

Presenteeism: Its Importance, Conceptual Clarifications, and A Working Definition

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Abstract: As far as Sri Lanka is concerned, the term Presenteeism seems to be a novel concept though it is a concept being currently researched and discussed particularly in Australia, USA, UK and Europe. According to the literature available in respect of Presenteeism, it has been defined by majority of researchers as that employees work while they are sick and few scholars defined it as working of employees more than the time assigned on a particular job. Also in a recent research paper it has been defined as not fully engaged at work. There is increasingly a serious concern of presenteeism because existing literature reveals that presenteeism results in a huge cost and its cost exceeds the cost of absenteeism. Also existing studies show only the cost of presenteeism owing to working of employees while they are sick and if other behaviours of presenteeism are considered, the cost and the hidden cost would definitely be higher. To highlight the importance of presenteeism from employee perspective and employer perspective; to provide a systematic conceptualization of presenteeism; and to formulate a comprehensive working definition which may be useful for future empirical studies of the concept are the three objectives of this paper. Systematic review method recommended by Tranfield et al(2003) and observation method were utilized to achieve the objectives. The formulated working definition hopefully will avoid confusion and disagreement among scholars regarding the meaning of the concept of presenteeism while serving for accurate operationalization of the variable of presenteeism in conducting future empirical studies. This paper may initiate a concern and an enthusiasm to engage in future research studies which focus on the cost and hidden cost of presenteeism.

Key words: Conceptualization, Presenteeism

JEL Classification: E24, J2, J5, J24, J53, .M12, M15, M54, O32, O15

Introduction

The term *presenteeism* seems to be a novel idea in Sri Lankan context, though it is a conceptualization that is being currently researched and discussed particularly in learned journals of Australia, the USA, the UK and Europe. Presenteeism has become a major buzzword and it deals with rational concerns of the recent past which will contribute to serious repercussion on individual's health and low productivity of the individuals. Presenteeism is gaining a momentous eminence in academia domain and

recently in the sphere of practitioners' literature as an important part in the modern business world.

There has been a rapid development observable in the academia by paying special attention on the concept, in particular in the international context despite the fact that Sri Lankan business community has given the least attention for this phenomenon. It has been observed that the literature has concentrated in constructing a conceptual frame work for presenteeism. Thus in a general way revealed literature has elicited the idea in a very simple manner stating that *work while they are*

sick and few scholars defined it as *working of employees more than the time assigned on a particular job*. Also in recent research papers it has been defined as *not fully engaged in work*.

The objectives of this paper are:(1) to highlight the importance of presenteeism from employee perspective and employer perspective;(2) to provide a systematic conceptualization of presenteeism; and (3) to formulate a comprehensive definition which may be useful for future empirical studies of the concept. The study focuses on exploring domains of the meaning of the term presenteeism in a broader spectrum by considering the empirical evidence in Sri Lankan business context. Systematic review method recommended by Tranfield et al(2003) was used for reviewing literature, with an archival method. Observation method was applied to find empirical critical incidents which had relevance. Role of the observer was onlooker as an outsider, portrayal of the observer role to others was covert, portrayal of the purpose of the observer to others was covert, duration of the observations was multiple rather than single, and the focus of the observations was holistic.

Importance of Presenteeism

Obstructions to the effect of employee performance due to presenteeism are hardly found unlike absenteeism since the absent employee emerged as absent (Hemp, 2004). Absenteeism can be seen and the cost and the losses are countable. Both the employee and the employer are well aware of its impact and up to what extent that they can control, but not presenteeism. Behavioral scientists, and recent researchers and academia have

followed up and have identified that the cost of presenteeism is much higher than that of cost of absenteeism. Hence cost saving of presenteeism is economically more beneficial than cost saving of absenteeism (Hemp, 2004).

Repercussions of presenteeism from the employee perspective are results of long term illness, work related physical and mental health problems including injury, anxiety, stress, depression, arthritis, headaches, back problems, sickness absence, long term inability in work engagement, early retirement, contagion in the work place and alcoholism/drug addiction and finally work and family imbalances; and degraded social status eventually might result in the death of the employee(Hemp, 2004; Quazi,2013 and Martin,2014).

