11-2022

Leadership Behavior, Stress, and Presenteeism: A Cross-Cultural Comparison

Jan Philipp Czakert
University of Barcelona

Julia A. M. Reif
Universität der Bundeswehr München

Rita Berger
University of Barcelona

Abstract

Presenteeism is the behavior of working with ill-health. Due to associated productivity losses and substantial transmission risks during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, presenteeism is gaining increased attention in occupational psychological research. To understand the complexity of this phenomenon, research on contextual influences is needed. Our study investigated positive leadership behavior (transformational leadership, TFL) and negative leadership behavior (passive-avoidant leadership, PAL) as social-contextual predictors, next to stress. We hypothesized that in countries with high masculine values, presenteeism is more likely to occur. Our study involved 979 employees from the different cultural contexts of Germany, Ireland, Latvia and Spain that answered an online questionnaire. Results displayed prevalence ranges between an average of 3.93 days (Ireland) to 22.11 days (Spain) over the last 12 months. In all countries, higher job stress was associated significantly with higher levels of presenteeism. Correlational analyses of leadership behaviors showed mixed results: Negative correlations between TFL and presenteeism were only significant in Germany and Spain, positive correlations between PAL and presenteeism were only significant in Germany and Latvia. This study questions the influence of masculine values and emphasizes the importance of leader-follower quality in presenteeism research.

Keywords: Presenteeism, Leadership, Stress

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Presenteeism is the behavior of working with ill-health (Karanika-Murray & Cooper, 2018): Due to physical or psychological complaints, employees are not able to work at a usual level of productivity but still attend work (Dew et al., 2005). Particularly showcased in the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, presenteeism may pose a substantial transmission risk to employees, colleagues, customers, and the overall public health (Johnson et al., 2021). Presenteeism is generally gaining increased attention in occupational psychological research because it is costly for organizations in terms of impaired performance, more errors, productivity losses (Robertson & Cooper, 2011), and is also problematic for individual health (Demerouti et al., 2008). A recent meta-analysis has identified different job demands (e.g., role demands, time pressures) and job resources (like positive leadership, supervisor, and organizational support) which serve as antecedents of presenteeism, mediated by health on which we will focus in this paper, and by job attitudes, e.g., satisfaction (Miraglia & Johns, 2016).

However, to more comprehensively understand presenteeism, we need a deeper understanding of contextual aspects that influence presenteeism, such as the social context and the cross-cultural context in which presenteeism takes place (Ruhle et al., 2019). Leaders are an important component of the work context (Oc, 2018) and are in frontline when it comes to the promotion of healthy work practices and employee well-being (Inceoglu et al., 2018). The leader has impact on employees' positive and negative outcomes such as performance and strain (Arnold, 2017). However, studies analyzing the role of positive and negative leadership behavior in relation to presenteeism are still scarce. Furthermore, as for the cultural context, only few studies compared presenteeism across cultures showing some differences, but more evidence is needed (e.g., Lu et al., 2013). Therefore, we focused on leader behaviors (positive leadership behavior in the form of transformational leadership (TFL), and negative leadership in the form of passive-avoidant leadership (PAL)) as social-contextual predictors of presenteeism in different cultural contexts in our study.

Stress and Presenteeism

Stressors and respective stress contribute to ill-health and vulnerability at the workplace, which lead to presenteeism (Oshio et al., 2017; Pohling et al., 2016). It is well documented that mental problems still suffer under stigmatization in many workplaces (Hinshaw, 2007; (Coe et al., 2021), which is why stress as a psychological and emotional strain symptom is particularly relevant for the phenomenon of presenteeism (e.g., Coe et al., 2021; Miraglia & Johns, 2016). According to Hobfoll's (2001) conservation of resources theory, people strive to protect their resources and must invest resources to prevent resource loss. People suffering from work stress may feel attendance pressure (Miraglia & Johns, 2016): They may fear resource loss (due to high job demands) and should thus try to protect remaining resources or prevent further resource loss by continuing going to work, despite being ill (Halbesleben et al., 2014; see also Miraglia & Johns, 2016). The robust positive association

between experienced stress and presenteeism was also meta-analytically shown by Miraglia and Johns (2016). We therefore suggest: *Job stress is positively associated with presenteeism (Hypothesis 1).*

