

SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITY AND PRESENTEEISM DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ACROSS THE COUNTRIES OF THE EU27: A PARALLEL MEDIATION ANALYSIS MODEL APPROACH

Abstract

The objective of this study is to examine the impact of supervisory responsibility on the prevalence of presenteeism in EU27 nations. Time pressure and job control were incorporated as mediators in the model. A parallel mediation analysis was performed. The European Working Condition Telephone Survey (2021) data were utilized for this purpose. The findings of this study indicate that supervisory responsibility elevates the probability of presenteeism. Although job control diminishes the probability of presenteeism, time constraint emerged as a markedly more potent catalyst for presenteeism. Despite supervisors possessing stronger job control, time pressure exerts a more significant adverse effect on presenteeism. Organizations aiming to establish a health-promoting work environment must assess the expectations placed on their supervisors.

JEL Classification: I12, I14, I31, J24, M12

Keywords: presenteeism, supervisory responsibility, Europe, COVID-19

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UDK:
005.96EU:COVID-19

Izvorni znanstveni članak
Original scientific paper
DOI 10.47960/2831-
0322.2024.2.28.33

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1. Introduction

Presenteeism, the condition in which employees show up sick at work, has gained more and more attention in recent years. The reason for this is that presenteeism has an impact on both productivity and the well-being of employees. It has been shown that presenteeism is associated with a poorer assessment of health, sick leave, depression and stress (Callen et al., 2013; Leineweber et al., 2011; Skagen & Collins, 2016).

Individuals in supervisor roles are distinguished by their unique status inside organizations. This role not only impacts the relevant work processes but is also defined by its influence on the assigned personnel in terms of well-being (Inceoglu et al., 2021). Simultaneously, managers not only exercise influence but also face specific expectations that affect their well-being and health (Li et al., 2018). Performing a leader's role is characterised by a number of features that are defined by longer working hours, uncertainty and stressful demands with a simultaneously high level of job control (Ganster, 2005; Li et al., 2018; Quick et al., 2000).

The onset of the pandemic significantly influenced managers. In this situation, supervisors are confronted with two simultaneous challenges: On the one hand, they act as the first point of contact for their employees. On the other hand, they must continue to focus on achieving goals and maintaining the assigned area (Eichenauer et al., 2022). The quality of these management tasks is changing enormously against the backdrop of the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic.

The link between performing a supervisor role and health has not yet been extensively researched (Inceoglu et al., 2021; Wegge et al., 2014). The same applies to the study of the relationship between performing a supervisor role and presenteeism (Funk, 2024).

This paper seeks to address the extent to which assuming a leadership post impacts the prevalence of presenteeism and tries to close this research gap. The impact of time pressure and job control as mediators between leadership roles and the incidence of presenteeism is examined through parallel mediation analysis. This study aims to examine the mechanisms that affect the health behaviour of managers, contributing to the more focused and advantageous design of working circumstances.

2. Literature Review

Exercising supervisory responsibility is seen as a challenging task. This is reflected, among other things, by involvement in decision-making processes and being responsible for certain consequences. Pressure and stress arising from this role can also affect the well-being of managers and supervisors (Sparks et al., 2001). The framework conditions also play a role here, because they have an influence on the experience of managers. This is partly due to working in a globalised and competitive world (Sparks et al., 2001), as well as the changed circumstances due to the then prevailing COVID-19 pandemic, which had an impact on the way management work was carried out (Garretsen et al., 2024; Inceoglu et al., 2021). A review article shows that the stress experienced by managers also influences the well-being of the employees assigned to them (Skakon et al., 2010).

According to the job demands and resources model, working conditions can be analysed along their respective aspects. The assumption here is that working conditions can be divided into two factors: job demands and job resources. Job demands refer to “physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of the job, that require sustained physical and/or psychological [...] effort or skills and are therefore associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 312). Examples of possible influences include high work-related pressure or the specific working environment. These influences of job demands, such as time pressure, are associated with emotional exhaustion (Kunzelmann & Rigotti, 2021).