Employer perspective of presenteeism receives an increased attention since it creates an ineffective work environment. Repercussions of the employer perspective of presenteeism include lower or loss of productivity, lower performances and heavy losses. It has been observed to the effect that the presenteeism may drive the business to a natural death as a final outcome of loss of productivity since the cost of presenteeism has been recorded as an iceberg model (Hemp 2004 and Observation of one of the authors,2011).

As literature revealed all these assessments are related to direct and indirect sick cost, which means cost of sick presenteeism. The real cost and the hidden cost would definitely be higher if it appraises accurately. Literature on cost due to other reasons is hardly found in the past. Presenteeism may be recorded as uncountable and unbearable

costs including hidden cost such as significant annual increase of costs including the cost of employees' awful physical and mental deceases. A sick worker would be infecting and sickening others which will result in increasing sick cost of presenteeism (Shaefer,2015).

Annual cost of presenteeism in New Zealand is between US Dollar 700mln to US Dollar 8.2bln and lost working hours is between US Dollar 39.3mln and US Dollars 409mln(Holt, 2010; Holt 2010 as cited by Australian Public Service Commission,2012). Cost of presenteeism in Australia based on survey conducted in 2007, was four times that of absenteeism cost and estimated to US Dollars 25.7bln in 2005-2006 and cost to the economy in 2009/10 was US Dollars 34.1bln; on average, 6.5 working days of productivity were lost per employee annually (Medibank, 2011).

The estimated minimum annual cost of presenteeism in UK counts to Sterling Pounds 15bln(Martin, 2014).Cost of Presenteeism in USA in 2010 was US Dollar 180bln, surpassing that of absenteeism cost of US Dollar 118bln (Weaver, 2010 as cited by Prater and Smith, 2011).

Reduced performances counted to US Dollar 35bln a year in USA which has caused by depression of the US Employers as per a research on presenteeism focusing chronic and episodic ailments in US employees.Total cost of presenteeism is over US Dollar 150bln a year (Journal of the American Medical Association, as cited by Hemp, 2004 and Hemp, 2004).Presenteeism cost is more than direct medical care, paid by the employers including insurance premium and employees'

claims(Hemp, 2004). The annual total cost and loss due to presenteeism has been estimated to the range from US Dollars 150bln to 250bln and presenteeism cost is 60 percent of total sick cost (Schaefer, 2015).

Hence it has been witnessed in the literature that the impact of presenteeism on both the employee and the employer is extremely enormous and carries negative collision than absenteeism. It has been finally impacted negatively on national GDP (Holt, 2010).Presenteeism cost is 55 percent of the annual estimated indirect cost of US Dollar 7.483bln and estimated to loss to GDP is 2.7percent in New Zealand(Holt, 2010).Estimated annual presenteeism cost to the Australian economy in 2009/2010 was US Dollar 34.1bln and projected to an increment up to US Dollar 35.8bln in 2050 counting to 2.8 percent decrease in GDP(Medibank, 2011).

According available literature there is no single unified definition of presenteeism(Australian Public Service Commission, 2012 and Johns, 2010) despite having many repercussions of presenteeism including health hazards and low performances. Thus presenteeism is a vital theme to study and symbolize the real impact on the national growth. More accurate definition would encompass in a broader sense with different potentials.

Literature Review of Definitions of Presenteeism

The term presentee has been originally used by the American author Mark Twain as far back as in 1892 in his book titled 'The American Claimant' a comic novel (as cited by Oxford English Dictionary Online, n.d.). Thereafter, the

term presenteeism has been used in periodicals such as Every Body's Business (1931), National Liquor Review (1943), Contemporary Unionism (1948), Euro Business (1989), Sunday Times (1994), and Independent (1999) as cited in Oxford English Dictionary Online (n.d.).

The Oxford Dictionary Online (n.d.) defined the term presenteeism as *the practice of working more hours than is required by one's term of employment, or of continuing to work without regard to one's health specially because of perceived job insecurity ; the practice of attending a job but not working at full capacity, specially because of illness or stress*. Available literature has defined the term presenteeism very recently and has commenced to use after 1998 in the present context.

