

Voluntary and Involuntary Absence: The Influence of Leadership, Work Environment, Affect and Group Size

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Abstract

This study examined a theoretical model that linked leadership, positive and negative workgroup environments, positive and negative affect and workgroup size with group-level voluntary and involuntary absence. Structural equation analyses were conducted on data obtained from 27,327 staff members in 852 schools. Overall, the results demonstrated that voluntary and involuntary absence each had different antecedents. Voluntary absence was predicted by school size and positive affect whereas involuntary absence was primarily predicted by negative aspects of the work environment. These findings have important implications on the way that researchers and practitioners should approach the subject of absenteeism.

Introduction

Of the different forms of withdrawal behavior such as turnover and absenteeism, absenteeism is arguably the more interesting. While the relationship between employees and organizations is terminated through turnover, employees who engage in absenteeism maintain their relationships with their organizations, introducing the question of how much an employee can withdraw while still maintaining this relationship. This raises two interesting questions about absenteeism, namely the motivation to engage in absenteeism and the opportunity to do so. Put simply, why would employees want to withdraw in this manner, and how much can they get away with? Given that the impetus for absence behaviour can be provided by factors such as affect (George, 1989; Pelled & Xin, 1999), and that the opportunity for absence behaviour can be provided by factors such as absence culture (Chadwick-Jones, Nicholson & Brown, 1982; Nicholson & Johns, 1985), it makes intuitive sense to simultaneously examine such factors.

Examination of the motivation to engage in absenteeism involves an assumption that employees have made a choice to be absent from work, raising volition as an important aspect to consider in absenteeism research. An important distinction thus needs to be made between two types of absence from work, namely voluntary and involuntary absence. Within absenteeism research, there is a drive to “purify” the measure of absenteeism as voluntary absence from work, with the implication that involuntary absence needs to be actively screened out to avoid “tainting” the measure (Steel, 2003). However, aside from methodological challenges in defining cases of involuntary absence for exclusion (Steel,

2003), such screening also precludes the integrated study of the different factors that contribute to voluntary and involuntary absence.

One of the factors that has been found to influence absenteeism is affect, although the link between absenteeism and negative affect seems to be more difficult to substantiate in studies that focus only upon voluntary absence (George, 1989; Pelled & Xin, 1999). Examination of the influence of positive and negative affect on the two forms of absence holds promise in providing a deeper understanding of the relationship between affect and absenteeism.

Another methodological issue in absence research is the level of analysis. Research into absenteeism requires group-level analysis, because collective experiences of work influence employees' absence decisions, (Steel, Rentsch & Hendrix, 2002), as well as employees' experiences of positive and negative affect at work (Hart, 1994; Hart, Wearing & Headey, 1995). Studies have found that positive affect influences voluntary absenteeism (George, 1989; Pelled & Xin, 1999), implying a causal chain of relationships in which situational factors such as organizational climate influence collective experiences, which in turn influence individual members' motivation to engage in absenteeism.

The aim of the present research was to test a model that encompassed the motivation of employees to engage in voluntary and involuntary absence and to examine the different factors that drive voluntary and involuntary absence from work. Specifically, we examined positive and negative affect as motivating factors for voluntary and involuntary absence, and the antecedents of positive and negative affect in groups.

A trend of absenteeism research has been to screen out involuntary absence as an outcome variable (Steel, 2003). One issue with this practice is that methods of excluding involuntary absence from a measure of absenteeism are subject to errors in classification, reflected by conflicting meta-analyses of studies involving voluntary and involuntary absence from work (Farrell & Stamm, 1988; Hackett & Guion, 1985; Scott & Taylor, 1985). In addition, Steel (2003) notes that studies using omnibus measures of absence produced results comparable to those that used purified measures, and suggests that voluntary and involuntary absence are both additive and independent.

Given the research focus on voluntary absence, it is not surprising that there appears to be a dearth of research focusing on involuntary absence, to the extent that Nicholson and Martocchio (1995) labelled this a "black hole" that hinders our understanding of absence behavior. For example, since people consciously seek positive affective states and avoid negative affective states (Clark & Isen, 1982), absenteeism may be an effort to avoid work situations that create low positive affective states and high negative affective states. However, studies that do not specifically examine involuntary absence have found no link between negative affect and absenteeism (George, 1989; Iverson & Deery, 2001). On the other hand, research in the field of health interventions has revealed that stress drives illness-related absences (Hendrix, 1985; Nichol, et al., 1995), demonstrating that negative affect, an often cited indicator of stress (Hart & Cooper, 2001), does in fact influence absenteeism in the form of involuntary absence. In light of this, focusing exclusively on voluntary absence would be at the peril of developing a richer understanding of the nature of absenteeism.

