

**Is absenteeism related to perceived stress, burnout  
levels and job satisfaction?**

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## Abstract

The aim of the present study is to determine whether there is a relationship between perceived stress, burnout, job satisfaction and absences. The study also looks for relationships between gender, age-groups and absenteeism. The method used was a cross-sectional correlational design. The Maslach Burnout Inventory, Job Satisfaction Scale and Perceived Stress Scale were used to measure the variables. Participants were all part-time students from DBS College in employment. The students were asked to fill in the questionnaires and to disclose how many times they had been absent from work in the past 12 months. The analyses showed that there is a significantly inverse relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism. Perceived Stress Scale and Maslach Burnout Inventory scores did not significantly correlate to days absent.

## Introduction

Absenteeism concerns employees that do not turn up for work and do not have a legitimate reason. It is, therefore, largely about unauthorised absence from work. As pressures increase on the budgets and competitiveness of companies, more attention is being given to reduce workplace absenteeism and its cost. Most research has concluded that absence is a complex variable and that it is influenced by multiple causes, both personal and organisational. Job satisfaction, stress and burnout have been noted as some of the factors influencing an employee's motivation to attend work.

Absenteeism is a term used to describe absences that are avoidable, habitual and unscheduled in nature. These are commonly practiced by employees which become a source of irritation to employers and co-workers. It is a major concern of all managers and organisation, both private and public. Productivity is reduced to zero for the employee who is absent from the workplace (Rogers & Hertin, 1993).

Estimates of potential working time lost due to unscheduled worker absence typically range around 2 to 4% (Allen 1981). Despite the potential costs these substantial worker absences impose on economies, studies of absenteeism are comparatively rare and there is, as yet, little agreement regarding its major causes across different subject areas (Vistnes, 1997).

Absenteeism is a massive problem for Irish companies, the Irish Business and employers' confederation (IBEC) says that absenteeism is costing Irish businesses €1.5bn a year or €818 for every employee per annum. The same report shows that a total of 11 million days are lost every year to absenteeism.

America also suffers from the same problem and the figures are equally alarming. In 2001, the median number of days away from work as a result of anxiety, stress, and related

disorders was 25 – substantially greater than the median of 6 for all nonfatal injury and illness cases (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2001). Job stress is estimated to cost U.S. industry more than \$300 billion a year in absenteeism, turnover, diminished productivity and medical, legal and insurance costs (Rosch, 2001). Clearly absenteeism is a major headache for organisations and more knowledge in the area can help alleviate the growing problem.

Nearly seven in ten (68%) employed Americans report that their employers have taken steps such as putting a freeze on hiring or wages, laying off staff, reducing work hours, benefits or pay, requiring unpaid days off or increasing work hours in the past year as a result of the weak economy. (American Psychological Association Practice Organisation, 2009). Statistics like this indicate an increase in perceived stress levels for individuals leading possibly to higher absenteeism.

In 2011 Research in almost 600 organisations also showed a link between job security and mental health issues, with employers planning redundancies "significantly" more likely to report problems among their staff. Stress-related absence has increased more in the public sector, according to the report by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) and health firm Simplyhealth. Absenteeism seems to be a behaviour that organisations can never eliminate, but they can rather control and manage it. George and Jones (2002, p. 94) note that “organisations should not have absence policies that are so restrictive that they literally force workers to come to work even if they are ill.

Organisations may want to recognise that a certain level of absence is indeed functional.” In a survey conducted by Aon Consulting (1998), employees missed workdays because of stress, personal matters, caring for a sick child, no available day care, caring for elderly dependents, time spent at work on personal matters, and employee sickness. The survey concluded that

the total amount of missed time due to personal reasons and sickness averages 6% of pay, almost as much as the time taken for holidays.

It has been estimated that genuine sickness accounts for between half and two-thirds of absences from work (Huczynski & Fitzpatrick, 1989). Recent data shows that calling in “sick” has more to do with reasons other than a worker’s own physical health. According to the 2002 CCH Unscheduled Absence Survey, the average percentage of unscheduled absences at U.S. organisations was 2.1% in 2002.

Employees who are engaged, or who have positive feelings about their jobs, and work organisations should be less likely to be absent from work than those who are disengaged and hold negative attitudes about their jobs. However before considering the relationships, one must consider how employee attendance variables are defined and measured (Hackett & Guinon, 1985).

The main problem is perhaps that many employees believe sick leave is a “benefit” like annual leave and they are entitled to take it, irrespective of the condition of their health. This has implications for organisations because it is difficult for an organisation to operate smoothly if employees fail to report for work. According to Robbins et al. (2003), having sick leave programmes in organisations, i.e. providing paid sick leave, actually re-enforces the wrong behaviour, which is absence from work. The authors argue that organisations should reward employees for attendance, not for being absent. Moreover, the importance of good attendance and its benefits should be clearly communicated to all employees (Bydewell, 2000).

## Effects of Absenteeism

Absenteeism leads to both direct costs (such as sick pay, overtime, costs of overstaffing, management and administration costs and loss of service provision) and indirect costs (such as disruption to service provision, reduced patient care quality, costs of recruitment, selection and training of replacement staff, lower morale and pain and suffering for those who are absent). Absence is a problem related to a minority of employees. However it seems that certain groups within a workforce, such as young people and women, are major contributors to absenteeism rates (Kristensen, 1991).

Worker absenteeism leaves an unfair burden on the workers left to pick up the slack or perform the duties of the missing employee. When the company expects workers to do the work of other employees without any recognition from management of the problem, it can affect morale. Employees in this position must perform their own job duties as well as the work of the absent workers, which can cause stress and fatigue. The company also experiences lower productivity when employees are missing on the job and employees may experience low morale because of the failure to meet productivity goals. Supervisors and managers under stress to make up for the lower productivity can damage the employer and worker relationship, which affects the morale of all workers. Absent workers cause a disruption to the normal work schedule, this can cause stress among co-workers and managers in the organisation. Managers must struggle to reschedule workers to fill the gap the absent worker causes in the department. Absenteeism creates stress, lowering the morale of workers and management in the company. Companies that discipline or terminate workers with poor attendance records may experience a poor staff retention rate. A higher turnover of workers can lower the morale among the remaining employees in the organization. Companies can implement policies that discourage absenteeism such as incentive programs for exemplary attendance records to reduce a high turnover of workers and avoid low morale.

