

Impact of divorce on absenteeism levels

Changes in marital status may be linked with consecutive data on absenteeism from the occupational health services in the Netherlands. According to a recent study by TNO Work and Employment, it appears that divorce has an impact on absenteeism levels among employees. After a certain period following the divorce, absenteeism among employees in this position declined to the level of absence among those employees who were already divorced at the start of the study.

About the study

Various publications from the United States of America (US) and Scandinavian countries point to a possible connection between divorce and absence from work. In 2007, [TNO Work and Employment](#) (TNO Arbeid) carried out a longitudinal study to examine whether such a link exists between divorce and absenteeism among employees in the Netherlands.

Municipal data from the Municipal Administration (Gemeentelijke Basis Administratie, [mGBA](#)) on marital status during the period 2002–2004 were combined with data on absenteeism from the occupational health services during the period 2002–2005. This resulted in a database of 2,873,364 employees, of whom 60,955 went through divorce proceedings in 2002, 2003 or 2004. Moreover, it was possible to link information on absence from work due to divorce in 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2005 with several other demographic variables, including marital status, sex, age of employee and youngest child, as well as gross salary and ethnicity.

Divorce and sickness absence

The study showed that absenteeism among employees increased in the year prior to divorce. However, absenteeism was highest in the year of an employee's divorce, decreasing again in the course of time after the divorce (Table 1).

Table 1: Rate of sickness absence before, during and after divorce (%)				
Group	Absenteeism 2002	Absenteeism 2003	Absenteeism 2004	Absenteeism 2005
Divorced in 2002 [N=20,350]	9.1%	7.3%	6.4%	6.8%
Divorced in 2003 [N=19,560]	7.7%	8.7%	6.8%	7.0%
Divorced in 2004 [N=21,045]	6.8%	7.5%	8.4%	7.5%
Already divorced before start of the study [N=169,476]	7.5%	7.1%	6.7%	7.5%
Already married before start of the study [N=1,426,026]	5.2%	4.9%	4.7%	5.2%

Total [N=2,868,206]	5.0%	4.9%	4.6%	5.0%
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Notes: *N* = number of employees.

Source: GBA data linked to absence registers from the occupational health services

Absence rates among men and women

With regard to gender, the increase in the rate of absenteeism was relatively equal among men and women during the course of the study. In terms of the entire group, the rate of absenteeism among both sexes increased in the year of divorce and decreased during the year after the divorce (Table 2).

Table 2: Rate of sickness absence and divorce, by sex (%)					
Group		Absenteeism 2002	Absenteeism 2003	Absenteeism 2004	Absenteeism 2005
Divorced in 2002	Men [N=10,525]	8.3%	6.4%	5.9%	6.4%
	Women [N=9,825]	9.9%	8.4%	7.0%	7.3%
Divorced in 2003	Men [N=10,335]	7.3%	7.6%	6.1%	6.3%
	Women [N=9,225]	8.2%	9.9%	7.7%	7.6%
Divorced in 2004	Men [N=11,439]	6.1%	6.9%	7.8%	7.0%
	Women [N=9,606]	7.7%	8.2%	9.0%	8.2%

Note: *N* = number of employees.

Source: GBA data linked to absence registers from the occupational health services

Impact of demographic variables

When considering the whole group, the level of sickness absence among women was higher than that among men. Regarding age, both older men and women showed higher rates of absenteeism. Additionally, lower gross salary and having a non-western ethnicity were associated with higher absenteeism rates.

By ranking the absence of employees according to a specific combination of characteristics, a list of the main cases of absenteeism among employees is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Highest absenteeism rates among divorced employees, by demographic variables

Rank	Group		Demographic characteristics	Absenteeism	Year of absence
1	Divorced in 2003	Women [N=1,670]	51–64 age group	12.5%	2003
2	Divorced in 2002	Women [N=1,818]	51–64 age group	12.3%	2002
3	Divorced in 2004	Women [N=1,748]	51–64 age group	11.5%	2004
4	Divorced in 2003	Women [N=722]	Salary €30,000–€40,000	11.2%	2003
5	Divorced in 2002	Women [N=817]	Non-western ethnic minority	11.1%	2002
6	Divorced in 2002	Women [N=3,278]	No children or youngest child aged 21 years or older	10.9%	2002
7	Divorced in 2003	Women [N=3,164]	No children or youngest child aged 21 years or older	10.8%	2003
8	Divorced in 2002	Women [N=1,994]	Children, youngest child aged 13–20 years	10.4%	2002
9	Divorced in 2003	Women [N=874]	Non-western ethnic minority	10.4%	2002
10	Divorced in 2003	Women [N=874]	Non-western ethnic minority	10.2%	2003

15	Divorced in 2002	Men [N=4,824]	Salary <€30,000	10.2%	2003

Note: N = number of employees.

Source: GBA linked to absence registers from the occupation health services

Table 3 shows that the top 10 groups with the highest absence rates were all female subgroups, nine of which were mostly absent from work in the year of divorce. Being of a higher age and of non-western ethnicity were factors associated with high absenteeism in the year of divorce. The study also reveals that women with an annual salary of €30,000 to €40,000 show a higher rate of absenteeism in the year of divorce than the other income groups which present a similar low level of absence (falling between rank 10 and 15). It is worth noting that an annual salary of €30,000 to €40,000 represents a relatively high income for women as about 80% of female workers earn less than this.

For one subgroup – namely, women of non-western ethnicity who were divorced in 2003 – absenteeism is higher in the year prior to divorce (10.4%) than in the year of divorce (10.2%). As Table 3 highlights, absenteeism among employed men could only be found in relation to ‘rank 15’ with 10.2% absenteeism among men due to divorce, concerning those earning an annual salary of less than €30,000.

Commentary

Divorce and absenteeism are connected; however, absence from work also depends on several other demographic characteristics, such as the presence of children in the home and a worker's income level. For some specific subgroups, particularly young female employees and/or employed women of non-western ethnicity, absenteeism was highest in the year before divorce.

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- **Country:** Netherlands
- **Language:** EN
- **Publication date:** 08-07-2008
- **Subject:** Absenteeism, Gender and work