Traditionally, affect in models of absenteeism has been examined in several forms. Job satisfaction is one of the most often studied variables in relation to absenteeism (Harrison & Martocchio, 1998), and organizational commitment (Blau & Boal, 1987) and job involvement (Brooke, 1986) have also been examined as antecedents of absenteeism. George (1989) argues that job attitudes such as these contain cognitive components that, unlike affective components, do not predict absenteeism, so the focus should therefore be upon direct measures of affect.

Research into affective states suggests that positive and negative affective states are not points on a single continuum. Instead, they constitute two independent dimensions: positive and negative affect (Meyer & Shack, 1989; George, 1996; Watson & Tellegen, 1985). Positive affect is pleasurable and can be expressed in terms such as “enthusiastic”, “energetic” and “cheerful”, while negative affect is non-pleasurable and can be expressed in terms such as “anxious”, “uneasy” and “depressed” (Hart & Cooper, 2001).

One interesting aspect of existing research is the unit of analysis, which has found much more variance in absenteeism between groups than within groups (Harrison & Martocchio, 1998; Xie & Johns, 2000). Along with meta-analyses of individual-level data which demonstrate that job-related factors are important predictors of absence (Farrell & Stamm, 1988), this finding indicates that such factors warrant further investigation at the group level. In particular, Rentsch and Steel (2003) highlight the importance of studying shared meanings amongst members of a workgroup, making the case for the inclusion of data on the relationship between organizational climate and absenteeism at the group level, organizational climate being the shared assignment of meaning between members of a group or organization (James, James & Ashe, 1990). Indeed, group-level absenteeism has been found to be strongly correlated with organizational climate (Hiller & Vance, 2001). Leadership is also a situational factor to be considered in understanding how the work environment influences absenteeism, since leaders are influential in guiding employees’ interpretations of events in the work place (Gellatly, 1995; Smircich & Morgan, 1982) and perceived norms (Gellatly, 1995). Leadership therefore constitutes a relevant antecedent of absenteeism, given that it can influence organizational climate and absenteeism in turn.

Another aspect that warrants investigation is the relationship between organizational climate and affect. Studies have found that positive work experiences contribute to positive affect but not to negative affect, and also that negative work experiences contribute to negative affect but not to positive affect (Hart, 1994; Hart, Wearing & Headey, 1995). One implication of these findings is that the relationship between organizational climate and affect may be made clearer by separately considering positive and negative aspects of climate. This approach is further supported by Hart's (1999) findings that positive and negative work environments contribute independently to job satisfaction.

Taking all of the hitherto mentioned points into consideration, a pattern of relationships may be formed in which voluntary and involuntary absence are influenced by positive and negative affect, as well as positive and negative work environments. In turn, positive and negative work environments contribute to positive and negative affect, while leadership contributes to both positive and negative work environments. The model of these relationships is presented in Figure 1. The enthusiasm and energy that are part of positive affect (Hart & Cooper, 2001) underpin the motivation to work, and so we would expect positive affect to drive voluntary absence. Based upon the previous findings that stress drives illness-related absences (Hendrix, 1985; Nichol, et al., 1995), we would expect that involuntary absence is driven by negative affect. Specifically, the model shown in Figure 1 is based on the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Positive affect contributes to voluntary absence, whereas negative affect contributes to involuntary absence.