Presenteeism is the *tendency to stay at work beyond the time needed for effective performance on the job* (Simpson, 1998). Aronsson et al (2000) defined that presenteeism means *attending to work even when one feels unhealthy*. A contemporary definition has been given in dictionary.com's 21st Century Lexicon (2003) for presenteeism and it is *the practice of always being present at the workplace, often working longer hours even when there is nothing to do*.

Work and family research network (2003) defined that presenteeism is *a term used to describe circumstances in which employees come to work even though they are ill, posing potential problems of contagion and lower productivity*. According to Hemp (2004) presenteeism is *people hanging in work when they get sick and trying to figure out ways to carry on*

despite their symptoms. Kratz (2004) defined the word presenteeism as *loss of productivity from employees who go to work while suffering from medical problems*.

Levin (2005) has defined presenteeism as *lost productivity that occurs when employees come to work but perform below par due to any kind of illness*. Yamashita and Arakida (2006) have defined presenteeism after reviewing forty four articles published during the period from 1955-2005, as *a self-rated measurable loss of work performance due to health problems in the work place*.

The Dictionary of American Slang (2007) defined presenteeism as *a habit of being present and working constantly instead of even taking earned or available time off*. As defined by D'Abate and Eddy (2007) presenteeism is *workers are on the job but not engaged at peak levels due to many reasons which may be due to sick, injury or other conditions. They sometimes may attend with private matters like payments of personal bills or e-mailing for friends and making personal appointments and etc*.

According to Cooper as cited by Demerouti et al (2008) presenteeism is *being at work when the employees should be at home either because ill or no longer effective in work*. Ericet al (2010) defined presenteeism as *the problem of workers being on the job, but, because of illness or other medical conditions, not fully functioning*.

Johns (2010) summarized, nine different definitions extracted from literature with due references.

Accordingly, two portrayed positively as *attending work, as oppose being absent* (Smith,1970) and *exhibiting excellent attendance* (Canfield and Soash,1955; Stolz,1993). One author has defined presenteeism as *being reluctant to work part time rather than full time* (Sheridan, 2004). Six out of nine definitions elaborated presenteeism latitudes for health status.

Accordingly, presenteeism is *working elevated hours thus putting in "face time" even when unfit* (Simpson, 1998; Warral et al 2000), *reduced productivity at work due to health problem or other event that distract one from full productivity* (Hummer, Sherman and Quinn, 2002, White House, 2005), *going to work despite feeling unhealthy or experiencing other events that might normally compel absence* (Evans, Johansson and Lundberg, 2004), *reduced productivity at work place due to health problem* (Turpin et al, 2004), *being unhealthy but exhibiting no sickness absenteeism* (Kivimaki et al, 2005) and *going to work despite being unhealthy* (Dew et al, 2005).

Johns (2011) has defined presenteeism as *attending work while sick*. As defined by Rebecca (2011) presenteeism is *showing up for work when one is ill in contrast to absenteeism*. Presenteeism is defined as *the practice of coming to work despite illness, injury, anxiety, and et cetera often resulting in reduced productivity* (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, as cited by Prater and Smith, 2011).

Australian Public Service Commission (2012) defined the term presenteeism as *people attending to work even though they are sick, putting*

in long hours but not working all the time and working at a reduced rate due to other distractions such as browsing the internet or playing games. British Dictionary (Collins English dictionary, 2012), defined the presenteeism as *practice of persistently working longer hours and taking fewer holidays than the terms of one's employment demand, especially as a result of fear of losing one's job*. As stated by Gilbreath and Karimi (2012), *presenteeism happens when employees are at work, but their cognitive energy is not devoted to their work*.

Quazi (2013) defined presenteeism as *a practice of coming to work despite health complications, such as illness, injury or anxiety; often it results in reduced productivity. The act of being present but less productive has been coined presenteeism* (De Beer, 2014). Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English eighth edition (2014) defined the term presenteeism as *the practice of spending more time at work than needed according to the contract*.

Similarly, The Dictionary of American Slang (2007) has defined the term presenteeism as *working long hours without effective*. Based on Random House Dictionary (2015) defined presenteeism is *the practice of coming to work despite illness, injury, anxiety, and et cetera often resulting in reduced productivity and the practice of working long hours at a job without the real need to do so*.