On the other hand, there are job resources, which are necessary to be able to cope with job demands and also have intrinsic value in the context of work performance. This can also be at an organisational level, at an interpersonal level, at the level of work organisation and also at the level of the specific task like job control, or task identification (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Job control as a possible job resource has a positive influence on the well-being of employees. A meta-analysis showed that job control has a positive effect on job performance in older employees and job satisfaction, especially in younger employees (Ng & Feldman, 2015).

Supervisory responsibility occupies a special position in this distinction between job demands and job resources (Funk, 2024). On the one hand, the perception of such a role can be seen as a resource, as a higher degree of job control is associated with higher job satisfaction, commitment and performance and lower levels of stress

and absenteeism (Sparks et al., 2001). On the other hand, it is also shown that performing a supervisory role can also be seen as a job demand due to the confrontation with time pressure and dealing with high work demands increased with the assumption of a leadership role (Li et al., 2018). Here, demands on the manager are seen as a result of performing the supervisor role, where supervisors deal with a range of potentially stressful situations such as task-orientated, relationship-orientated, change-orientated and external tasks such as networking (Hambrick et al., 2005; Yukl, 2012).

Studies that have investigated the interaction of time pressure and other work demands in conjunction with job control have shown that the values for demands were higher for people in management roles than for people who did not have a management role. The level of job control was also higher. It was found that managers did not suffer from burnout more frequently than people without a management role, despite the higher work demands. Job control was seen as the factor that could mitigate the negative effects (Blom et al., 2016). Another study has shown that taking on a leadership role leads to an increase in work demands and job control. This revealed that the increase in work demands is associated with more envious values of wellbeing, whereas higher job control values can be associated with higher values (Li et al., 2018).

Presenteeism describes the phenomenon of going to work despite illness. A variety of studies have addressed this topic from different perspectives and have, among other things, analysed the connection with support in the workplace (Caverley et al., 2007), conflicts in the team (Gosselin et al., 2013), overtime and shift work (Bockerman & Laukkanen, 2010), or job insecurity (Preisendörfer, 2010).

Presenteeism plays an important role in the world of work. On the one hand, studies have shown that presenteeism has an impact on future health and that this behaviour increases the likelihood of sick leave at a later date (Bergström et al., 2009; Hansen & Andersen, 2009). On the other hand, presenteeism also restricts employees' ability to work and increases their susceptibility to errors (Gustafsson & Marklund, 2011; Niven & Ciborowska, 2015).

Numerous studies have examined the correlation between job control and presenteeism. A study of employees in Sweden indicates that individuals with greater autonomy are less susceptible to presenteeism compared to those with limited autonomy (Johansson et al., 2015). Other studies have also shown that lower job control increases the risk of presenteeism (Gosselin et al., 2013; Hansen & Andersen, 2008; Krpalek et al., 2014).

A study of German employees demonstrated the connection between work-related characteristics, particularly job control, and the incidence of presenteeism, as well as mediation through specific health indicators such as well-being (Pohling et al., 2016). A qualitative study of British employees concluded that increased job control lead to individuals attending work despite illness, thereby utilizing their flexibility to avoid reporting sick (Irvine, 2011). This was similarly proven in another study involving Austrian employees. While more job control generally reduces the likelihood of presenteeism, it is evident that this relationship is U-shaped, with individuals possessing either low or high degrees of job control exhibiting elevated presenteeism rates. Employees with heightened vulnerability and increased absenteeism due to illness were especially impacted by this (Gerich, 2019). Other studies have demonstrated this connection only to a limited degree. One study has demonstrated a minor effect linking adjustment latitude — the capacity to modify or alleviate workload — to presenteeism, contrary to prior assumptions (Johansson & Lundberg, 2004, p. 1862).