Leadership Behavior and Presenteeism

Negative leader behavior is a main category of workplace stressors whereas positive leader behavior constitutes a workplace resource (Reif et al., 2021). Negative leadership behaviors such as acting aggressively, showing little recognition, withholding information, or passive and avoidant leadership have been found to be stressful for employees in various studies (for a meta-analysis see Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Barling & Frone, 2017). Positive leader behaviors such as appreciating employees, activating, and encouraging them (Spieß & Stadler, 2016) can promote employee health (Berger et al., 2019; Inceoglu et al., 2018; Montano et al., 2017; Rudolph et al., 2020).

Referring again to Hobfoll's (2001) conservation of resources theory, positive leadership behaviors should less threaten employee's resources, which is why those employees should be less prone to show presenteeism (e.g., Dietz & Scheel, 2017). Regarding the job-demands resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), positive leadership behaviors help enhance employees' personal resources, which in turn buffer the negative effect of job demands on employee health (Zwingmann et al., 2014; Schaufeli, 2015). By contrast, negative leadership behaviors should threaten employees' resources, which is why those employees should be more prone to show presenteeism, in order to prevent further resource loss and protect existing but threatened resources (Dietz & Scheel, 2017; Halbesleben et al., 2014).

In our study, we selected TFL as positive leadership behavior and PAL as negative leadership behavior (Bass, 1985a). While earlier research has already shown that feelings of supervisorial pressure or fears of punitive actions are directly related to presenteeism (e.g., Ashby & Mahdon, 2010; Dietz & Scheel, 2017; Grinyer & Singleton, 2000), we aimed to shed more light on PAL as an under-researched but destructive leadership style (Barling & Frone, 2017; Inceoglu et al., 2018). Previous research has contrasted the effects of TFL and PAL on mental health outcomes through different mechanisms (e.g., Berger et al., 2019). TFL comprises "leader behaviors that transform and inspire followers to perform beyond expectations while transcending self-interest for the good of the organization" (Avolio et al., 2009, p. 423). Transformational leaders are charismatic, ideally influence and inspire their followers, stimulate them intellectually and individually consider them (Bass, 1985a, 1985b). TFL is positively related to mental health (Inceoglu et al., 2018; Montano et al., 2017). However, when it comes to the association between TFL and presenteeism, research has also suggested that TFL may "promote self-sacrifice of vulnerable followers by leading them to go to work while ill" (Nielsen & Daniels, 2016, Abstract), implicating a detrimental effect of TFL with regard to presenteeism. Yet, the most recent meta-analysis showed that the 'true' correlation between presenteeism and quality leadership was significantly negative (-.13) (Miraglia & Johns, 2016). Quality leadership is defined as "capability to encourage participation, provide feedback, plan, and organize tasks" (Miraglia

& Johns, 2016, p. 271) which is closely related to conventional TFL conceptualizations.

PAL is characterized by an absence of leadership, which means that leaders avoid supervising subordinates. Passive-avoidant leaders, for example, are absent when needed, ignore, and abdicate leader responsibilities, do not monitor their employees, and do not respond to their problems, show no or less involvement in important organizational matters, delay actions, and avoid decision-making (Barling & Frone, 2017; Bass & Riggio, 2006). Several studies show the negative relationship between PAL and health-related employee outcomes (Arnold, 2017). Moreover, Frooman et al. (2012) demonstrated that PAL is associated with a reduction in legitimate absenteeism, i.e., staying away from work when ill, which was related to an increase in presenteeism. Halbesleben et al. (2014) argued that employees may engage in presenteeism to meet job demands, and PAL is directly linked to increased job demands (Barling & Frone, 2017). It was also proposed that employees use presenteeism to regain missing connection with their supervisor, which is clearly lacking under PAL (Halbesleben et al., 2014). In line with our theoretical argumentation and previous empirical findings we thus propose: *TFL is negatively associated with presenteeism (Hypothesis 2). PAL is positively associated with presenteeism (Hypothesis 3).*