Investopedia(n.d.) defined the presenteeism as *a loss of workplace productivity resulting from employee health problems and/or personal issues*.

Even though the employee is physically present at work, because they are experiencing problems such as arthritis, allergies, family illness or stress, they are unable to fully perform their work duties and are more likely to make mistakes in the work they do perform.

Presenteeism is new to Sri Lanka and no research is observable in Sri Lanka despite four general articles showing its image by introducing the term to Sri Lankan scholars after 2012. Dharmasiri (2012) pioneering in discussing the term presenteeism in Sri Lankan community explained that presenteeism is *work when someone is ill*. Based on the observation about Sri Lankan work force he has derived his idea of the term presenteeism as *employees are physically in but mentally and emotionally not in, which means that the employees' bodies are at work but the heads and hearts are elsewhere*.

Agampodi et al (2012) defined the term presenteeism as *working while unwell*. Opatha (2015) as a pioneer in Sri Lankan community discussed about the presenteeism as *a tendency to be present at work even when employees are not supposed to come and work*. He has briefed that the presenteeism is a serious modern problem in the context of human resource management. Mutukutti (2015) has defined presenteeism as *a situation where employees are present at work but they do not work*.

As discussed above 40 articles were reviewed in respect of definition of the concept of presenteeism. In 23 articles the term presenteeism has been defined most similarly and those definitions can be categorized into one dimension as *being at work despite*

being sick. As a percentage it is 58 percent. The respective authors of these 23 articles are Warral et al (2000), Aronsson et al (2000), Hummer, Sherman and Quinn (2002), Work and family research network (2003), Hemp (2004), Kratz (2004), Evans, Johansson and Lundberg (2004), (Turpin et al (2004), Levin (2005), (Kivimaki et al (2005), Dew et al (2005), White House (2005), Yamashita and Arakida (2006), D'Abate and Eddy (2007), Demerouti et al (2008), Ericet al (2010), Johns (2011) Rebecca (2011), American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, as cited by Prater and Smith (2011), Dharmasiri (2012), Agampodi et al (2012) Quazi (2013), and Opatha (2015).

In 7 articles out of 40 articles in the literature, the term presenteeism has been defined most similarly and those definitions can be categorized into another dimension as *working employees more than the time assigned on a particular job*. As a percentage it is 18 percent. Accordingly, Simpson (1998), 21st Century Lexicon Dictionary (2003), Sheridan, 2004), The Dictionary of American Slang (2007), British Dictionary (Collins English dictionary, 2012) and Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English eighth edition (2014) have defined the term presenteeism as *working employees more than the time assigned on a particular job*.

In 8 articles out of 40 articles the term presenteeism has been defined most similarly and those definitions can be categorized into another dimension as *not fully engaged in work*. As a percentage it is 20 percent. Gilbreath and Karimi (2012), Dharmasiri (2012), De Beer (2014) and Mutukutti (2015) are some

authors who have defined the term Presenteeism as *not fully engaged in work*.

Random House Dictionary (2015) has defined the term presenteeism as *being at work despite being sick and employees are working more than the time assigned on a particular job* by combining the two dimensions categorized above. As a percentage it is 2 percent.

One article (Australian Public Service Commission, 2012) has defined the term presenteeism as *being at work despite being sick, employees working more than the time assigned on a particular job and not fully engaged in work* by integrating all the three dimensions categorized as per the definitions in the literature. As a percentage it is 2 percent.

Accordingly, 58 percent of the articles have definition of presenteeism as *being at work despite being sick*. 18 percent of the articles have definition of presenteeism as *employees working more than the time assigned on a particular job*. 20 percent of the articles have definition of presenteeism as *not fully engaged in work*. 2 percent of articles have definition of the term presenteeism as *being at work despite being sick, employees working more than the time assigned on a particular job* and 2 percent of the articles have defining of Presenteeism as *being at work despite being sick, employees working more than the time assigned on a particular job and not fully engaged in work*. It was revealed that the majority of these articles were concluded with empirical evidence. Thus, we identify three dimensions of the concept of

presenteeism and they are given in Figure 1.

