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the cleaning sector in perspective

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POSTER PRESENTATION

Title: Health and sickness absence among immigrants in Denmark: the cleaning sector in perspective

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Background: Previous studies in Denmark and in other Scandinavian countries have shown that immigrants report poorer health than native Danes (Jørgensen, MB et al., 2011; Gadd et al. 2006). Studies related to health have increasingly focused on sickness absence due to the associated large economical, social, organizational and personal costs. It is particularly interesting to look into the relationship between health and sickness absence from an ethnic perspective within a job sector that traditionally employ a large fraction of workers with a non native background.

Purpose: The objective of the study was to investigate the association between health and sickness absence among natives and immigrant cleaners in Denmark.

Methods: This study is based on a cross-sectional analysis of baseline data from 2007-2008. The final population includes 276 cleaners, 144 Danes and 132 non-Western immigrants. Cumulative sickness absences from administrative records were subdivided into no sickness absence (0 days), low sickness absence (1-10 days) and high sickness absence (over 10 days) in a 6-month-period. Different measures of health were collected both through self-reported data and objective measurements, such as self-reported health, blood pressure and doctor-diagnosed chronic illness. The relationship between sickness absence and health was analyzed through multinomial logistic regression, stratified by Danes and non-Western immigrants, where the reference category was no sickness absence.

Results: There was no significant difference in the average number of sickness absent days between Danes (on average 5 days) and non-Western immigrants (on average 7 days). However, slightly more Danes experienced low sickness absence (55% compared to 54% among immigrants) while more immigrants experienced high sickness absence (16% compared to 12% among Danes). There was no significant association between low sickness absence and health in general, neither among native

Danes or immigrant cleaners, while high sickness absence for both groups was significantly related to poor self-reported health. High blood pressure was related to high sickness absence only among Danes, while the presence of at least 1 self-reported doctor-diagnosed chronic disease was related to high sickness absence only among immigrants.

Conclusion: Our findings indicate a relationship between health and high sickness absence. Therefore, investments in preventive initiatives tailored to reduce chronic diseases among immigrants and hypertension among Danes are suggested as such efforts could diminish high sickness absence, and some of the large costs related to it.

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