The topic of absenteeism has been under the spotlight recently in Ireland, with the Health Service Executive (HSE) under heavy scrutiny for what is seen as chronic absenteeism, O' Regan (2012) reported that more than 5,000 health service staff called in sick each day at a cost of €284m a year and that absenteeism rates climbed to an average of 4.98% among the HSE's staff of 104,000. This compared with a rate of 4.80% in 2010. The average days sick in 2010 (CIPD) 7.4 days per employee.

Deegan (2012) reported that a survey found 20 per cent absenteeism rates among general support staff at one acute hospital. According to the Healthstat report, one in five general support staff at Louth County Hospital called in sick on any given day in February. The survey found at the same hospital that 10 per cent of the 70 nurses were off sick on any day in the same month, with the overall absenteeism rates running at under 8 per cent. These figures indicate an alarming culture developing in the HSE of sick leave being abused by employees, the rate of absenteeism is almost double that of the private sector. This haemorrhaging of public funds cannot continue, especially in times of austerity. With public funding drying up in Ireland the findings have caused much anger and frustration with many asking, what is the cause of absenteeism and most effective way of tackling absenteeism?

### Perceived Stress

Worker stress can be defined as physiological or psychological reaction to an event that is perceived to be threatening or taxing. Stress is actually a perception so there is a tremendous individual variation in what one perceives to be stressful. Negative stress or distress can cause stress related illness, and it can affect absenteeism, turnover and work performance (Riggio, 2013 p. 277).

Workplace stress appears to be the number one cause of staff absenteeism. According to new research by recruitment firm Reed, over three quarters of HR professionals have noted an increase in the number of employees taking time off due to stress-related illnesses in the past five years. Half of respondents believe unmanageable workloads are the primary stress cause, while only 15% attribute it to the employee's personal circumstances. A further 12% felt the increase was a result of organisational change, and 9% blamed pressure from managers. Moderate stress levels improve productivity in employees so it is important to strike an effective balance between under-utilising staff and overworking employees. The impact of stress can often be cloaked in other symptoms, for example, physical ailments. Work stress can be sparked by things such as a formal warning, bullying, victimisation, increased work pressure, deadlines and management changes. Employees who are suffering from stress at work are less likely to be productive.

The three most common reasons for unscheduled absences are personal illness (33%), family issues (24%), and personal needs (21%). Stress as a reason for absenteeism has increased over 300% since 1995 (CCH Inc., 2002). Research also suggests a financial stress-absenteeism link. Joo and Garman (1998) found that a higher level of financial well-being was associated with less absenteeism. Bagwell (2000) and Garman, Camp, Kim, Bagwell, Baffi & Redican (1999) found that greater absenteeism was associated with poor financial management, poor financial management is a huge contributor to stress levels. One solution that many perceive as a solution to stress levels are holidays, research indicates that although holidays do indeed reduce work stress and feelings of burnout the effects are temporary. In fact, levels of stress and burnout are reduced immediately before, during and after holidays, but may go back to original levels a few weeks after the holiday (Etzion, 2003).

Some research suggests that workers might use absences from work (voluntarily taking a day off) as a coping strategy. If absence is used as an attempt to cope with a

particularly stressful job, then the lost time must be balanced against the possible gains in terms of the employee's long-term performance and well-being (Hackett & Bycio, 1996).

### Burnout

There is general agreement that the key component of burnout is emotional exhaustion (Gaines & Jermier, 1983). When this occurs the person becomes callous towards, or withdrawn from, colleagues and clients, and then develops a sense of a lack of personal accomplishment about work. It seems to be far more prevalent in people whose jobs include a large component of interaction with other people who have their own problems; for example, the police, teachers, nurses and other caring professions (Evans & Fischer 1993).

Burnout can be another reason for absenteeism, employees exposed to such things as unresolved interpersonal conflicts, lack of clearly defined work tasks and responsibilities, extreme overwork, lack of appropriate rewards may become victims of burnout, a process by which employees become less committed to their jobs and begin to withdraw from work (Riggio, 2013, p.267).

The process of withdrawal may include such reactions as poor punctuality and absenteeism (Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter 2001). Burnout usually occurs in three phases. The first phase is emotional exhaustion caused by excessive demands placed on the worker. The second is depersonalisation, the development of a cynical, insensitive attitude towards people in the workplace. The third phase is the feeling of low personal accomplishment, this is when the burned-out employee feels a sense of frustration or helplessness. (Riggio, 2013 p.265)

People who feel burnt-out lack energy and are filled with frustration and tension. Emotional symptoms of burnout include dreading coming to work each day (Cordes &

Dougherty, 1993). Research has shown that burnout is particularly high in human-service professions that involve helping others, such as health-care providers, teachers, social-workers and policemen (Burke, 1997; Carlson & Thompson 1995). Jobs such as these often attract people with high ideals and the nature of their work places strong emotional demands on them, but if these demands cannot be met, they develop burnout through frustration (Cordes & Dougherty 1993). Another study found that burnout in Nurses led to decreased organisational commitment and increased negative interactions with supervisors (Leiter & Maslach, 1988).

### Job Satisfaction

Spector (1997, p. 2) defines job satisfaction simply as “the degree to which people like their jobs and the different aspects of their jobs.” Job satisfaction is also defined as a response towards various facets of one’s job. Meaning a person can be relatively satisfied with one aspect of his or her job and dissatisfied with other aspects (French, 1998 p.137).

Research examining the relationship between job satisfaction and employee absenteeism has produced conflicting findings. Some studies indicate a slightly negative relationship between the two, with higher levels of job satisfaction associated with lower rates of absenteeism (Ostroff, 1993) and sometimes no significant relationship at all (Ilgen & Hollenback 1977). A meta-analysis of a number of studies indicates that job satisfaction and absenteeism are negatively correlated but that the relationship between the two is not very strong (Scott & Taylor 1985). Matrunola (1996) found no significant relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism. Previous work on the relationship has resulted in very mixed findings.