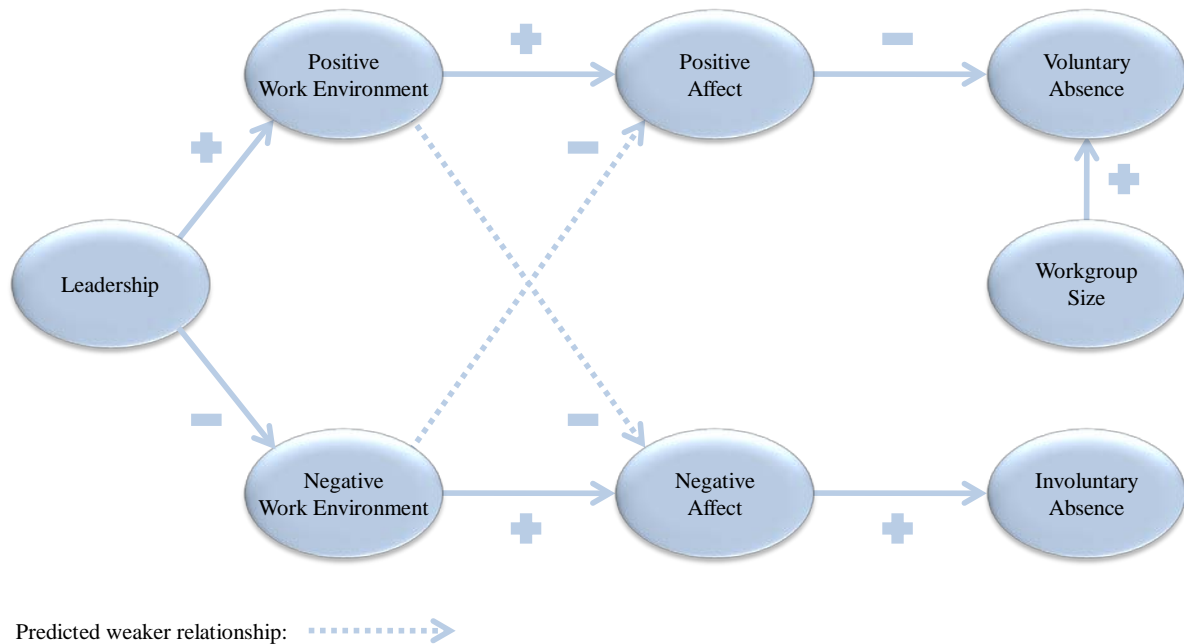
Hypothesis 2: Positive aspects of the work environment contribute more strongly to positive affect than negative affect, whereas negative aspects of the work environment contribute more strongly to negative affect than positive affect.

Hypothesis 3: Leadership contributes positively to the positive aspects of the work environment and negatively to the negative aspects of the work environment.

Hypothesis 4: Positive and negative affect are independent from one another.

Hypothesis 5: Positive and negative aspects of the work environment are independent from one another.

Figure 1. A proposed model of the relationships between leadership, workgroup environment, affect, and absence



Aside from affective causes, workgroup cultures can also influence absenteeism. Various researchers have studied absence cultures, whereby the beliefs and practices of workgroup members allow or even encourage absenteeism (Harrison & Martocchio, 1998; Johns, 2001). Absence culture factors that have been studied include legitimization of absence from work (Johns & Xie, 1998) and how previous absence levels set a precedent for present absence levels (Harrison, 1995; Johns & Xie, 1998).

Johns (1997) characterizes absenteeism as “mildly deviant behavior”, although group norms regulate the amount of deviance that is considered acceptable (Gellatly & Luchak, 1998). Existing research suggests that people tend to be self-serving when reporting their own absence behavior, underestimating their own absence rates and overestimating their own attendance relative to their peers (Harrison & Schaffer, 1994; Johns, 1994). This self-serving behavior hints at absence-takers’ desire to hide their deviant behaviors or make them less salient.

In light of this, an interesting aspect of absentee research is the salience of each group member’s absence within the workgroup as a facilitator of absence culture. We could expect to find that absenteeism would result in increased workload for the remaining members in the workgroup, possibly placing strain on relationships between the workgroup’s members (Mason & Griffin, 2003), and that the degree to which the additional workload can be spread would be inversely related to the salience of the member’s absence. Since the workload can be spread more across larger workgroups, it could be expected that absenteeism in larger workgroups would be less salient and therefore higher.

Hypothesis 6: Workgroup size contributes positively to voluntary absence.

In the present study, we used data collected from a survey of 27,327 school staff members to examine the workgroup (i.e., school) level relationships between absenteeism, affect, workgroup environments and leadership. One of the strengths of this study is that

measures of voluntary and involuntary absence were based upon schools' records of overall sick leave and non-certified sick leave (i.e. sick leave taken without a medical certificate being presented) taken by staff, with non-certified sick leave being taken as a measure of voluntary absence. This provided an objective measure of absenteeism, rather than having to rely on self-reports, which can be unreliable because of self-serving behavior (Harrison & Schaffer, 1994; Johns, 1994). This approach also circumvents the methodological issues in differentiating voluntary and involuntary absence on the basis of frequency and time-lost measures (Steel, 2003), and employs overall sick leave as the omnibus measure of absenteeism recommended by Steel (2003).