A meta-analysis employing a dual path model has demonstrated this association via a health pathway, wherein job control is regarded as a resource that can mitigate presenteeism. A positive relationship between job control and presenteeism is evidenced through the motivational pathway, which encourages employees to meet work obligations, hence potentially enhancing presenteeism (Miraglia & Johns, 2016).

The impact of time pressure on presenteeism has been examined in numerous studies. Time pressure is linked to the prevalence of presenteeism and poses a problem for employees in meeting job obligations. Research indicates that elevated work demands promote the incidence of presenteeism (Deery et al., 2014; Krpalek et al., 2014; Robertson et al., 2012). Another research indicates that time constraint elevates the possibility of presenteeism when the workload must be completed under such challenging circumstances (Hansen & Andersen, 2008; McGregor et al., 2016; Merrill et al., 2012). The meta-analysis conducted by Miraglia and Johns demonstrated that time pressure was in connection with presenteeism. The dual path model indicates that time pressure adversely affects health through stressful encounters along the health path, thereby elevating the probability of presenteeism (Miraglia & Johns, 2016).

The relationship between performing a supervisor role and presenteeism has only been addressed in a few studies to date, as well as the extent to which performing a leadership role has an influence on presenteeism. A study of 1,730 senior executives in Canada has revealed that experienced stress among managers is the variable that

shows the most explanatory power for presenteeism (Gosselin et al., 2013, p. 82), however this study exclusively interviewed managers. Another study has proven that carrying out supervisory responsibility leads to an increase in presenteeism. This is mainly due to the time pressure experienced (Funk, 2024). This is of interest because presenteeism among managers has an influence on the presenteeism behaviour of employees (Dietz et al., 2020).

This study builds on these findings by focussing on two critical mediators: Time pressure as a demanding factor and job control as a potential resource. Both are considered central for people who have a leadership role and show an influence on presenteeism within the body of literature.

Hypotheses

H1: Supervisory responsibility (SUPER) relates positively to presenteeism (PRES).

H2: Time pressure (TIME) mediates the relationship between supervisory responsibility and presenteeism (PRES).

H3: Job control (CONTR) mediates the relationship between supervisory responsibility and presenteeism (PRES).

3. Methods

3.1 Dataset and Participants

This paper uses data from the European Working Condition Telephone Survey (EWCTS) from 2021. A quantitative cross-sectional design was selected to calculate the parallel mediation analysis. This study uses participants from the EU27 countries for the calculation ($n=20012$). The sample of individual countries ranges from 420 participants for Cyprus to 1496 participants for Belgium. The data were obtained free of charge from UK Data Service (prior registration required).

The EWCTS survey was originally conducted every five years and comprises a total of 36 participating countries. The original survey was cancelled in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey was restarted in 2021 and was not conducted face-to-face as before, but by means of telephone interviews. The survey took place between March and November 2021. The representativeness of the survey may have been affected by the prevailing pandemic at the time and the switch from face-to-face to telephone interviews (e.g. due to lockdowns, changes in working conditions).

Dependent variable (Presenteeism)

Presenteeism was surveyed in the course of the EWCTS by asking whether they had worked in the last 12 months even though they had been ill. This variable was dichotomised (0=no presenteeism, 1=presenteeism). Other answers (“I was still sick”, “Don’t know” and “Refused”) were excluded from the analysis.

Independent variable, mediators and covariates

The characteristic of performing a supervisor role was queried using the question “Do you have people under your supervision, for whom pay increases, bonuses or promotion, depend directly on you?”. This variable is coded dichotomously (0=no supervisor role, 1=supervisor role).

For the calculation of the mediator “Time pressure”, two variables - analogous to Avgoustaki & Frankort (2019) – are summarised in this index, which takes into account working at high speed and working under tight deadlines (Cronbach’s alpha is 0.653).

The mediator “job control” was calculated as an index of three variables - analogous to Breugh (1985). The choice of methods, the determination of the working speed and the order in which the work can be completed are taken into account. Only those participants who answered all three questions were included in the analysis. If only one or two of the three questions were answered, this participant was not included in the analysis. The Cronbach’s alpha for job control is 0.754.