According to Tharenou (1993) there is an association between voluntary absence and job satisfaction, however the study concluded that rather than job satisfaction causing the absenteeism, it was really absenteeism leading to lower job satisfaction.

Problems with measuring absenteeism occur and as it is impossible again to differentiate between voluntary and involuntary absences, this could be the reason why the relationship is not strong. Rhodes and Steers (1990) propose that employee attendance is based on an employee's motivation to attend as well as their ability to attend. According to George and Jones (2002), job satisfaction is one of the factors affecting an employee's motivation to attend. It becomes important to measure the strength of the relationship between absenteeism and job satisfaction as ".....positive attitudes can at times serve to "pull" the individual towards the organisation and the reverse can be expected when attitudes are more negative " (George & Jones, 2002). Generally, it is expected that low satisfaction levels would be related to high rates of absence and vice versa. Cooper and Locke (2000, p142) note that there is only a weak correlation between job satisfaction and absenteeism.

According to Rhodes and Steers (1990) however, "...when work is satisfying, people will show up to enjoy it", therefore indicating a stronger relationship between these two variables. Anderson (2004) agrees that dissatisfied employees would use their sick leave to "withdraw" from the workplace. In essence, if a correlation does exist between these two variables, managers would be able to devise focused strategies around the various aspects of job satisfaction in an effort to reduce the absenteeism levels of employees.

Other research shows an inverse relationship between satisfaction and absenteeism. That is, when employees are highly satisfied, they tend to be less absent from work; when they are highly dissatisfied, they tend to be more absent from work. Again, there are other factors which influence this relationship. One such factor might be the degree to which an

employee feels that his or her work is important. If a person feels that his or her work is important, he or she will be less likely to be absent from work (Luthans, 1992 p.138).It is possible that the more challenging nature of higher-level jobs lead to higher job satisfaction. Also, employees in professional and managerial jobs are normally paid more, have better promotion prospects, autonomy and responsibility which might also increase the levels of job satisfaction (Saal& Knight, 1988).A number of studies have found a stronger correlation between job satisfaction and absenteeism.

Hardy et al. (2003) in their study of 323 health services staff in the U.K found that job satisfaction is related to the number of days absent as well as to the frequency of absence. This view is supported by Hoque and Islam (2003), who conducted a study amongst 400 employees from textile and jute mills in Bangladesh. They found that job satisfaction contributes negatively to absenteeism, thus the lower the satisfaction levels, the higher absenteeism amongst the sample of workers. These authors maintain that it is essential to lay emphasis on enhancing job satisfaction in order to reduce absenteeism.

### Gender

In most Western countries, absenteeism is higher among female workers than among male workers. For example, in Europe, women take approximately 7.6 more sick days per year than men the same age (Ichino&Moretti, 2009), with the same occupation and level of education.Furthermore, family-related commitments can explain only part of this gender gap in illness-related absenteeism. For instance, when we restrict the comparison to unmarriedworkers with no children, we see that in Europe women still take almost 3 more sick-daysthan men (Ichino&Moretti, 2009).

There has also been some debate in literature as to the tendency of females with dependents to be absent, with Leigh (1983) and Vistnes (1997) finding that the presence of

children less than six increased female absenteeism whereas Paringer (1983) found women with dependents were less likely to be absent. There is a similar debate over the effect of age: Leigh (1983) found no significant effect on female absenteeism, Paringer (1983) found a positive relationship for both genders which was greater for males. It is believed that the debate can be addressed by considering the definition of the dependent variable used. The findings are generally mixed and take into account children and menstrual cycles.

### Age

In terms of age, findings in relation to absenteeism levels interestingly show a U-shape: the rate of sick leave is higher among teenagers (at 3.5% for men and 3% for women) and young adults (3.4% for men and 2.5% for women), while it is lowest among employees aged between 25 and 44 years (for example, in the 30–34 age group, 2.75% for men and 2.25% for women). From the age of 45 years onwards, the rate of sick leave increases steadily, peaking at 6.5% for men and 6.6% for women in the 55–59 age group (Vogt, 2008). The studies in this area have mixed conclusions Lau, Au & Ho (2003) found that absences were more prevalent in younger employees and those with low job satisfaction.

Rhodes (1983) found that no logical age-absenteeism relationship existed and concluded that the relationship between age and absenteeism may depend a) on the type of absence measure used, b) whether the job is physically demanding, c) employee gender, d) inconsistencies in absence classification that can adversely affect measurement reliability. In addition to Rhodes work, Porter & Steers (1973), review of absence literature concluded that “Absenteeism may well be directly related to age, although relationships are probably weak.”

## Rationale & Aims

This study differs from previous work in the field of absenteeism and possible causes as it looks at three possible contributors to absenteeism and look for correlations between days absent and survey scores. Most research in the area has shown that these three stressors are slightly linked to the number of days an employee is absent this study will be able to draw comparisons between male, female and age of participants to discover how each variable affects the number of days the employee is absent.

This study can help to identify which of these factors has the most significant impact on absenteeism by comparing results from each of the variables, this study can also determine which gender and age bracket is most susceptible to each variable. As this is a correlational study, a direct cause will not be found. This study will also compare absences between age and sex of employees. Previous studies indicate a negative correlation between age and voluntary absenteeism, and a positive correlation between age and involuntary absenteeism (Hackett, 1990). This shows that younger employees tend to voluntarily miss work and older employees tend to miss work because they are ill.

The participants will complete three questionnaire's containing the Maslach Burnout Inventory, Perceived Stress Scale and the Job Satisfaction Survey, accompanied with the questions about sex, age and number of unscheduled days absent from work in the past year a convenience sample of 100 participants will be administered the questionnaire's. All participants were part-time students in Dublin Business School studying either Business or Psychology. Participants were asked their gender, age, course of study, full-time or part-time employment and number of unscheduled days absent. The information collected will be entered into Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS), where the data will be analysed.

### Hypothesis 1

It is hypothesized that subjects with higher scores in stress, burnout and lower scores in job satisfaction will have higher levels of days absent from work than those with lower scores.