Building on the "tendency for job demands to trump job resources in accounting for presenteeism [which] may be yet another manifestation of the general psychological tendency of 'bad to be stronger than good'" (Baumeister et al., 2001, as cited in Ruhle et al., 2019, p. 354), we further assume that the negative relationship between TFL and presenteeism will be lower than the positive relationship between PAL and presenteeism. This notion is also reflected by the mobilization perspective which suggests that negative events elicit disproportionately more cognitive attention than neutral or positive events (Taylor, 1991; Gilbreath & Karimi, 2012). We therefore suggest: *The negative relationship between TFL and presenteeism will be weaker than the positive relationship between PAL and presenteeism (Hypothesis 4).*

Culture and Presenteeism

The prevalence of presenteeism also depends on broader beliefs and values embedded in society which makes it necessary to investigate how culture is associated with presenteeism (Ferreira et al., 2019). Eurofound data, for example, show variation in the prevalence of presenteeism in different countries (Eurofound, 2015). It is likely to be proven that characteristics of countries might influence how work is defined and how work and family relate to each other. In the context of work-life balance, it was shown that "individualism influences the degree to which work and family roles are segregated (Schein, 1984; Triandis, 1989), power distance influences the degree of supervisory support for work-life balance (Lu et al., 2010) […] and uncertainty avoidance moderates the degree to which work-life conflict influences overall life satisfaction (Javidan & House 2001)" (Sirgy & Lee, 2018, p. 239). Masculinity, however, was suggested to influence competitiveness at work (Hofstede 1980). As competitiveness can be one driver of presenteeism (see Simpson, 1998), we specifically focused on this cultural dimension in the investigation of presenteeism. Nevertheless, only

few studies analyzed the influence of specific culture dimensions on presenteeism (Ruhle et al., 2019).

In detail, countries scoring high on masculinity are driven by achievement, competition and striving for success (e.g., Ruhle et al., 2019) as proven by various previous studies (Lu et al., 2013; Simpson, 1998). People in masculine societies are motivated by striving to be the best. Work prevails over family and the strong is admired (Hofstede, 2011). People in feminine societies (which is the opposite pole of masculinity) are motivated by striving to like what they do. Work and family are balanced and there is a sympathy for the weak (Hofstede, 2011). Thus, people in masculine societies "tend to devote more time to work and receive more incentives to stay long hours at work in highly competitive environments" (Ruhle et al., 2019, p. 356; see also Simpson, 1998). We therefore suggest: *Countries with higher masculine values have higher rates of presenteeism (Hypothesis 5).*

Building on this hypothesis that in countries with high masculine values presenteeism is more likely to occur, we investigated the prevalence of presenteeism in Germany, Ireland, both high on masculinity, and Spain and Latvia with lower level on masculinity.

Method

Sample

A sample of $N = 979$ workers in total completed the survey in 2018 (German sample $n = 334$; Spanish sample $n = 249$; Irish sample $n = 110$; Latvian sample $n = 286$; see Table 1 for more detail). With 34.1%, the majority of the participants answered the German version of the questionnaire. Mean age was 40.81 years ($SD = 13.17$), and with 60.6%, the majority of the sample was female. 26.1 % were in a supervisory position and 69.8% were subordinates. Most of the participants were working as full-time employees (65.1 %). Participants worked on average 34.95 hours per week ($SD = 12.76$), and average overtime per week was 4.24 hours ($SD = 7.19$). Absenteeism rates ranged from 2.1 (Ireland) to 8.3 (Spain) days over the last 12 months. This is below average when comparing it to data for EU13 member states for 2018, stating an average of 12.3 days within a range of 3.9 to 16.3 days per employee per year (WHO, 2021).

Procedure

We developed an assessment battery called 'IMPRESS Stress Survey' based on the well-established job-demands resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017), which included multiple validated scales for job demands, job resources, and several psychophysiological health outcomes. The translation process followed the recommended guidelines of scale adaptation by the International Test Commission (2017) and included forward and backward translation procedures by experts in the field of occupational psychology who were native speakers of the target languages. When conceptual differences were discovered, the target translation was adjusted to appropriately reflect the meaning of the source items. Discrepancies were then discussed, and further adjustments were carried out as many times

as needed until a satisfactory version was reached. National research experts from the IMPRESS-consortium performed a review of the final drafts of the local language questionnaires, for language adequacy, and general quality assessment.