Two further variables, gender and age, are included in the model as control variables.

3.2 Data Analysis

In order to calculate the influence of a supervisor role on presenteeism with consideration of the two mediator variables (time pressure and job control), a parallel mediation analysis was conducted. The SPSS extension PROCESS (version 4.2) was used for this purpose (Hayes, 2012). Model setting 4 was selected for the calculation of the parallel mediation model in order to be able to calculate both paths in parallel. The bootstrap confidence interval was set to 5000 to evaluate the significance of the indirect effects. This method is notably characterized by its robustness against deviations from the typical distribution of indirect effects. The model’s calculations are predicated on a binary-coded dependent variable, resulting in outcomes stated

in a log-odds metric. Statistical indicators employed included Nagelkerke R²- and -2LL-values (likelihood ratio test).

4. Results

The findings in Table 1 reflect the descriptive statistics of the sample utilized and illustrate the relationships among the variables. The percentage of individuals who have worked sick within the last 12 months is 29.89%. A positive correlation was calculated between presenteeism and supervisor responsibility ($r=0.069$, $p<0.01$). Time pressure shows a positive correlation with presenteeism ($r=0.188$, $p<0.01$), but job control demonstrated a negative relationship with presenteeism ($r=-0.024$, $p<0.01$). The relationship between the supervisor role and time pressure was positive ($r=0.152$, $p<0.01$), as was the relationship between the supervisor role and job control ($r=0.144$, $p<0.01$). The sample has a balanced ratio of women to males (women=48.6%, men=51.4%). The mean age of the respondents is 41.97 years (SD=12.12)

Table 1: Correlation matrix

		Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1	Presenteeism (PRES)	0.2989	0.45778	1			
2	Supervisor responsibility (SUPER)	0.1769	0.38159	0.069**	1		
3	Time pressure (TIME)	3.3910	1.02105	0.188**	0.152**	1	
4	Job control (CONTR)	3.4733	1.02989	-0.024**	0.144**	-0.031**	1

Source: Own calculations (EWCTS 2021);**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), n=20012

A parallel mediation analysis was performed utilizing PROCESS model 4 with 5000 bootstrap samples. The impact of the supervisor role (SUPER) on presenteeism (PRES) was examined alongside two mediators: time pressure (TIME) and job control (CONTR). Furthermore, two control factors were considered: gender and age.

The analysis of the parallel mediation model revealed a significant direct positive influence of the supervisor role (SUPER) on the occurrence of presenteeism (PRES) ($\beta=0.2667$, $SE=0.0409$, $p<0.01$). The results indicate that those in supervisory roles exhibit a higher probability for presenteeism than those without such responsibilities.

The indirect influence of supervisor responsibility (SUPER) on presenteeism (PRES) transpires through two paths. Through the first pathway of time pressure (TIME) and the second pathway of job control (CONTR). The findings indicate that supervisors experience more time pressure (=0.4223, SE=0.0188, p<0.01) and enhanced job control (=0.3857, SE=0.0190, p<0.01).

The indirect mediations through the pathway of time pressure (TIME) exhibit a significant positive correlation (=0.1751, SE=0.0099, p<0.01), indicating that supervisors are more likely to experience presenteeism as time pressure increases. Through the second pathway, job control (CONTR), a notable negative connection is seen (=−0.0207, SE=0.0061, p<0.01), indicating that managers might diminish the likelihood of presenteeism by enhancing job control levels. Nonetheless, this indirect influence through job control is less strong than that through the pathway of time pressure.

The total effect through both mediators is statistically significant ($\beta=0.1544$, SE=0.0117, p<0.01) and suggests partial mediation. The job control (CONTR) path diminishes the likelihood of supervisors, however the time pressure (TIME) path elevates the risk chance of presenteeism.

The analysis of the two control variables considered in the model revealed that gender significantly influences presenteeism (=−0.1386, SE=0.0318, p<0.01), with women exhibiting a greater likelihood of presenteeism. Concerning age, it is evident that it exerted no significant impact (=−0.0022, SE=0.0013, p=0.0929).

