

Do high levels of occupational sitting time predict sickness absence, sickness presenteeism and low work engagement over time?

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Introduction: Sedentary behaviour, has emerged as a risk factor for premature death and several chronic diseases. About one-third to half of our daily sitting time occurs at work. There is limited research on the link between occupational sitting and important work-related outcomes such as work engagement, presenteeism and sickness absence. An earlier cross-sectional study by Munir et al (2015) found that women had higher occupational sitting times than men and that men with high work engagement of vigor and dedication were less likely to have prolonged sitting time. In this study, we examine the effects of occupational sitting time on sickness absence, sickness presenteeism and work engagement, and over an 18-month period.

Methods: A cohort of 1005 office workers from the Northern Ireland Civil Service (Stormont) completed a questionnaire in 2012 (T1) and in 2014 (T2). Occupational sitting time were divided into tertiles of low (<360 mins), medium (361-420 mins) and high levels of sitting time (421-600 mins). Logistic regressions and generalised linear regressions were used to analysed data.

Results: Participants were predominantly female (N = 613, 61%). There were no significant findings for occupational sitting times predicting sickness absence. Overall, males who reported moderate levels of sitting times at T1 were more likely to report engaging in sickness presenteeism at T2. This was not the case for those males reporting high levels of sitting time. Increase sitting time at T1 also contributed to lower levels of work engagement of dedication at T2 for males. There were no significant findings for females between occupational sitting times and work-related outcomes.

Discussion: Our finding findings for levels of sitting time, sickness presenteeism and work engagement warrants further research.

Keywords: sedentary behaviour, workplace, presenteeism