The effect of part-time sick leave for employees with mental disorders

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Abstract

Previous studies find that part-time sick-listing it is an effective instrument for reducing sick leave durations for employees with musculoskeletal disorders and for sick-listed employees in general. This paper provides new evidence by studying whether the Danish part-time sick leave programme reduces the duration until employees with mental disorders end their sick leave by reporting ready for returning to regular working hours. The program allows fully sick-listed employees to resume work at reduced hours. When the sick-listed employee’s health improves, working hours are increased until the employee is able to work regular hours. We use combined survey and register data about 226 long-term sick-listed employees with mental disorders and 638 employees with physical. Our analyses show that part-time sick-listing significantly reduces the duration until returning to regular working hours for employees with physical disorders. In contrast, we find that part-time sick-listing does not reduce durations for employees with mental disorders. The analyses also illustrate the importance of adjusting for unobserved differences between part-time sick-listed and full-time sick-listed. Without such adjustment part-time sick-listing significantly reduces the duration until returning to regular working hours. When we adjust for unobserved characteristics this effect decreases, and for sick-listed employees with mental disorders the effect vanishes entirely. The lack of an effect for these employees suggests that employers and colleagues may be less supportive of and more reluctant towards employees with mental disorders than towards employees with physical disorders. Furthermore, mental disorders are often more diffuse and ‘invisible’ than physical disorders, possibly making accommodating a colleague with a mental disorder more difficult than a colleague suffering from physical disorders.

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