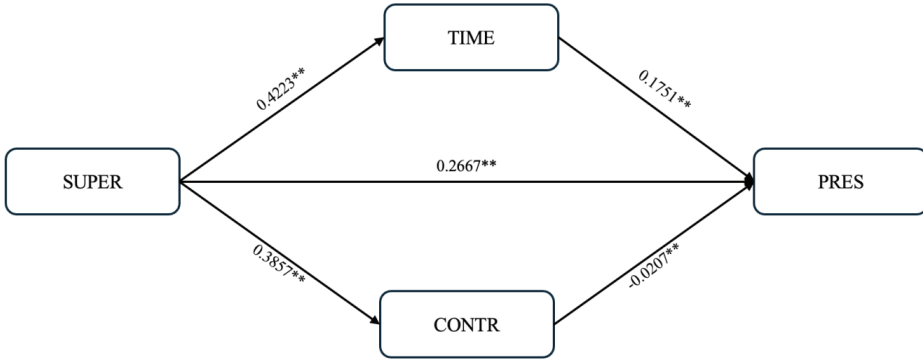
The model quality of this parallel mediation analysis indicates an explanatory variance proportion of 5.58%. The likelihood ratio test (-2LL=23592.5438) indicates significant model quality (p<0.01).

Table 2: Results of the calculated parallel mediation model

Effect type	Path	Effect (β)	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Direct effect	SUPER → PRES	0.2667**	0.0409	0.1866	0.3469
Indirect effect	SUPER → TIME	0.4223**	0.0188	0.3853	0.4592
Indirect effect	SUPER → CONTR	0.3857**	0.0190	0.3483	0.4230
Indirect effect	SUPER → TIME → PRES	0.1751**	0.0099	0.1557	0.1949
Indirect effect	SUPER → CONTR → PRES	-0.0207**	0.0061	-0.0329	-0.0086
Total effect	SUPER → TIME + CONTR → PRES	0.1544**	0.0117	0.1318	0.1776

Note: own calculations based on EWCTS 2021; SUPER=supervisor responsibility, TIME=time pressure, CONTR=job control, PRES=presenteeism; this model also controls for gender and age; proportion of explained variance in PRES: R²=0.0558; -2LL: 23592.5438; p-value:**<0.01; n=20012

This following model demonstrates the distinct impacts computed by the parallel mediation model.



Note: own calculations based on EWCTS 2021; SUPER=supervisor responsibility, TIME=time pressure, CONTR=job control, PRES=presenteeism; this model also controls for gender and age; proportion of explained variance in PRES: $R^2=0.0558$; -2LL: 23592.5438; p-value:**<0.01; n=20012

5. Discussion

This study aimed to examine the impact of supervisory performance on the prevalence of presenteeism. This was conducted using time pressure and job control as mediating variables. A parallel mediation study was conducted using data from the EWCTS 2021.

This data indicate that individuals in supervisory positions are more prone to working when ill. This outcome is corroborated by the findings of Funk (2024). This also confirms the statements by Li et al. (2018) who describe that people with supervisory responsibility are potentially confronted with higher work demands, which is also perceived as impacting the well-being of this group.

In the dual path model analysed herein, time pressure serves a reinforcing function concerning the incidence of presenteeism. The findings indicate that time pressure positively affects the likelihood of presenteeism, hence augmenting the chance of risk. This aligns with the findings of previous researchers who have examined the impact of time pressure on presenteeism (Deery et al, 2014; Hansen & Andersen,

2008; Krpalek et al, 2014; McGregor et al, 2016; Merrill et al, 2012). This investigation indicates that time pressure serves as an additional factor influencing the risk of attending work when ill, demonstrating its impact on the decision-making of those in supervisory roles.