Method

Participants

The data in the present study were drawn from a larger data set that was collected as part of an annual employee opinion survey in an Australian government education system. The education system comprised of 1,638 schools that were responsible for the education of children aged from 5 to 18 years. All teachers and support staff in these schools were invited to participate in the survey. The survey was administered electronically during the middle of the school year.

For the purpose of this study, it was necessary that we only used data from those schools that assessed all study variables. Given that the education system allowed schools to opt in or out of the leadership component of the survey, this meant that we were unable to use the data from 770 schools. We also removed data from 16 schools that had less than 4 respondents or less than 10 students. This approach was adopted, given our focus on investigating group level relationships, to ensure that our analyses were based on schools that had a meaningful group of staff. Accordingly, we were able to use data from 27,327 employees in 852 schools. The number of employees in each school ranged from 4 to 170 ($M = 32.07$, $SD = 25.62$). No gender, age, or length of service data were available, because demographic variables were not assessed in the survey to minimize concerns about confidentiality.

Measures

Leadership. The 49-item Occupational Leadership Questionnaire (Ostrogny & Hart, 2002) was used to measure three broad domains of transformational leader behavior (i.e., focus on core business, focus on development, and focus on people). Within these three domains, 12 specific aspects of leader behavior were assessed (i.e., Builds Own Skills, Builds Relationships, Coaches Staff, Creates a Quality Environment, Effectively Manages Change, Effectively Manages Projects, Is Entrepreneurial, Manages People, Provides Direction, Seeks Feedback, Supports Staff and Values Training and Development). These variables reflect employees' ratings of the behaviors their immediate workgroup managers or leaders (coefficient alphas ranged from .88 to .97). The 12 variables assessed through the questionnaire were used to provide an overall index of transformational leadership. The use of an overall measure of transformation leadership was supported by the results of a second-order confirmatory factor analysis (coefficient alpha = .95).

Positive aspects of the work environment. Employees' perceptions about seven positive aspects of their work environment (Appraisal and Recognition, Coworker Interaction, Goal Alignment, Opportunities for Development, Role Clarity, Participative Decision-Making and Workgroup Morale) were assessed using 37 items from Hart, Wearing, Conn, Carter, and Dingle's (2000) School Organizational Health Questionnaire. Employees were asked to rate the extent to which each item (e.g., "Staff receive recognition for good work") described their workgroup on a 5-point scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"

(coefficient alphas ranged from .84 to .93). Confirmatory factor analyses showed that the seven separate dimensions could be aggregated, at a second-order level, to provide an overall index of the positive aspects of the work environment (coefficient alpha = .97).

Negative aspects of the work environment. The 9 items of the Excessive Work Demands and Workgroup Distress scales of Hart et al.'s (2000) School Organizational Health Questionnaire were used to assess the negative aspects of the work environment. Research on organizational climate has previously identified excessive workloads as a significant contributor to distress (e.g., Hart & Wearing, 1995), and confirmatory factor analyses demonstrated that Excessive Work Demands and Workgroup Distress could be aggregated to provide an overall index of the negative aspects of the work environment (coefficient alpha = .90).

Positive and negative affect. The 10-item Occupational Positive and Negative Affects Scales (Hart, Griffin, Wearing, & Cooper, 1996) were used to assess Positive Affect and Negative Affect. These variables reflect the positive (e.g., feeling energized, enthusiastic, cheerful, happy) and negative (e.g., feeling anxious, depressed, tense, unhappy) emotional responses that employees had to their work (coefficient alpha = .93 and .91, respectively).

Voluntary and involuntary absence. Our measures of voluntary and involuntary absence were based on data provided by the education system that reflected the average number of sick leave days that were taken throughout the school year by employees in each of the schools. These data took into account the number of employees in each school and the time-fraction (i.e., hours employed) for each employee. All data were provided at the aggregated school level. This meant that we had two indices for each school; one reflecting the average number of days lost for voluntary absence, and the other reflecting the average number of days lost for involuntary absence. Involuntary absence was based on sick leave days that were taken as a result of illness and certified as such by a medical practitioner, whereas voluntary absence was based on sick leave days that were taken without supporting documentation from a medical practitioner. Importantly, the conditions of employment in this education system allowed employees to take up to five days sick leave each year, at the employee's discretion, without the need to justify or support the sick leave with evidence from a medical practitioner.