Table 1
Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 979)

Characteristic	*n*	*%*
Country		
Germany	334	34.1
Spain	249	25.4
Ireland	110	11.2
Latvia	286	29.2
Gender		
Female	593	60.6
Male	351	35.9
Other	4	3.2
No information	31	0.4
Position		
Supervisor	256	26.1
Employee	683	69.8
No information	40	4.1
Work time		
Full time	637	65.1
Part time	177	18.1
No information	165	16.9

One partner of the project (IBK Management Solutions GmbH, located in Wiesbaden, Germany) developed the software and provided the platform for the survey.

As part of an alpha-testing phase of a multi-phase assessment development process, the sample was recruited with the snowballing method targeting the professional and private networks of all domestic project partners to reach representative sample sizes in all four study countries. Moreover, the link to the survey was distributed through mailing lists and panels of interested people and promoted on social media such as LinkedIn and Xing. The participants were given a comprehensive consent form including detailed information about the project and the anonymization of the data. The survey addressed people working in part-time or fulltime. All participants were notified about the voluntary nature of the study. It was indicated that by continuing to the online questionnaire link, they consented to participating in this survey.

Measurement

Passive-avoidant leadership. In the present survey, PAL was considered a job demand. The job demands-related items were introduced with the following question: "When I think about my work, to what degree do these aspects cause me stress?". Participants could then respond on a response scale ranging from 1 = *Aspect does not exist*, 2 = *Causes not at all stress*, 3 = *Causes very little stress*, 4 = *Causes to some degree stress*, to 5 = *Causes to a very great degree stress*. PAL was measured by using 4 items from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire MLQ 5X (Bass & Avolio, 1997). An example item is "supervisor avoids getting involved when important issues arise". Cronbach's alpha values in our study ranged between .92-.95.

    Transformational leadership. TFL was considered a job resource. Job resource-related items were introduced with the sentence "When I think about my work, to what degree do these aspects cause me relief?". Participant could respond on a response scale ranging from 1 = *not at all*, 2 = *very little*, 3 = *to some degree*, 4 = *to a great degree*, 5 = *to a very great degree*. TFL was measured by using 8 items from the Human System Audit Transformational Leadership short scale (HSA-TFL Short Scale; Berger & Antonioli, 2019; Berger et al., 2011, 2012). An example item is "My supervisor develops ways of motivating us". Cronbach's alpha values in our study ranged between .95-.98.

    Stress. Stress items in the survey were introduced with the following sentence: "Please indicate to what extent, in your opinion, the following statements apply." Response options ranged from 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *to a very great degree*. In this study, we applied a set of 10 items from different scales to measure the overall stress level of the study participants. This included a global item of stress (Elo et al., 2012) and several emotional-cognitive and physical stress-related symptoms, such as exhaustion, fatigue, irritation, and sleeping problems (Frese, 1985; Goldberg, 1972; Haslam & Reicher, 2006; Parker and DeCotiis, 1982). Exploratory factor analyses (principal axis factoring, promax rotation) revealed a one-factor structure of the construct in all country samples. Cronbach's alpha values in our study ranged between .88 and .94.

    Cultural masculinity. We assessed the cultural dimension of masculinity with the freely available online tool from Hofstede Insights (2021). The scale runs from 0 – 100, with 50 as a mid-level. A score under 50 is considered relatively low on that scale and if any score is over 50 the culture scores high on that scale. According to the official Hofstede Insights website, a "high score (Masculine) on this dimension indicates that the society will be driven by competition, achievement, and success, with success being defined by the winner / best in field – a value system that starts in school and continues throughout organizational life. A low score (Feminine) on the dimension means that the dominant values in society are caring for others and quality of life. A Feminine society is one where quality of life is the sign of success and standing out from the crowd is not admirable." (Hofstede Insights, 2021). The derived masculinity dimension scores per country are as follows: Germany = 66, Ireland = 68, Spain = 42, Latvia = 9.

Presenteeism. Presenteeism was measured with a single-item question as follows: "On how many days were you at work in the last 12 months even though you were sick?" (see Aronsson et al., 2000).

