

# Sickness presence is an important warning signal

## – a Swedish questionnaire study



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### Conclusion

Persons with sickness presence see their job as important and demanding, and also report both physical and mental health problems as well as high sickness absence. As working life of today often requires great efforts, the

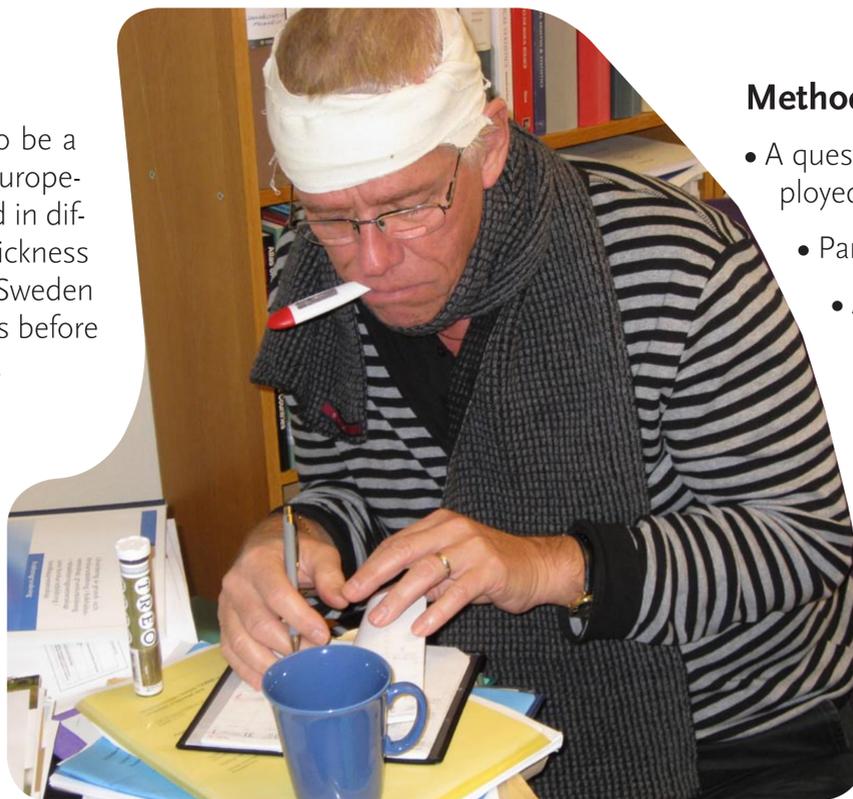
combination of sickness presence and sickness absence is alarming. Ambitious employees with bad health may cause themselves more severe health problems in the future. Further research is required to clarify the causality.

### Background

Sickness absence has appeared to be a common phenomenon in many European countries and has been studied in different workplaces. Research on sickness presence however, is sparse. In Sweden there is a qualifying day of sickness before sickness benefits may be claimed.

### Aim

In the light of a demand for learning how to address different health issues in the workplace, the purpose was to focus on what characterises persons with repeated episodes of sickness presence.



### Methods

- A questionnaire to 1080 individuals employed in a municipal administration.
- Participation rate 68.4% (739/1080).
- A logistic regression model was used to analyse the data.
- High sickness presence was the dependent variable.
- Various aspects of the workplace, spare time, behaviour and attitudes were included in the analyses.
- Odds Ratio (OR) was used as an outcome.

### Results

High sickness presence was reported by 55%. The variables in the table were found to be significantly ( $p < 0.05$ ) related to high sickness presence in a final logistic regression model.

**Table. Variables significantly related to high sickness presence**

	OR	95% CI
Sex: male	1,05	1,01 – 1,10
Work efforts (index): high	2,55	1,35 – 3,96
General work attitudes (index): positive	1,74	1,03 – 2,92
Sickness absence: $\geq 2$ days in a year	2,71	1,64 – 4,47
Symptoms: above the median	3,52	2,01 – 6,16
Sleep: not very satisfied	1,98	1,15 – 3,41
Self-rated health: not good	2,92	1,32 – 6,46

#### Definitions

\* High sickness presence is referred to here as going to work at least twice in a year yet not feeling healthy and judging sick leave was required.

\* Self-rated health is referred to here as the person's own evaluation of his/her global health on a five-graded scale. Good is defined as very good or rather good.