

New Study Reveals Key Predictors for Prolonged Work Absence in Precarious Workers with Mental Disorders

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A recent study has shed light on the factors influencing the duration of work absence and return to work (RTW) among precarious workers suffering from common mental disorders (CMDs). This research is crucial given the rising prevalence of mental health issues and their impact on the workforce, particularly among those in unstable employment situations. The findings were published in the *International Journal of Mental Health Systems*.

The study analysed data from two Dutch randomised controlled trials and one cohort study, encompassing 681 participants. This diverse sample provided a comprehensive view of the variables impacting RTW and work absence durations in this demographic.

One of the study's most striking findings is the role of employment status at the time of sick-listing. Individuals who were unemployed when they became sick-listed had a significantly longer duration before returning to work compared to those in temporary employment. Furthermore, the loss of an employment contract during sickness absence was another critical predictor of prolonged work absence.

Severe psychological symptoms emerged as another significant predictor. Individuals experiencing more severe symptoms of CMDs faced a longer road to RTW and extended periods of work absence. This finding underlines the importance of mental health support in the workplace and during periods of employment instability.

The study also highlighted age as a factor, with individuals above 50 years experiencing longer times until RTW. In terms of gender, males were found to have a prolonged duration of sickness absence.

These findings have substantial implications for occupational health professionals and policymakers. They highlight the need for targeted interventions focusing on mental health support and vocational rehabilitation, especially for those unemployed or facing job insecurity. There is an urgent need to develop strategies that address these specific challenges, ensuring a quicker and more sustainable RTW for precarious workers with CMDs.

While the study offers valuable insights, it also has limitations, including the use of data from a specific region (the Netherlands) and a focus on precarious workers, which might not be

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universally applicable. Further research in diverse settings is essential to build on these findings and develop broader strategies.

This study makes a significant contribution to understanding the complex interplay of factors affecting RTW among precarious workers with CMDs. Unemployment status, severity of psychological symptoms, age, and gender emerge as key predictors of prolonged work absence. This knowledge is vital for developing tailored interventions and policies to support this vulnerable group in the workforce.