Analyses

Statistical analyses included mean comparisons and Spearman rank-correlational analyses. Cultural comparisons based on the Hofstede model were applied theoretically.

Table 2

Correlations between TFL, PAL, Stress, and Presenteeism in Four Countries (N = 979)

Country	Scale	TFL	PAL	Stress	Presenteeism
Germany	TFL	(.95)			
	PAL	-.45**	(.92)		
	Stress	-.29**	.38**	(.88)	
	Presenteeism	-.14*	.23**	.36**	-
Ireland	TFL	(.97)			
	PAL	-.21*	(.92)		
	Stress	-.30**	.35**	(.90)	
	Presenteeism	-.05	-.04	.30**	-
Spain	TFL	(.98)			
	PAL	-.34**	(.95)		
	Stress	-.39**	.35**	(.90)	
	Presenteeism	-.18**	.07	.31**	-
Latvia	TFL	(.96)			
	PAL	-.22**	(.95)		
	Stress	-.26**	.35**	(.94)	
	Presenteeism	-.11	.18**	.48**	-

Note. German sample n = 334; Spanish sample n = 249; Irish sample n = 110; Latvian sample n = 286. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). Values in diagonals in parenthesis show Cronbach's alphas of the respective country.

Results

The means, standard deviations and correlations of the variables studied are shown in Table 2 and Table 3. Hypothesis 1 was fully supported: In all countries, higher job stress was associated significantly with higher level of presenteeism, with correlation coefficients ranging between r = .30 (Ireland) and r = .48 (Latvia) (Table 2).

Hypotheses 2 and 3 were partially supported. The correlational analyses between leadership behaviors and presenteeism showed mixed results. Regarding Hypothesis 2, negative correlations between TFL and presenteeism were only significant in Germany (r = -.14) and Spain (r = -.18). Regarding Hypothesis 3, positive correlations between PAL and

presenteeism were only significant in Germany ($r = .23$) and Latvia ($r = .18$).

Table 3
Means, Standard Error of the Means, and Standard Deviation of the Four Samples

Country		Mean	SEM	SD	Hofstede masculinity score
Germany (N = 321)	TFL	2.99	0.06	1.07	
	PAL	2.45	0.06	1.16	66
	Stress	2.28	0.04	0.77	
	Presenteeism	4.15	0.66	11.99	
Ireland (N = 103)	TFL	3.13	0.10	1.08	
	PAL	2.16	0.11	1.11	68
	Stress	2.24	0.07	0.78	
	Presenteeism	3.93	0.67	6.91	
Spain (N = 203)	TFL	3.35	0.07	1.03	
	PAL	2.57	0.08	1.23	42
	Stress	2.20	0.05	0.75	
	Presenteeism	22.11	4.44	65.31	
Latvia (N = 268)	TFL	3.16	0.06	1.01	
	PAL	2.67	0.07	1.23	9
	Stress	2.32	0.06	0.94	
	Presenteeism	7.17	0.59	9.83	

Note. Regarding the Latvian masculinity score, which is – in comparison to the other values - strikingly low, Huettinger (2008, p. 370) explains that "[t]o evaluate the meaning of this dimension, it is necessary to have a close look on how the questions were formulated, which calculates the masculinity index. All four questions […] deal with values and perceptions at the workplace and in job–life. It is therefore doubtful, if differences in the framework of "Gender and Sex", "Family Norms" or "consumer behavior" can be explained with perceptions at the workplace. It could be possible that Baltic people score extremely masculine when it comes to gender equality or sexual harassment, but very feminine when it comes to work-life. This combination is a part of the Soviet heritage."

Hypothesis 4 was partially supported. Size comparisons of the correlation coefficients between TFL and presenteeism, and PAL and presenteeism respectively did not reveal higher values for the positive relationship between PAL and presenteeism than the negative relationship between TFL and presenteeism across all samples. This was only the case for Germany and Latvia, but not for Ireland (similar correlation coefficients) and Spain (higher correlation coefficients for the TFL-presenteeism relationship). Hypothesis 5 was not supported. Results displayed prevalence numbers of presenteeism between an average of 3.93 days in the Irish sample (Hofstede masculinity score = 68), 4.15 days in the German sample (Hofstede masculinity score = 66), 7.17 in the Latvian sample (Hofstede masculinity score = 9), to 22.11 days in the Spanish sample (Hofstede masculinity score = 42) over the last 12 months (Table 3).