School Size. School size was based on the number of employees who responded to the survey in each school.

Aggregation of data at the school level. The employee-level data collected on the survey variables were aggregated to the school level. This enabled the survey data to be integrated with the absence data so that all analyses could be conducted at the school level (i.e., the school was used as the unit of analysis). A series of variance components analyses were performed on the seven study variables, and the variance for the individual- and school-level models for each variable, as well as the total variance explained by differences between schools, is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Group level variance, individual level variance and total percentage variance explained at the group level for leadership, climate, affect and excessive workload variables

	Group level variance	Individual level variance	% variance explained by group
Leadership	744.07	2890.04	20.47%
Positive Workgroup Environment	162.61	580.61	21.88%
Negative Workgroup Environment	19.16	59.09	24.49%
Positive Affect	5.01	32.10	13.50%

Negative Affect	4.52	41.41	9.85%
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The total amount of variance explained at the group level exceeded 10% for all variables except for Negative Affect, justifying the aggregation of scores to the school level (Bryk, & Raudenbush, 1992).

Results

The means, standard deviations and intercorrelations for the seven study variables are presented in Table 2. The summary statistics presented in Table 2 are based on listwise deletion of cases with missing data.

Table 2. Means, standard deviations and correlations for all observed variables

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Leadership	283.53	30.32						
2. Positive Work Environment	141.85	13.87	.87					
3. Negative Work Environment	23.49	4.77	-.73	-.80				
4. Positive Affect	26.77	2.57	.79	.89	-.85			
5. Negative Affect	12.51	2.62	-.73	-.81	.87	-.89		
6. Voluntary absence	1.77	0.71	-.27	-.35	.29	-.35	.28	
7. Involuntary absence	5.10	3.95	-.08	-.08	.14	-.11	.12	.09

Note. All correlations are significant at $p=.05$.

The high correlations between variables in Table 2 may be explained by the data being aggregated to the group level, as well as the survey-based methodology of data collection creating a common-method bias. Notwithstanding this concern, the correlations demonstrate discrimination is a pattern that aligns with the hypotheses. For example, Negative Affect is more strongly correlated with Negative Work Environment than with Positive Work Environment, while Voluntary Absence is more strongly correlated with Positive Affect than with Negative Affect.

A series of structural equation analyses were conducted using the Linear Structural Relations (LISREL VIII) Program (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1993). The structural equation analyses were based on the estimation of polychoric correlations that assumed all variables were normally distributed and the maximum likelihood method of estimation. The maximum likelihood method of estimation has been shown to be robust against moderate departures from the skewness and kurtosis of the normal distribution (Cuttance, 1987). The skewness and kurtosis was less than 1.0 in absolute value for all study variables.

The unit weighted composite scores for the first-order variables were used as single indicators of their respective latent constructs. Measurement error was taken into account by setting the percentage of error variance at (1 – the scale’s reliability). This approach has been used in previous studies (e.g., Hart, 1999; Bagozzi and Heatherton, 1994) note that this form of measurement model is satisfactory when global questions are being asked about the relations among the constructs of interest. Moreover, this procedure was adopted for practical reasons, because some of the constructs were measured by a large number of items.

The tested theoretical model was based upon the hypothesized relationships shown in Figure 1, but allowed for the possibility that the leadership variables had a direct effect on voluntary and involuntary absence, providing a more stringent test of the hypothesized model by controlling for the effects of leadership. School size was also allowed to contribute to all of the other variables so that the contextual factor of school size was taken into account. The

residual variances for Voluntary Absence and Involuntary Absence, for Positive Affect and Negative Affect, and for Positive Work Environment and Negative Work Environment were all allowed to correlate.