The null hypothesis is accepted if no significant relationship can be found between days absent and job satisfaction, burnout or perceived stress.

### Hypothesis 2

Women will have a significantly higher rate of absences than men.

The null hypothesis is accepted if there is no significant difference between gender and days absent.

### Hypothesis 3

Younger employees will be absent from work more often than older employees.

The null hypothesis is accepted if there is no significant difference in days absent between older employees and younger employees.

Correlations will be used to find significant relationships between days absent and job satisfaction, burnout and perceived stress. Since there is no robust empirical evidence to suggest a direct link between job satisfaction, burnout and perceived stress to absenteeism a two tailed test will be used in order to test the hypothesis.

An independent t-test will be used to find the difference between genders and days absent. An independent t-test will also be used to test the significance between the different age-groups in the final hypothesis, looking for a significant difference between absences and age.

Previous studies in the area of absenteeism show that employees are unlikely to admit voluntary absences (Dalton, Mesch, 1991). Therefore this study will not ask participants to distinguish between voluntary and involuntary absences, but instead will measure the amount of unscheduled days the employee was absent from work.

## Methodology

### Participants

The participants consisted of one hundred part-time DBS students, in order to participate in the study the students must be in employment. All participants were undergraduate level, studying Psychology or Business. The sampling method was convenience as all participants were chosen based on their relative ease of access. The sample is displayed in table 1.

Table 1 *Descriptive Statistics of Age-Groups*

<u>Age</u>	<u>18-25</u>	<u>26-35</u>	<u>36+</u>
Male	7	25	14
Female	6	31	17

Participants were all part-time students as the study needed people in full-time and part-time employment, for these reasons full-time students were not considered for participation. In order to gain access to potential participant's lecturers were contacted to seek permission to carry out the survey prior to lecture classes. Participation was voluntary. The sample was taken from Business students and Psychology students. The students could be in either full-time employment or part-time employment. The make-up is displayed in table 2.

Table 2 *Descriptive Statistics of Work Status & Course of Study*

<u>Work Status</u>	<u>Full-time</u>	<u>Part-time</u>
Psychology	28	26
Business	35	11

## Materials

The questionnaire was made up of a cover sheet where the aims of the study were explained to participants along with questions about their age, gender, course of study, full-time or part-time employment and number of absences in the last year, followed by the Job Satisfaction Survey, Perceived Stress Scale and the Maslach Burnout Inventory. The questionnaires were distributed to the participants in the lecture halls, prior to their lecture.

The only materials needed were the questionnaire and a pen. The questionnaire was made up of 67 questions. The first five questions were age, gender, course of study, full-time or part-time employment and number of days absent this year.

The next set of questions was the Job Satisfaction Survey; the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) is a 36 item, nine facet scale to assess employee attitudes about the job and aspects of the job. Each facet is assessed with four items, and a total score is computed from all items. A summated rating scale format is used, with six choices per item ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Items are written in both directions, so about half must be reverse scored. The nine facets are pay, promotion, supervision, fringe benefits, contingent rewards (performance based rewards), operating Procedures (required rules and procedures), co-workers, nature of work, and communication. The interpretation of scores is displayed in table 3. Although the JSS was originally developed for use in human service organisations, it is applicable to all organisations (Spector 1985).

Scores range from 36 to 216, the ranges is:

Table 3 *Interpretation of Job Satisfaction Scores*

Score	Meaning
36-108	Dissatisfaction
108-144	Ambivalent
144-216	Satisfaction

Test–retest reliability reflects “the stability of a scale over time” (Spector, 1997, p.12). This means that if the same test is being administered a second time to the same subjects over a period of time, and it yields the same results, it is considered to have test-retest reliability. The JSS has reported test-retest reliability ranging from .37 to .74 (Spector, 1997).

Internal consistency refers to whether items are consistent across different constructs. (Cresswell, 2003). It therefore looks at how well items of a scale relate to one another. The JSS has been tested for internal consistency reliability and reported coefficient alphas ranging from .60 for the co-worker subscales to .91 for the total scale. According to Spector (1997, p. 12), “the widely accepted minimum standard for internal consistency is .70.”

Next was the Perceived Stress Scale Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) was developed by Sheldon Cohen (1983) based on a theoretical perspective introduced by health care researchers such as Lazarus (1966 & 1971) who defined the impact of stressful events as determined by ones’ perception of their stressfulness. Appraisal of a stressful situation correlates with the nature of threat itself and the resources used to combat that threat. Therefore, PSS measures the degree to which situations are appraised as stressful. The PSS items were designed to assess the extent to which respondents find their lives unpredictable,

uncontrollable, and overloaded; these three elements have been created to be key components of stress experience.

The PSS is not a diagnostic instrument, but it is proposed to make comparisons between individuals' perceived stress related to current, objective events. Higher Perceived Stress Scale Scores are associated with higher levels of stress and indicate a greater likelihood for stress interfering with things like lifestyle changes and their ability to improve their shape. Higher scores are associated with an increase in a person's vulnerability to compromised health, especially if a big life stress occurs in the near future. Higher scores are also associated with increased susceptibility to stress-induced illness. Scores are interpreted in table 4.

Table 4 *Interpretation of Perceived Stress Scale Scores*

Score	Meaning
0-7	Much lower than average
8-11	Slightly lower than average
12-15	Average
16-20	Slightly above average
21+	Much higher than average

The Perceived Stress scale is based on psychometric principles and is considered to be sound. However, the limited four-item abridged scale suffers in internal reliability ( $r=.60$ ). It provides a less adequate approximation of perceived stress levels than the larger scales. Test-Retest reliability and predictive validity is strongest for shorter time periods. The 10- and 14-item self-report instruments have established reliability and validity ( $r=0.85$ ).

Finally the participants filled in The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). The original MBI was based on the following definition of burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1986, p.1): “Burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do ‘people work’ of some kind”. The MBI is currently the most widely used research instrument to measure burnout. It has been used in over 90% of empirical research (Schaufeli and Enzmann, 1998). This study used the MBI-GS (General Survey), consisting of sixteen questions measuring emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and personal accomplishment. Answers range from 0-6 on a Likert scale, 0 indicating never and 6 meaning everyday. Score interpretations are given in table 5.