Discussion

To consider contextual influences of leadership and culture on presenteeism, we investigated the relationship between TFL, PAL, stress, and presenteeism in four countries, varying on Hofstede's (e.g., 2021) masculinity dimension. Whereas stress was related with presenteeism across all four countries, results for the relationship between leadership and presenteeism were less consistent. In the German sample, TFL was negatively, and PAL was positively related to presenteeism, as predicted. In Ireland, no relationship between leadership and presenteeism could be shown. In Spain, the negative relationship between TFL and presenteeism was demonstrated, whereas in Latvia, the positive relationship between PAL and presenteeism was shown. We did not find consistent evidence for the bad to be stronger than good (see Baumeister et al., 2001). Moreover, in our sample, the masculinity hypothesis was not supported, although cross-cultural variation in presenteeism scores was observed.

Implications

The results add to current knowledge on the relationship between health conditions and presenteeism considering the role of stress, leadership, and the culture dimension 'masculinity'. In line with recent meta-analytic findings (Miraglia & Johns, 2016), the hypothesis that perceived psychophysiological stress is associated with presenteeism (Hypothesis 1) was supported across all four countries. Although general ill-health is a prerequisite for the phenomenon of presenteeism (i.e., working with ill-health), the relationship with perceived stress is of particular importance to understand the emergence of presenteeism: Calling in sick because of mental stress or psychological problems might be avoided because of the presence of self-stigma and social-stigma (Hinshaw, 2007). Indeed, current surveys by McKinsey show that even in times of the ongoing pandemic and mental health crisis, mental health stigma at work is still omnipresent yet lacks appropriate intervention actions (Coe et al., 2021).

The mixed results regarding leadership styles and presenteeism were somewhat surprising. It was theorized that attitudinal and behavioral aspects related to the social work climate play a large role when it comes to presenteeism (Johnson et al., 2021). In this vein, it was argued that leaders should act as role models when it comes to reframing taking time off from work as an act of responsible organizational citizenship rather than a lack of commitment or sign of weakness (Johnson et al., 2021). Contrary to previous research that investigated leadership and presenteeism mechanisms (e.g., Dietz & Scheel, 2017), we found only partial support for Hypotheses 2 and 3, arguing for further investigation of moderating and mediating mechanisms in the relationship. Although both positive and negative leadership in general have been shown to play a major role in occupational stress management (Reif et al., 2021), it has been suggested that a large amount of leadership's influence might indeed be exerted more indirectly through the leadership's prominent agent role in shaping the work environment, working climate and individual working attitudes (e.g., Schaufeli, 2015). Moreover, Halbesleben et al. (2014) proposed various presenteeism-

related strategies of employees to manage tensions in the relationship between them and their supervisor, suggesting complex processes. Following Hypothesis 1, mediating mechanisms linked to job stressors might be of particular concern here.

Regarding Hypothesis 2, the correlations between TFL and presenteeism ranging between -.05 and -.18 in our study are similar to findings for quality leadership presented in the meta-analysis by Miraglia and Johns (2016). In general, TFL tends to be associated with less presenteeism. However, whereas TFL might generally contribute to less stressful work environments, it might still be true that TFL comes with a self-sacrificing element that motivates employees to engage in presenteeism (Nielsen & Daniels, 2016). Conceptualizations of TFL tend to emphasize the element that leaders motivate their employees to go 'beyond expectations' (MacKenzie et al., 2001, p. 117), and research has shown that increased performance expectations indeed hampered important health-related off-work recovery processes (Syrek & Antoni, 2014). The nonsignificant correlations might be explained by this cannibalizing effect of self-sacrifice that would rather promote than deter presenteeism (see also Johnson et al., 2021). Eventually, more research for the clarification of the relationship between TFL and presenteeism is warranted.