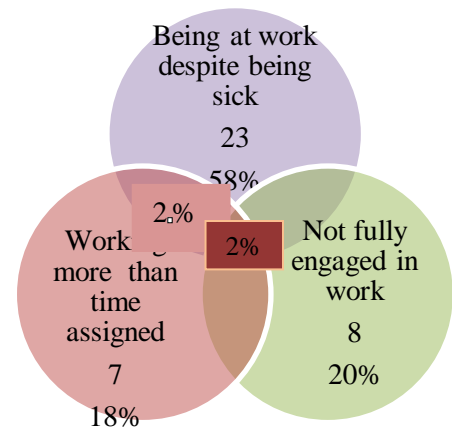


Figure 1 - Definitions of Presenteeism in the literature in three dimensions

These three definitions of the term Presenteeism can be perceived by the authors of this paper as the three domains or spheres of the concept. A question in this regard arises: are these three domains sufficient to represent all the possible dimensions of the concept of presenteeism?

Observation of Critical Incidents

According to the actual observations of Sri Lankan critical incidents there are practical situations where certain forms of presenteeism are visible though they had not been included in the existent definitions in the existing literature. 13 such actual observations are presented below:

1. Observation:

An employee in the middle management working in a financial institution is engaged in his private work while he is on duty. He is also a part time lecturer in

a private academy and he prepares all his lecture notes and tutorials at the office during office hours. All his teaching materials are prepared at the office by using office accessories and resources including staff. He engages in private assignments including lecturing while he is on duty. He anyway manages his superiors without any disruption on his personal engagements by asserting his ability in handling any critical task. He is smart, a good orator, and a presenter and highly networked, thus no one could find out that he is idling. He gets his promotions in time despite he is idling. Thus although he is physically present at work, he is engaged in some other work without engaging in the work assigned. As a result the estimated cost including direct, indirect, hidden and the cost of misused resources including replacement cost of the work assigned would be more than LKR 4mln. Further the loss of productivity is material. This observation does not fall into the above mentioned three domains of the concept of presenteeism. Hence a new domain emerges and we label it as:

“Recorded as present at work but not in the work assigned”.

2. Observation:

A lady who was working in a financial institution was engrossed in attending to her private work while she was being on her assigned role. She met most of her private clients and spent hours while being recorded as at work. She was giving numerous reasons to be out of the premises. She was a multi - task contributor having a good rapport with all, a very popular character and thus there were no complaints recorded against her although she could not cope with institutional targets. She had been

gradually building more relationships and regularly used to leave the office. Finally, she was dismissed owing to bad reputation and bad image stemming from her continuous misconduct. The social cost and the estimated direct, indirect and hidden cost including the replacement cost alone are more than LKR 2mln. This observation can be considered under the new domain identified from observation 1.

3. Observation:

A young female officer who had been recently promoted to the managerial grade delivered her first baby. She was transferred to a city branch from a rural branch at her request with the intention of taking care of her new born baby by living with her parents. This transfer was arranged by an internal union and on the condition that she should actively involve with the union activities. She reported to work after six months of her officially entitled maternity leave. She was assigned to complete very special assignments given by the Chairman of the company, which necessitated coordinating with top hierarchical personnel in the market. While she was attending on this special task, the internal union requested her to participate in union activities. Consequently, she applied for a twenty days duty leave, which was refused by her supervisors including that of the head of the institution since she had just reported to work after the confinement. In spite of that, she somehow got the approval from the Human Resource Department. The respective female officer attended to this union activity without completing the chairman's official assignment. Having returned from leave, she again requested

for another five days leave for the same union activity. One week later her return on duty, she met with an accident and took three months leave. She could not balance both her work and family life and had to keep her child under the care of her parents most of the time due to the union activities. Further, she was unable to work at least for two months continuously in that year. The estimated total cost to the company including direct, indirect, hidden and replacement cost was to be over LKR 2mln. In addition social obligation and cost of unattained personal life would have been substantial assuming that the accident would be due to rushing through to attending neglected work. Mental and psychological sufferings and future costs due to neglected infant are immeasurable. As a result of family-work imbalance and the harm to the next generation arisen due to neglected infant would cost substantially. This observation also can be considered under the new domain identified from observation 1.