Table 5 *Interpretation of Maslach Burnout Inventory Scores*

Score	Meaning
15-18	No sign of burnout
19-32	Little sign of burnout
33-49	At risk of burnout
50-59	Severe risk of burnout
60-75	Very severe risk of burnout

### Design

In order to test the hypothesis and determine if there was a link between the number of days absent and Job Satisfaction, Burnout and Perceived Stress scores a survey method of correlation was adopted. Correlational studies are used to look for relationships between variables. There are three possible results of a correlational study: a positive correlation, a negative correlation, and no correlation. The correlation coefficient is a measure of correlation strength and can range from  $-1.00$  to  $+1.00$ .

**Positive Correlations:** Both variables increase or decrease at the same time. A correlation coefficient close to +1.00 indicates a strong positive correlation.

**Negative Correlations:** Indicates that as the amount of one variable increases, the other decreases (and vice versa). A correlation coefficient close to -1.00 indicates a strong negative correlation.

**No Correlation:** Indicates there is no relationship between the two variables. A correlation coefficient of 0 indicates no correlation.

While correlational studies can suggest that there is a relationship between two variables, they cannot prove that one variable causes a change in another variable. In other words, correlation does not equal causation.

This is a mixed design, cross-sectional correlational study, with the predictor variable being the scores from the Perceived Stress Scale, Job Satisfaction Survey and the Maslach Burnout Inventory. The criterion variable is the number of days absent.

### Procedure

Once permission was obtained from the lecturer to distribute the questionnaire the procedure was quite straightforward. The questionnaires were printed up and stored in a box. Once the students arrived in class and sat down the questionnaires were passed around, the participants were made aware of what they were filling in, how long it would take and informed that participation was completely voluntary. The students were also told briefly about the purpose of the study.

Upon completion of the questionnaires the students would pass the questionnaires to the end of the row in which they were sitting. The surveys would then be collected and stored in a case before being locked in a file cabinet. The questionnaire took approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

### Ethics

The study was completely anonymous in order to protect the participants and all questionnaires were stored securely in a locked cabinet. All participation was completely voluntary and the entire sample was aged eighteen or older. Participants had the right to withdraw at any stage and did not have to answer questions they did not want. The phone numbers of The Samaritans and another support line were listed at the bottom of the questionnaire; this was to help those participating who were affected by any of the issues in the survey. Students were also informed that due to the anonymity of the study once they had submitted the questionnaire it could not be withdrawn.

## Results

The statistical programme used for the analyses and presentation of data in this research is the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 18. The current chapter outlines the results obtained in the study and provides followed by a comprehensive discussion of these results. The descriptive statistics computed for the study are presented first in an outline of the characteristics of the sample with regards to the variables included in the study. Thereafter, the analyses of the constructs relevant to the study, that is, job satisfaction, perceived stress, burnout and absenteeism, are presented with the aid of inferential statistical procedures. Conclusions are then drawn on the basis of the obtained results.

### Descriptive Statistics

Table 6 *Descriptive Statistics of Gender*

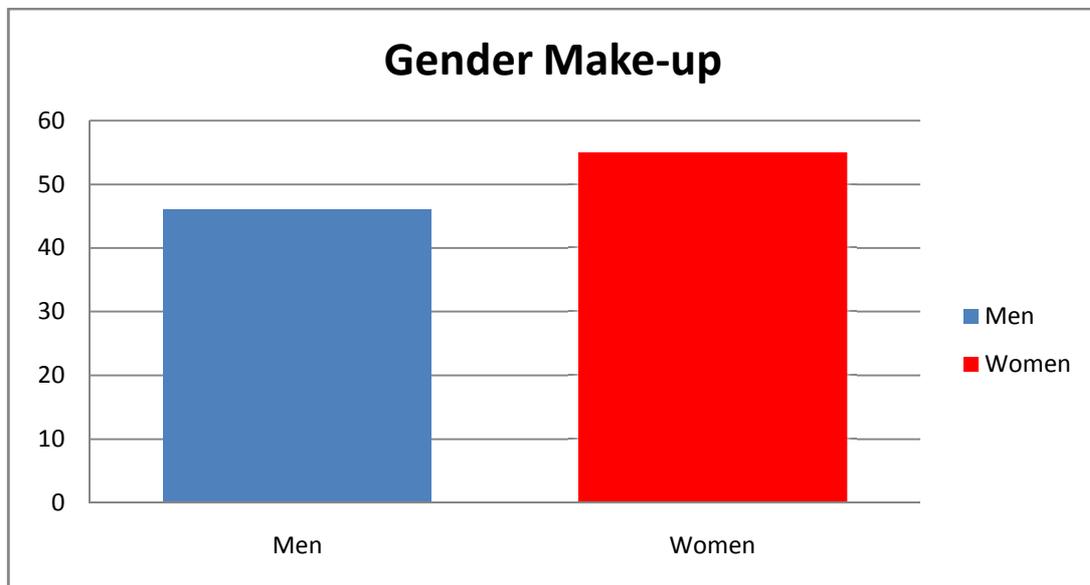


Table 6 shows that 46 men and 56 women took part meaning the sample was nearly evenly split between male and female participants, slightly more women took part in the study but overall the sample was well represented by both genders.