The estimated model provided a good fit to the data. However, the relationship between Negative Affect and Involuntary Absence was found to be nonsignificant. Moreover, inspection of the residual variances and modification indices suggested that there was a significant relationship between Negative Work Environment and Involuntary Absence. Although not initially hypothesized, this relationship could be justified on theoretical grounds. It is quite plausible, for example, that the negative aspects of the work environment create a toxic situation that can contribute to employees' ill health. Accordingly, we estimated a revised model that drop the relationship between Negative Affect and Involuntary Absence and replaced it with a relationship between Negative Work Environment and Involuntary Absence. The goodness-of-fit statistics for the revised model are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Goodness-of-fit statistics for the structural equation models

Model	<i>N</i>	χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Goodness of Fit Index	Standardized Root Mean Square Error of Approximation	Relative Non-centrality Index	Root Mean Square Residual
Null Model (Independence)	852	13,677.24	45	<.001				
Tested Model	852	107.94	20	<.001	.98	.02	.99	.01

The goodness-of-fit statistics for the estimated model showed that there was an excellent fit between the observed data and the revised model. Moreover, inspection of the standardized residuals and modification indices suggested that there were no modifications that would improve the fit of the model. The parameter estimates for the revised model are shown in Figure 2. For reasons of diagrammatic clarity, we have listed the standardized beta coefficients lining School Size to all other variables in Table 4.

As shown in Figure 2, Positive Affect was the only study variable to contribute significantly to Voluntary Absence, while Negative Work Environment was the only study variable to contribute significantly to Involuntary Absence. These findings partly support Hypotheses 1, demonstrating that positive affect contributes to voluntary absence even though negative affect was not shown to contribute to involuntary absence.

Hypothesis 2 was supported by the results; Positive Work Environment contributed more strongly to Positive Affect than Negative Affect, whereas Negative Work Environment contributed more strongly to Negative Affect than Positive Affect. Also, Leadership contributed positively to Positive Work Environment and negatively to Negative Work Environment, providing support for Hypotheses 3.

The independence of positive and negative affect proposed in Hypothesis 4 was supported by the low correlations between Positive Affect and Negative Affect. Similarly, the low correlations between Positive Work Environment and Negative Work Environment supported the fifth hypothesis of the independence of positive and negative aspects of work from one another.

Figure 2. Standardized maximum likelihood parameter estimates for the revised model, showing the links between leadership, workgroup environment, affect, and absence. [all parameter estimates significant at the .05 level.]

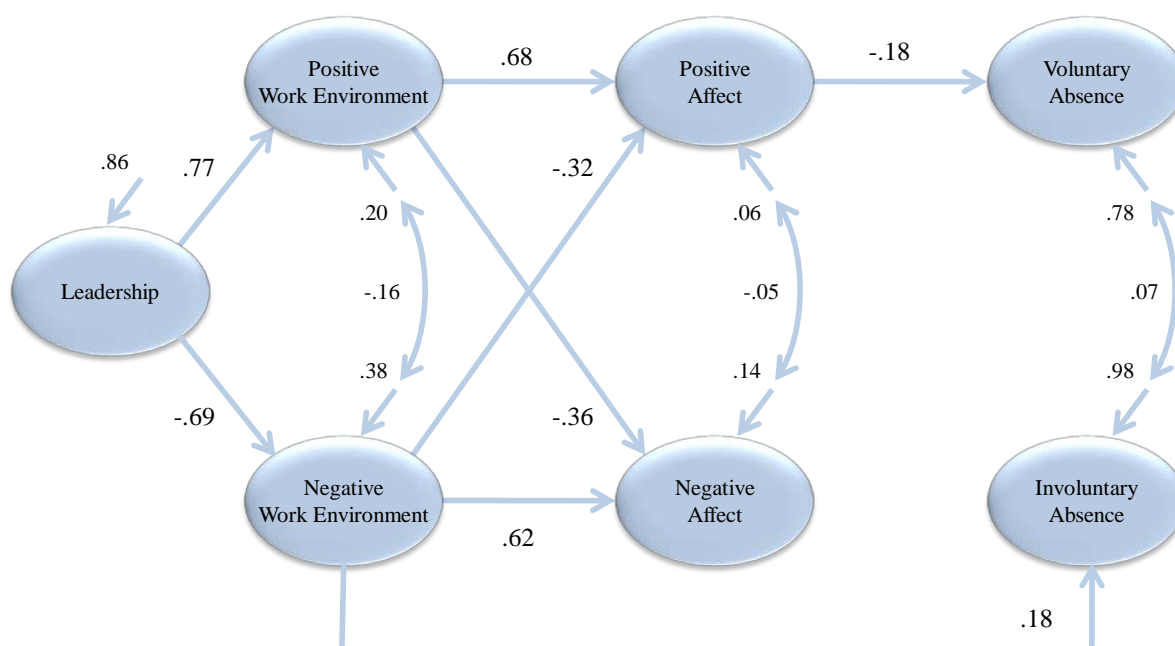


Table 4. Standardized beta coefficients of school size on other factors in the models