4. Observation:

A manager stationed in a rural branch of a leading financial institution has been assigned with a special task to have a new branch building constructed within a year. The building plan was approved by the relevant authorities and construction was handed over to the Building Engineer and his professional team. The Manager is responsible for reporting the progress of the construction to the management through his reporting line consisting of four superiors including the Area Manager as the immediate superior, Regional Manager, Area Assistant General Manager and Head of Operations (HO) stationed in Colombo. The Project was

completed as scheduled in spite of numerous radical changes to the original structure as instructed by the HO from time to time. The day before the inauguration, the HO suddenly visited the construction site and instructed to relocate windows disregarding the instructions of the Building Engineer and his professional team who were responsible for the construction.

Thus, the branch was not attractive enough and not impressive due to sudden changes in its structure made with the irrelevant interferences of the Head of Operations. All officers including the Branch Manager, Area Manager, Regional Manager, Area Assistant General Manager and the HO are not at their assigned work. This observation too can be considered under the new domain identified from observation 1 (*Recorded as present at work but not in the work assigned*). In this scenario the estimated cost of the presenteeism including direct (as salary), indirect and hidden cost of all officers in the hierarchy would be huge and estimated average loss would be more than LKR 5mln.

Similar incidents have occurred in other areas too due to the unnecessary interferences of the HO even for trivial matter, despite having formal prior approvals from respective authorities. Thus all others in nearly two hundred branches have to wait for HO's decisions. Hence, the loss is enormous due to not in assigned work by the officers in the administration hierarchy between the Managers and the HO.

5. Observation:

A young senior officer had joined a financial company of a reputed

multinational group as a senior risk assessor. He has been hired to assess the risk of the company business/credit decisions, to find solutions for mitigating risk, and to explore corrective measures by proactive risk management. However, this young gentleman knows only theoretical aspects, as he had been lecturing on the subject of risk management in an institution over years. He has been gifted with excellent eloquence and ability in logical presenting of ideas and arguments on anything. He does not want to become a credit assessor since he is scared in taking credit decisions. He always leaps to another area of the subject when he notices risk and besides that inclination, he could not achieve the real objective of the task.

Credit assessors are well trained and have more practical experience than him. But they are scared of taking business decisions, since he is the Head of Risk. The subjects of credit and risk management are to be handled differently since one is business-oriented and the other is risk focused. The critical point in such a situation is that neither credit nor risk assessment has been done by this officer formally; he would solely interfere in others' decisions. Finally, none of credit applications are processed for approval, because of this thwarting situation.

The company has incurred heavy losses since he is idling and forces others' idling with unnecessary interferences. No successor for him has been trained by the management, thus they cannot leave him out. Hidden costs and losses are much higher than his direct salary cost. Estimated annual direct losses to the company would amount to LKR 30mln including the loss of erroneous risk

decisions with his annual direct salary cost of LKR 12mln. This is an observation exhibiting the new domain identified from observation 1. It is "*Recorded as present at work but not in the work assigned*".

6. Observation:

A management trainee qualified in the field of IT joined a leading financial company in Sri Lanka, was appointed as the officer in-charge of a pawning centre, although he knew nothing pertaining to gold, jewellery or pawning. He has completed his degree in Information Technology. He had complained many times that he could not handle the subject assigned without a proper training. Thus, he was prone to omission and commission errors. In addition, he informed the management that he was interested in IT and requested for a transfer to the IT department while stating that he could take any challenge in system upgrades while saving the cost of out-sourcing. However, the request was refused. After a few months, he had been called for explanation on spurious articles he accepted. Subsequently he was transferred farther away from his hometown and as a result, he applied for leave regularly. He had attended to private business in IT since he was frustrated with his job. Later on he met with an accident while returning home thus resulted in tendering his resignation. Estimated loss would be more than LKR 2.5mln. This too is an observation showing "*Recorded as present at work but not in the work assigned*".