Table 7 *Descriptive Statistics of Age*

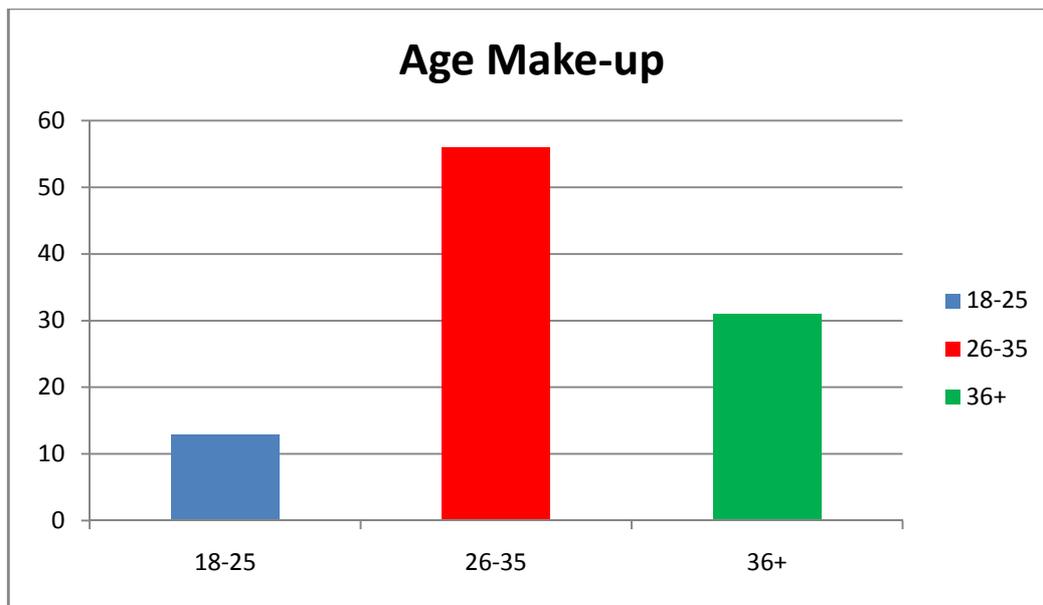


Table 7.

The majority (56%) of the participants fell between the ages of 26-35. The next largest group is the 36+ who accounted for 31% of the sample, with the 18-25 participants only making up 13% of the sample, strangely, considering most students would fall into this age category.

The course of study sample is almost even with 54% of participants studying Psychology and 46% studying Business. 63% of the sample was in full-time employment, leaving 37% in part-time work.

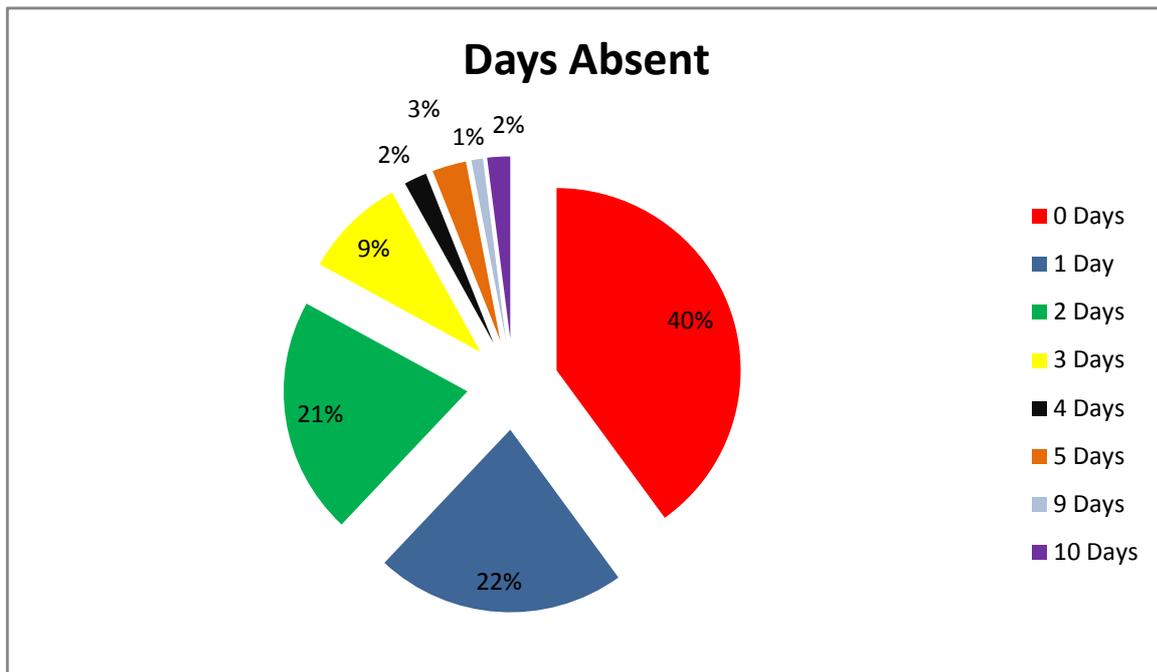
Table 8 *Number of Absences in the past 12 Months*

Table 8 illustrates the number of days absent taken by the participants, interestingly 40% of the sample had no absences in the past year. 22% of the participants only had one absence in the past year, followed closely by 21% who had two absences. Only 17% of the sample had over 2 absences in the past year which indicates that overall the level of absenteeism in the sample was quite low in comparison to the national average of 7.4 days (Chartered Institute of Personnel Development) per annum, the mean number of days absent in this study is 1.4 days per annum.

Table 9 *Descriptive Statistics of Gender Differences*

<u>Gender</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
Male	1.08	1.31
Female	1.72	2.31

Table 9 shows that the mean amount of days absent for men was slightly lower at 1.08 days per annum than women 1.72 days per annum.

Table 10 *Descriptive Statistics of Psychological Measures*

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
Job Satisfaction	123.11	23.93
Perceived Stress	19.07	7.54
Maslach Burnout	38.67	15.15

The mean is the average score of the 100 participants, the score from the Job Satisfaction Survey shown in table 10 suggests that our sample is ambivalent in satisfaction; this conclusion is reached after looking at the score range (given in table 1.), any score that falls in between 108-144 is deemed to be ambivalent.

The mean score of 19.07 taken from the Perceived Stress Survey indicates that the sample scored slightly higher than average. This indicates that the sample perceived more stress than the general population. The mean score taken from the Maslach Burnout Inventory was 38.67 suggesting that the sample is at risk from burnout. The mean taken from the sample indicated that there is only a slight risk of burnout.