The findings regarding the impact of job control on presenteeism indicate that job control, as a resource, reduces the likelihood of presenteeism. This outcome aligns with that of Johansson et al. (2015). Job control appears to mitigate the chance of working while ill, indicating that it has a protective influence against presenteeism. Simultaneously, it is evident that the protective influence of job control is less significant than the compelling impact of time pressure.

6. Conclusion

This study has sought to analyse the interplay between the supervisor role, time pressure and job control concurrently at the level of EU27 nations. This study presents findings that have been largely overlooked in presenteeism research, as there has been less investigation into the impact of a supervisor's position on the incidence of presenteeism. The findings elucidate the interaction between stress (time pressure) and resources (job control), so offering a more nuanced understanding of the role of this specific target group.

These results offer significant foundational insights for personnel policy strategies. Given that time pressure significantly influences the prevalence of presenteeism, it is evident that realistic time objectives and explicit recommendations for supervisors are essential to mitigate the effects of time pressure. Specialized leadership training focused on workload management can positively influence task and stress management. This is especially significant considering that managers serve as role models for their workforce (Dietz et al., 2020). Exhibiting presenteeism as a supervisor conveys to subordinate employees that the repercussions of presenteeism are disregarded, hence potentially promoting its occurrence. This indicates that organizations must implement health-promoting measures to acknowledge the potential repercussions of presenteeism and to sustain employees' work capacity and well-being.

Nonetheless, the findings of this study should be evaluated in light of specific limitations: This study utilizes cross-sectional data, which does not indicate any causal links. This underscores the necessity for longitudinal research that particularly examines the impact of a supervisory role and other variables. Conversely, it

is important to acknowledge that the data were gathered during the COVID-19 pandemic. This indicates that these results ought to be considered in the context of this specific event. The results must be understood to indicate that the situation of individuals in supervisory roles may be characterized by this phase. It is important to acknowledge that these data are self-reported. Consequently, socially desirable information or distortions resulting from memory lapses cannot be excluded. Also, this research also examined the nations of the EU27. Consequently, it is infeasible to draw conclusions regarding specific countries or regions. Future research should concentrate on specific geographical units to examine these mechanisms at the national or regional level.

The model computed here exhibits low explanatory power ($R^2 = 5.58\%$). This underscores that presenteeism is a multifaceted issue that cannot be elucidated by merely a handful of features. Subsequent research must consider additional impacting elements, including the incorporation of various job demands and resources.

In summary, the supervisor's job may elevate the danger of presenteeism. The risk element may not lie in the supervisor's function itself, but in the accompanying traits. This pertains, among other aspects, to the risk factor of time constraints. Job control may mitigate risk; nevertheless, the effect of time constraint outweighs the mitigating benefit of job control.

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ODGOVORNOST NADREĐENIH I PREZENTEIZAM TIJEKOM PANDEMIJE COVID-19 U ZEMLJAMA EU27: ANALIZA PREMA MODELU PARALELNE MEDIJACIJE

Sažetak

Cilj je ovoga istraživanja ispitati utjecaj odgovornosti nadređenih na učestalost prezenteizma u zemljama EU27. Vremenski pritisak i kontrola posla uključeni su kao medijatori. Provedena je analiza paralelne medijacije. Podatci iz Europskoga istraživanja o uvjetima rada putem telefona (2021) korišteni su u ovu svrhu. Rezultati ovoga istraživanja pokazuju da odgovornost nadređenih povećava vjerojatnost prezenteizma. Iako kontrola posla smanjuje vjerojatnost prezenteizma, vremenski pritisak pokazao se kao znatno snažniji katalizator prezenteizma. Unatoč tomu što nadređeni imaju veću kontrolu nad poslom, vremenski pritisak ima značajniji negativan učinak na prezenteizam. Organizacije koje žele uspostaviti radno okruženje koje promiče zdravlje moraju procijeniti očekivanja koja postavljaju pred svoje nadređene.

JEL klasifikacija: I12, I14, I31, J24, M12

Ključne riječi: prezenteizam, odgovornost nadređenih, Europa, COVID-19