Factor	Tested Model
Leadership	-.38
Positive Work Environment	-.25
Negative Work Environment	.19
Positive Affect	.00 ^{NS}
Negative Affect	-.05
Voluntary Absence	.35
Involuntary Absence	-.09

^{NS} $p > .05$

Table 5. Standardized total effects

Predictor	Voluntary Absence	Involuntary Absence
Voluntary Absence	-	-
Positive Work Environment	-.12	-
Negative Work Environment	.06	.18
Leadership	-.13	-.12
School size	.44	.01 ^{NS}
Positive Affect	-.18	-
Negative Affect	-	-

^{NS} $p > .05$

The beta coefficient of School Size on Voluntary Absence in Table 4 is significant and larger than the beta coefficient of School Size on Involuntary Absence, supporting the hypothesis that workgroup size contributes positively to voluntary absence. In addition, the standardized total effects of the study variables on Voluntary and Involuntary Absence, as presented in Table 5, demonstrates that School Size was the strongest predictor of Voluntary Absence, providing further support for Hypothesis 6.

Negative Work Environment made the strongest contribution to Involuntary Absence, providing further support to the hypothesised influence of distress on involuntary absence.

Alternative models were tested to investigate the possibility that alternative patterns of relationships between affect and absence would provide a model that would better fit the data, but the results showed that the model described above provided the best representation of the data.

Discussion

The aim of the present research was to examine how voluntary and involuntary absence from work were influenced by leadership, organizational climate, excessive workloads, affect and workgroup size. Overall, the results supported the proposed structure of relationships amongst the study variables. The mediating effect of Positive Affect between Positive Work Environment and Involuntary Absence, as well as that of both Work Environment measures on the relationship between Leadership and both measures of absenteeism, reflect a causal chain of antecedents to absenteeism: leadership influences organizational climate, which in turn influences affect, which in turn influences absenteeism. The results also demonstrated that voluntary behaviour is driven by positive affect, whereas the factors that drive involuntary absence are of a negative nature.

The results of the present study also support the hypothesis that workgroup size contributes positively to voluntary absence. This finding holds interesting implications. While explanations of absenteeism such as absence culture focus on factors that promote or permit absenteeism, the relationship between workgroup size and voluntary absence highlights the role of barriers to absenteeism. While policies to punish absenteeism have been examined, such policies have produced mixed results (Harrison & Martocchio, 1998). The effects of workgroup size on absenteeism may be used to influence the design of workgroups such that members perceive their absence as having a significant impact on the remaining members.

One unanticipated result of the study was that while negative work environments involuntary absence was directly influenced by negative work environments, negative affect showed no significant influence. This pattern of relationships implies that the physiological demands of dealing with a negative work environment outweigh the affective responses in driving involuntary absence. For example, poorly-functioning teams may not be able to cope with their workloads, leading team members to consistently work longer hours at the expense of their health.

One of the limitations of the present study was in the absenteeism data provided by the state education department, which was aggregated at the school level. The group level data precluded the use of individual-level analyses and a full multilevel design to examine predictors of within-school and between-school variation in absence. Notwithstanding this limitation, the data provided enabled us to investigate the antecedents of voluntary and involuntary absence at the school level.

One of the key strengths of the present study was that we examined voluntary and involuntary absence separately in an attempt to address Nicholson and Martocchio's (1995) "black hole". In so doing, we identified separate mechanisms that drive these two forms of

absence. Another strength of this study was that the data was analysed at the workgroup level, and along with the advantage of a large sample of workgroups, the results provided insight into how workgroup-related factors contribute to absenteeism.

One potential limitation of the study is that it focuses on one occupational setting, namely schools, raising the question of whether the results can be generalised to other work settings. However, the pattern of relationships found between positive and negative aspects of the work environment with positive and negative affect was consistent with the results of previous studies in different settings (Hart, Wearing, & Headey, 1995).

The findings of the present study highlight the influence of contextual factors such as organizational climate, leadership and workgroup size on not only absenteeism but its underlying affect. The key implication of this study is that both practitioners and researchers need to be mindful of these factors when dealing with absenteeism.

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