### Inferential statistics

#### Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis was that there would be a significant relationship between job satisfaction scores, perceived stress scores and burnout scores to days absent. The

relationship found in scatterplots for days absent and job satisfaction perceived stress and burnout were not linear so a non-parametric test was performed known as Spearman's rho. A Spearman's rho correlation found that there was a significant negative relationship between days absent and job satisfaction ( $r_s(98) = -.20, p = .04$ ). In light hereof, the null hypothesis, which states that no statistically significant relationship exists between job satisfaction and number of days employees remain absent during the last twelve months, is rejected. The results thus indicate that there is a statistically significant, albeit inverse relationship between the number of days employees stay absent and their job satisfaction levels. This indicates that a low level of employee satisfaction is therefore associated with an increase in the number of days absent amongst the sampled employees.

A Spearman's rho correlation found there was no significant relationship between perceived stress and days absent ( $r_s(98) = .05, p = .61$ ). The null hypothesis is accepted.

A Spearman's rho correlation found there was no significant correlation between burnout and days absent ( $r_s(98) = .12, p = .22$ ). The null hypothesis is accepted.

### Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis was that women would have a significantly higher amount of absences per annum. An independent t-test found a significant difference between males (Mean = 1.08,  $s = 1.31$ ) and females ( $M = 1.72, s = 2.31$ ) in their numbers of days absent, ( $t(98) = -1.72, p = .102$ ). The null hypothesis is therefore rejected.

### Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis was that younger employees would have a significantly higher amount of absences. An independent t-test found no significant difference between the 18-25

group (Mean = 1.46, s = .40) and the 36+ group (Mean = 1.19, s = .25) in the number of days absent, ( $t(42) = .08$ ,  $p = .933$ ). The null hypothesis is accepted.

## Discussion

The aim of the research was to find a significant relationship between participant's scores on the Job Satisfaction, Perceived Stress Scale and Maslach Burnout Inventory and the number of unscheduled absences in the past year. The hypothesis is that higher scores on the burnout and perceived stress scales would lead to more days absent and that the lower the job satisfaction the more days absent. The study also looks at gender and age differences in absenteeism rates.

The spearman's rho showed a significant negative correlation between days absent and job satisfaction, this means that the more satisfied participants were in their job the less days they were absent from work, the null hypothesis is rejected. It may come as no surprise that participants who scored higher in job satisfaction levels were less likely to be absent from work. This matches with Ostroff's (1993) work and is similar to the work of Cooper and Locke where they found a weak correlation.

The correlation in this study was significant, however the relationship was not very strong. The main goal of the present study was to determine the impact of job satisfaction, perceived stress and burnout on absenteeism as research generally states that dissatisfied employees are more likely to miss work than satisfied employees (Saal & Knight, 1988). The study however only found a weak, albeit inverse correlation between satisfaction and absenteeism.

There was a significant difference between the amount of days absent between men and women in this study.

There was no significant difference between the 18-25 year old group and the 36+ group in the number of days absent from work.

There is support for the hypothesis that higher JSS scores would have lower number of days absent and vice versa. There was no support in the hypotheses that scores in the PSS and MBI scores would correlate with days absent.

### Problems

This study relied upon participants recalling the exact number of unscheduled absences, the reliability could be improved by obtaining official number of absences from a human resource department. Participants may not want to divulge the amount of absences in the survey or may have difficulty recalling the amount of absences if there are many. As Dalton & Mesch (1991) found many are unlikely to admit voluntary absences, this hampers many efforts to correctly gauge the number of voluntary absences.

The sample taken in this study were all part-time students, it is possible that with the demanding nature of their lifestyle of working followed by lectures the sample could endure greater levels of stress and burnout, this could alter the scores and damage the validity of the results. Student's mood at the beginning of lectures may be different to their normal mood and could also influence their answers in the questionnaire.

A cross-sectional design was used for the study as it provided the researcher with a snapshot of the research elements at a given point in time. Even though this design is considered appropriate, a longitudinal study would allow for forming a better understanding of the true nature of absenteeism and job satisfaction, perceived stress and burnout as it uses the same sample over a period of time.

### Strengths

The strength of the research is in the broad scope of the study, the study examined the relationship between days absent and three variables; perceived stress, burnout and job satisfaction. A methodological strength of the present study is that the questionnaire could be completed quickly and efficiently, thus placing less of a burden on participants time. The present study used a broad range of people who are representative of a general Dublin Business School student population. The inclusion of men and women also enhanced the generalisation of the results. A relatively large sample of undergraduate students participated in the study which is a strength, as larger sample sizes improve the power for ascertaining differences and correlations between variables.

### Future Research

Future research should aim to study a larger sample in order to increase precision also the participants could be in the same line of work; this would increase the validity of the findings.

Another interesting addition to this study would be to split the sample between public sector and private sector employees. This could show if there is a difference in culture and could provide some interesting insights. Furthermore a sample of nurses could be compared to other employees to examine the difference in absenteeism and job satisfaction, perceived stress and burnout levels, this could give a greater understanding of the current problems in the HSE.

Using one large organisation the study could look at the implication of the questionnaire scores against official records of absences kept by the organisations human resource department, this would eliminate any guess work by participants as to how many

days in the past year they had been absent. This study had a mean of 1.4 days absent per annum compared to the national average of 7.4 which indicates that either this sample were far less likely to be absent from work than their the rest of the workforce or the sample simply could not recall the number of days they had beenabsent in the past year. Johns (1996) as quoted by Siu (2002) – argues that “employees do not have accurate perceptions of their own absenteeism; some employees underestimate their own absenteeism and overestimate the absenteeism of co-workers” (Siu, 2002, p. 218).

### Conclusions

JSS scores correlate with absenteeism, this was also found by Saal& Knight (1998), the results were very similar, both studies found a significant inverse relationship. The fact that these findings occurred in this study also shows the JSS is an accurate predictor of absenteeism. Organisations should look to increase job satisfaction in order to lower absenteeism, in order to increase job satisfaction amongst employees the Human Resource Department should look into why job satisfaction levels are low and remedy the situation.

Since a significant relationship was not found between burnout and absenteeism in this study it is difficult to understand the current problems in the HSE, all the previous studies point to burnout as being a significant factor for absenteeism in the human-service area, a tailored study into the HSE could be beneficial for the organisation in the future as this study could not corroborate a significant correlation.