7. Observation:

A team consisted of young graduates in a bank has been given a task to be accomplished in a reasonable period. A few have contributed to nothing while depending on others, accounted to reduce team productivity. When assessing them while they were working, it was revealed that unproductive staff members were in the face book. They got addicted to that and could not control themselves and get rid of it. Finally, some of them were suspended from work as punishment and the bank gained nothing from the team due to a few culprits surfing on the face book. The bank incurred heavy losses including replacement cost which are estimated to be LKR 3mln. This observation is relevant to the new domain identified "*Recorded as present at work but not in the work assigned*".

8. Observation:

A Chartered Accountant who worked as a financial analyst in a private blue chip company, joined as a manager in a state bank. He had been in the bank as a clearing officer. Even though he had daily reported to work did nothing but scrolling the computer screen up and down. He had requested for a transfer to the treasury operation unit but could not have his transfer to the treasury department. Later on, he was transferred to the research and marketing department and the same phenomenon happened since he had no such experience in marketing either. Finally, he decided to leave the bank informing the management that the bank had not taken proper use of his technical skills in financial and investment decision making as a financial analyst. The loss to the country is substantial including the cost of free education in a developing

country like Sri Lanka. Estimated annual cost would be around LKR 3.5mln. This observation too falls into "*Recorded as present at work but not in the work assigned*".

9. Observation:

A Research Officer in a private bank has been used to scrolling the screen of the computer up and down while at work without any productive outcome. This is because he had been in the treasury and working both in the private and the public sector finance institutions with relevant expertise in financial appraisals and treasury management and he rather hates field visits. Further, he was not interested in his work, and could not get on with field visits being a qualified management accountant. When these instances were explained to the management and his request to be transferred to a suitable place was in vain. Finally, he became ill continuously and looked frustrated and finally resigned. Estimated annual cost would be LKR 4mln. This is another observation exhibiting "*Recorded as present at work but not in the work assigned*".

10. Observation:

An export oriented copper manufacturing company registered with BOI status has been in the process of manufacturing copper bars for the international market. Operational work had three shifts with an average of 100 labourers including fifty labourers in the Burners. The labourers had work fulltime with routine work life battling with fire. They had to continue operations of machines twenty four hours continuously once they start operating burners to avoid operating

cost. Thus labourers had to work in a very bad environmental condition causing high labor turnover. There were forty labourers working in the Furnace to produce high quality copper bars and remove them for cooling. All these operations were done manually. It has been observed that all labourers were at work with fire being under the influence of drugs and drug addicts. Thus they cannot work without drugs. When they take drugs they can work relentlessly until they are told to stop. Once they are addicts, they cannot work without using drugs since they have been overdosed on drugs and they were overacting under the influence of potent drugs. This situation is tantamount to the fact, that these particular kinds of jobs are performed by labourers who are provided with drugs by the owner of the factory. It is a kind of an over loading situation at a certain period of time. Since they got sick due to this addiction, and yet continuing with their work until they are told to stop. When they take drugs again they can work relentlessly. Later it was found that most of them had not reported to work due to sickness and another team was recruited. Presumably, that too will have the same fate.

Labourers were committed to the job for the time being and were not mentally in existence despite their physical movements. They were just there since they had been working over a long period in the same stance and no one was needed to direct them for work which they continued over hours. This incident or situation can be considered as a new domain to presenteeism. We label this domain as:

“Overactive and hyperactive in the work assigned”

11. Observation:

In a construction company the same incident happened and finally they were compelled to close the business after the death of some labourers who had been working under the influence of drugs. The company incurred heavy losses and requested their financiers to write-off the accrued interest and to reschedule the capital. They claimed that the business was about to get suspended in its operational work for reasons of inadequate number of labor hands and the operational process was to be replaced with concrete ready-mix machines. The owner is in the construction field laying concrete slabs for tall buildings in large-scale construction projects. Two of his workers died and the remaining were inadequate for the continuation of the project as a result of the demise of skilled labourers. This situation can also be included under the new second domain emerged from observation 11. It is *“Overactive and hyperactive in the work assigned”*.