Regarding Hypothesis 3, the correlations between PAL and presenteeism ranged between r = -.04 (Ireland) and r = .23 (Germany). These inconclusive findings contrast with previous research (Frooman et al., 2012), that argued that PAL motivates employees to come to work when ill. PAL may influence rather indirectly presenteeism, and more mediating mechanisms, particularly regarding job demands, are warranted (e.g., Dietz & Scheel, 2017). Also, maybe more actively pressuring supervisor behaviors related to come into work when employees feel unwell are closer linked to presenteeism (Ashby & Mahdon, 2010; Dietz & Scheel, 2017).

As hypothesis 4 was only partially confirmed we rather do not interpret the results by referring to the negativity bias (Baumeister et al., 2001). Contrary to previous research that found higher coefficient values for PAL on job demands and negative wellbeing outcomes than TFL (e.g., Berger et al., 2019), TFL was correlated stronger to stress and presenteeism in Spain than PAL.

Finally, and according to the yielded mixed findings of our study, the relationship between leadership and presenteeism seems to be more complex and might vary along with country cultures (Zwingmann et al., 2014). It seems that indirect mechanisms including job demands warrant more investigation (e.g., Dietz & Scheel, 2017; Halbesleben et al., 2014), and especially attitudinal aspect of the work climate seem to play a role for presenteeism (Johnson et al., 2021). However, our results question the influence of masculine values on presenteeism (see Hypothesis 5) and deviate from Ferreira et al.'s (2019) work which showed that Latin countries tended to have weaker presenteeism climates than non-Latin countries (see Ruhle et al., 2019).

Limitations and future research

Given that we focused on the cultural dimension of masculinity, future research should delve deeper into further cultural dimensions which might be linked to a country's presenteeism

culture. For example, in countries (and cultures) with higher levels of collectivism, employees might feel obligated not to let their group down and therefore go to work despite being ill to show solidarity. Moreover, in countries (and cultures) with high power distance employees should have a high degree of obedience and therefore, show higher levels of presenteeism. Research (see Grinyer & Singleton, 2000) has shown that 'due to fears of punitive action and a feeling that their colleagues would suffer if they themselves reported in sick, employees felt pressured to engage in presenteeism behaviours' (Nielsen & Daniels, 2016, p. 196). This inclusion of others (colleagues, public health) in the individual decision-process related to presenteeism behavior seems particularly important in the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, as presenteeism constitutes substantial transmission risk (Johnson et al., 2021).

The cross-sectional design deters us from inferring causal relationships. Future research should apply longitudinal designs to investigate and test sequential relationships between leadership, stress, and presenteeism (see Pohling et al., 2016), or reciprocal relationships between stress and presenteeism, which might also be plausible. For example, Oshio et al. (2017) showed longitudinally that stress predicted presenteeism, but presenteeism also predicted future stress. However, the latter effect size was reported considerably smaller than the previous one.

Future research on contextual antecedents of presenteeism should also control for further contextual variables, such as occupational sector, general absence policies (in countries and organizations) and average days of absence, employment situation and job (in)security, the personal financial situation or ease of replacement of employees (see Miraglia & Johns, 2016; Ruhle et al., 2019). Given the increasing presence of hybrid and mixed work arrangements and possibility of some kind of 'remote presenteeism' (working from home while ill; Johnson et al., 2021, p. 260), future research should also more clearly define which type of presenteeism is investigated. Perhaps, a potential dark side of TFL's influence on 'remote presenteeism' through self-sacrifice could be an interesting avenue for future investigations.

Comparing the average days of presenteeism reported in our samples with official data from larger samples (see Eurofound, 2015), we found deviating values, not only in terms of frequency but also regarding the rank of countries. This comparison might indicate that the representativeness of our sample could be limited.

Conclusion

Presenteeism is a prevalent phenomenon and closely linked to work-related stress. Although living in the midst of an ongoing and unprecedented pandemic, mental health issues are still stigmatized at work, and working while facing mental health concerns is common. This study tested the influence of positive and negative leadership on work-related stress and presenteeism in four European countries, because leaders shape attitudes and behaviors related to the decision-making processes regarding working while being sick. As the findings suggest, presenteeism does not depend on the degree of masculinity of the country, and leadership-presenteeism mechanisms might be more indirect and complex.

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