A significant relationship between perceived stress and absenteeism could not be found in this study either, however previous study’s mentioned have all indicated there certainly is a relationship, perhaps a diagnostic stress survey could be used in the future.

The fact that the sample had such a low mean number of days absent hindered the study greatly. This study's mean number of days absent was miniscule (1.4) when compared with the national average of 7.4. The limited variance in days absent made it very hard to find a correlation between variables.

The gender differences in absenteeism is an area that has been overlooked, there are few studies on the subject and very mixed conclusions. The age-absence relationship is also an area to be studied in the future, there are good arguments on both sides, young people generally have lower job satisfaction which could increase absences, whereas older employees are more likely to be genuinely sick. This study could not find a significant difference between younger employees and older employees, a larger scale study with more access to attendance records could yield different results.

This information will be of use for organisations to help understand the problem of absenteeism. The problem can never be eradicated completely as it is a complex issue with many causes, however understanding the problem can help to find viable solutions for organisations in order to address the issue.

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## Appendices

My name is Tony Glynn and I am a final year student of Psychology in Dublin Business School. This survey is investigating the relationship between burnout, job satisfaction and perceived stress to absenteeism. The information gathered will be used for my final year thesis.

Participation is totally discretionary and all data will be anonymous. Due to the anonymous nature of this study, once you have submitted your answers your contribution cannot be retracted. Your completion of this study is taken as consent for use. This questionnaire should take 10 minutes to complete. If you have any questions feel free to contact me at [REDACTED].

*Please tick the relevant box below:*

**Age Category:** 18-25   
26-35   
36 plus

**Gender:** Male   
Female

**Course:** Psychology   
Business

**Work status:** Full time   
Part time

**No. of unscheduled days absent:** \_\_\_\_\_

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<b>JOB SATISFACTION SURVEY</b> Paul E. Spector Department of Psychology University of South Florida Copyright Paul E. Spector 1994, All rights reserved.		
PLEASE CIRCLE THE ONE NUMBER FOR EACH QUESTION THAT COMES CLOSEST TO REFLECTING YOUR OPINION ABOUT IT.		Disagree very much Disagree moderately Disagree slightly Agree slightly Agree moderately Agree very much
1	I feel I am being paid a fair amount for the work I do.	1 2 3 4 5 6
2	There is really too little chance for promotion on my job.	1 2 3 4 5 6
3	My supervisor is quite competent in doing his/her job.	1 2 3 4 5 6
4	I am not satisfied with the benefits I receive.	1 2 3 4 5 6
5	When I do a good job, I receive the recognition for it that I should receive.	1 2 3 4 5 6
6	Many of our rules and procedures make doing a good job difficult.	1 2 3 4 5 6
7	I like the people I work with.	1 2 3 4 5 6
8	I sometimes feel my job is meaningless.	1 2 3 4 5 6
9	Communications seem good within this organization.	1 2 3 4 5 6
10	Raises are too few and far between.	1 2 3 4 5 6
11	Those who do well on the job stand a fair chance of being promoted.	1 2 3 4 5 6
12	My supervisor is unfair to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6
13	The benefits we receive are as good as most other organizations offer.	1 2 3 4 5 6
14	I do not feel that the work I do is appreciated.	1 2 3 4 5 6
15	My efforts to do a good job are seldom blocked by red tape.	1 2 3 4 5 6
16	I find I have to work harder at my job because of the incompetence of people I work with.	1 2 3 4 5 6
17	I like doing the things I do at work.	1 2 3 4 5 6
18	The goals of this organization are not clear to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6

PLEASE CIRCLE THE ONE NUMBER FOR EACH QUESTION THAT COMES CLOSEST TO REFLECTING YOUR OPINION ABOUT IT.		Disagree very much Disagree moderately Disagree slightly Agree slightly Agree moderately Agree very much
19	I feel unappreciated by the organization when I think about what they pay me.	1 2 3 4 5 6

20	People get ahead as fast here as they do in other places.	1	2	3	4	5	6
21	My supervisor shows too little interest in the feelings of subordinates.	1	2	3	4	5	6
22	The benefit package we have is equitable.	1	2	3	4	5	6
23	There are few rewards for those who work here.	1	2	3	4	5	6
24	I have too much to do at work.	1	2	3	4	5	6
25	I enjoy my coworkers.	1	2	3	4	5	6
26	I often feel that I do not know what is going on with the organization.	1	2	3	4	5	6
27	I feel a sense of pride in doing my job.	1	2	3	4	5	6
28	I feel satisfied with my chances for salary increases.	1	2	3	4	5	6
29	There are benefits we do not have which we should have.	1	2	3	4	5	6
30	I like my supervisor.	1	2	3	4	5	6
31	I have too much paperwork.	1	2	3	4	5	6
32	I don't feel my efforts are rewarded the way they should be.	1	2	3	4	5	6
33	I am satisfied with my chances for promotion.	1	2	3	4	5	6
34	There is too much bickering and fighting at work.	1	2	3	4	5	6
35	My job is enjoyable.	1	2	3	4	5	6
36	Work assignments are not fully explained.	1	2	3	4	5	6

**Instructions**

The questions in this scale ask you about your feelings and thoughts during the last month.

In each case, you will be asked to indicate how often you felt or thought a certain way.

For each question circle one of the following options :

0 = **never**

1 = **almost never**

2 = **sometimes**

3 = **fairly often**

4 = **very often**

1	In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?	0	1	2	3
2	In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?	0	1	2	3
3	In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and stressed?	0	1	2	3
4	In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?	0	1	2	3
5	In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?	0	1	2	3
6	In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things you had to do?	0	1	2	3
7	In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?	0	1	2	3
8	In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?	0	1	2	3
9	In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control?	0	1	2	3
10	In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?	0	1	2	3

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete the questionnaires.

If you have been affected by any of the issues dealt with in the questionnaire here are some help-lines that may be of use to you.

#### Support Line

Tel: 01708 76 52 00 (provides a confidential helpline offering emotional support to any individual on any issue.)

#### Samaritans

Tel: 01850 60 90 90