12. Observation:

A colleague of one of the authors who has been in a bank holding a senior grade position was scrolling the screen of the computer most of the time. When burdened with duties he roughs out himself on others for completion of the work since he is prone to laziness and does not take any risk in his career. He just passes all the responsibilities to others whilst keeping his dignity with such behavior. He is from an affluent family background. The observer noticed him playing computer games continuously instead of attending to his assigned work and he replied that he was

lazy and did not like his work which had no challenges. Presenteeism arises since a person does not engage fulltime in the duty assigned to him. Estimated annual cost would be around 10mln. This observation falls into the first new domain identified and it is “Recorded as present at work but not in the work assigned”.

that the male officer oversees after his manageress. The resultant cost is substantial including both direct salary costs and loss of productivity. Estimated annual loss would be around LKR 8mln. This observation too falls into the first new domain identified and it is “Recorded as present at work but not in the work assigned”.

Based on the above observations it was possible to identify two new domains which characterize the concept of presenteeism. We propose to consider these two domains in addition to the identified three domains from the existent literature toward formulating a working definition of presenteeism which is indeed a more comprehensive one. Figure 2 shows presenteeism in a broader spectrum with existing literature and critical incidents observed.

13. Observation:

A professionally qualified smart young manageress in a rural branch in a commercial bank was performing well with her team. She had been instructed to give priority to her second officer’s decisions and also to take decisions jointly with his direction since he is a male officer. He has been under the influence of liquor at work and more often he was not performing. She had complained many times about this officer but she could not get any support from the head office. Despite this situation she was asked to work under this male officer. Ultimately, both have not attended to their assigned task. Since she was made to work under her deputy’s instruction and observations, that has made her to stop performing and

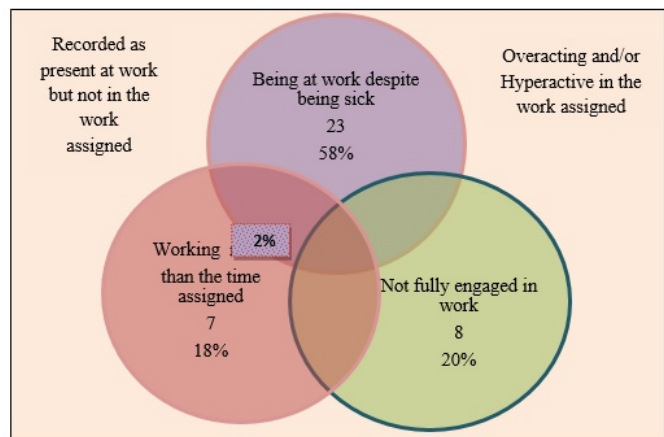


Figure II –Presenteeism in a Broader Spectrum with Existing Literature and Proposed Dimensions of Presenteesim.

Concluding Remarks

It is possible to redefine by compounding three different dimensions revealed in the literature as *being work despite being sick, working longer hours than the time assigned and not fully engaged in work*. However we affirm that these three dimensions are not sufficient to represent all dimensions of presenteeism as perceived by the authors based on the 13 observations in Sri Lankan context. Accordingly, two spheres or domains can be added to the existing domains built in the literature. These domains are labeled as *recorded as present but not in work assigned* and *overactive and hyperactive in the assignment*. These are considered as fourth and fifth dimensions of the

concept of presenteeism. Fourth domain presents a situation where an employee comes to work but does not perform duties assigned to him or her officially. Fifth domain presents a situation where an employee acts in work more than is necessary or act abnormally in the assignment and after some time becomes unhealthy and problematic.

Accordingly, a comprehensive working definition in a broader spectrum of the term presenteeism is formulated as follows:

“Presenteeism is being at work despite being sick, working more than the time assigned on a particular job, not fully engaged in work, recorded as present but not in work assigned and overactive and hyperactive in the assignment”.

Presenteeism is conceptualized as a construct which is composed of five domains as mentioned above. It involves an employee working while being sick, working more than the required time, working without engaging in work fully, working on something else not the work assigned, and working over actively or hyperactively in the assignment. We hope that the formulated working definition will serve as a comprehensive definition which will serve for accurate operationalization of the variable of presenteeism in conducting future empirical studies by avoiding confusion and disagreement in respect of the meaning of the concept.

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