Public Health* shows that conflicts and stress at work can trigger taking sick leave.

A Swedish study interviewed more than 400 individuals, who worked at six different workplaces, including [health care workers](#), office staff and people in the manufacturing industry, within a few days of them taking sick leave. The [sociologist](#) Hanna Hultin from the Karolinska Institutet explained, "When we compared aspects at work during the days just before the participants reported sick to other workdays, we found that problems in relationships with colleagues and superiors were more frequent in the days just before sick leave than on other days. We also found that individuals with a minor ailment were more likely to report sick when they expected that the following workday would be particularly stressful."

So it seems that the [work environment](#) does not only affect our health, but also our behavior when ill. Understanding stress in the workplace plays an important part in determining why sick-leave rates differ between individuals in ways that do not mirror differences in health.

More information: Work-related psychosocial events as triggers of sick leave - results from a Swedish case-crossover study

Hanna Hultin, Johan Hallqvist, Kristina Alexanderson, Gun Johansson, Christina Lindholm, Ingvar Lundberg, and Jette Möller, *BMC Public Health* (in press)

Provided by BioMed Central

Citation: Can non-medical factors trigger sick leave? (2011, March 23) retrieved 1 December 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-03-non-medical-factors-trigger-sick.html>

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