

Bibliometric Exploration of Sickness Presence Research: Global Trends, Emerging Themes, and Research Agenda

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Abstract

The phenomenon of employees' sickness presence at work has attracted growing scholarly and managerial attention, owing to its rising global prevalence and the evidence that the costs incurred from such behaviour often surpass those linked with absenteeism. However, to date, the literature lacks a holistic retrospection of this phenomenon. The present paper addresses this gap by examining prevailing patterns, knowledge underpinnings, and emerging thematic directions in the domain of sickness presence through a bibliometric analysis of documents from 1996 to 2025. A corpus of 428 unique research papers retrieved from the Scopus database, meeting the inclusion criteria, has been analysed using VOSviewer software and the bibliometrix package implemented in the R statistical environment. Bibliometric procedures applied in this study include performance assessment (drawing on publication and citation indicators), science mapping approaches (bibliographic coupling, co-citation analysis, and thematic map), and network analysis. The study found that sickness presence, as a field of research, has been gaining increasing attention since its inception in 1996, especially in the last decade. The most prolific and impactful scientific actors—i.e. authors, institutions, countries, documents, and sources—are discussed. The study also highlights key knowledge foundations and current themes in this domain. Moreover, a few unexplored sub-themes specific to sickness presence research that require immediate attention from the researchers and stakeholders are listed.

Keywords: Sickness Presence, Presenteeism, Working While Ill, Working While Sick, Bibliometric Analysis, VOSviewer, Bibliometrix

1. Introduction

Sickness presence, also known as presenteeism, denotes the behaviour of employees working despite experiencing health problems (Ruhle et al., 2020), and it has been increasingly gaining the attention of practitioners and academics around the world. Studies at the global level have reported high prevalence of this behaviour among employees ranging from 33% to 94% (Aronsson & Gustafsson, 2005; Deloitte, 2022; Kinman & Wray, 2018; Shan et al., 2021; Raja, 2024). This high prevalence, in conjunction with claims that its effective management can provide organisations with a competitive advantage (Hemp, 2012), has resulted in growth in research investigating this phenomenon. Thus, to provide a holistic retrospection of this phenomenon, the following research questions (RQs) are dealt with in this study:

RQ1. What are the global publication trends in the sickness presence domain?

RQ2. Who are the most prolific and influential scientific actors (i.e., authors, institutions, countries, documents, and sources) in the sickness presence domain?

RQ3. What are the fundamental knowledge structures in the field of sickness presence?

RQ4. What are the prominent and emerging themes in the research on sickness presence?

RQ5. What are the directions for further study in the domain of sickness presence?

Given the importance and increasing volume of scholarly activity in this domain, a bibliometric review has been conducted to provide a retrospective and holistic comprehension of the extant corpus of existing research in this area of study and to answer the aforementioned RQs. Through the bibliometric methodology, publication trends, prolific and impactful research constituents (authors, affiliations, countries, documents, and journals), seminal knowledge foundations, most pertinent thematic clusters, and future research avenues are identified and discussed. The study aims to motivate and guide readers and researchers to focus on the most important subdomains, thereby expanding the understanding of the domain of sickness presence.

2. Research Methodology

Bibliometric analysis is concerned with the rigorous evaluation and interpretation of bibliographic data, i.e., the information used for identification, retrieval, and understanding of published documents (Donthu et al., 2021; Pritchard, 1969). Bibliometric methodology is considered an appropriate review approach when the objective is to synthesise a large quantity of scientific literature to trace the evolution, intellectual foundations, and emerging areas of research in a specific domain (Donthu et al., 2021). Lately, the bibliometric methodology has gained increasing prominence in business management (Donthu et al., 2020; Donthu et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2021), organisational behaviour, and human resource management research (Kim et al., 2024), mainly due to its capacity to process a large volume of scientific work and generate high-impact insights (Donthu et al., 2021). It is an objective method that relies on quantitative techniques to summarise the extant literature and outline the conceptual framework of a domain. The bibliometric procedure encompasses the definition of appropriate search terms, the collection of data, and the selection of analysis techniques.

2.1. Search Terms

As the concept of sickness presence is the nascent stage of development, there is little consensus on terminology, and various synonyms for it are used in the existing literature. The keywords applied for the extraction of records from the Scopus database are displayed in Table 1. The keywords were derived from a preliminary review of pertinent research papers in the field of sickness presence. Various synonyms of ‘sickness presence’, such as ‘presenteeism’, ‘working while sick’, ‘working while ill’, ‘going to work sick’, ‘going to work ill’, and ‘sick at work’, were used. Since the Scopus database retrieves information from both British and American English texts regardless of the spelling convention used, only the American English spelling convention was used for the search terms, as the majority of publications in this field adhere to this convention.

2.2. Data Collection

The data corpus for the study was extracted from the Scopus scientific database, the largest repository of social science research documents, which includes a substantial number of peer-reviewed documents from top-tier journals (Groff et al., 2020). Table 1 outlines the methodological techniques for arriving at the 428 documents selected for this study. The keywords “sickness presence” OR “presenteeism” OR “working

while sick” OR “working while ill” OR “going to work sick” OR “going to work ill” OR “sick at work” were used to extract records published in the English language in the subject areas of Business, Management and Accounting, Social Sciences, Nursing, Psychology, Economics, Econometrics and Finance, and Decision Sciences. The records were extracted from the Scopus database through the following search string:

TITLE-ABS-KEY (“sickness presence” OR “presenteeism” OR "working while sick" OR "working while ill" OR "going to work sick" OR "going to work ill" OR "sick at work" AND NOT "virtual reality" AND NOT "VR") AND PUBYEAR > 1995 AND PUBYEAR < 2026 AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "SOCI") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "PSYC") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "BUSI") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "NURS") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "DECI") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "ECON")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ar") OR LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "re") OR LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ch") OR LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "cp")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SRCTYPE , "j") OR LIMIT-TO (SRCTYPE , "p") OR LIMIT-TO (SRCTYPE , "k")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "English"))

The data were cleaned prior to analysis, as data extracted from Scopus or similar databases are prone to inaccuracies, such as incorrect or missing bibliographic information (Donthu et al., 2021). Duplicate documents and documents with missing authors’ information were excluded. The PRISMA flow chart for identification and selection of records is depicted in Figure 1.

2.3. Analysis Techniques

Bibliometric analysis—application of quantitative techniques to bibliographic data (Pritchard, 1969)—facilitates the uncovering of emerging trends in publications, collaboration patterns, performance of research constituents, and intellectual structure of a domain of knowledge (Donthu et al., 2021). Performance analysis has been employed for identifying the publication activities of scientific actors (researchers, countries, institutions, documents, and sources), and science mapping techniques of co-citation analysis and bibliographic coupling have been used for identifying the thematic structure of the domain. These analyses have been conducted through VOSviewer and the R-based Bibliometrix tool (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017).

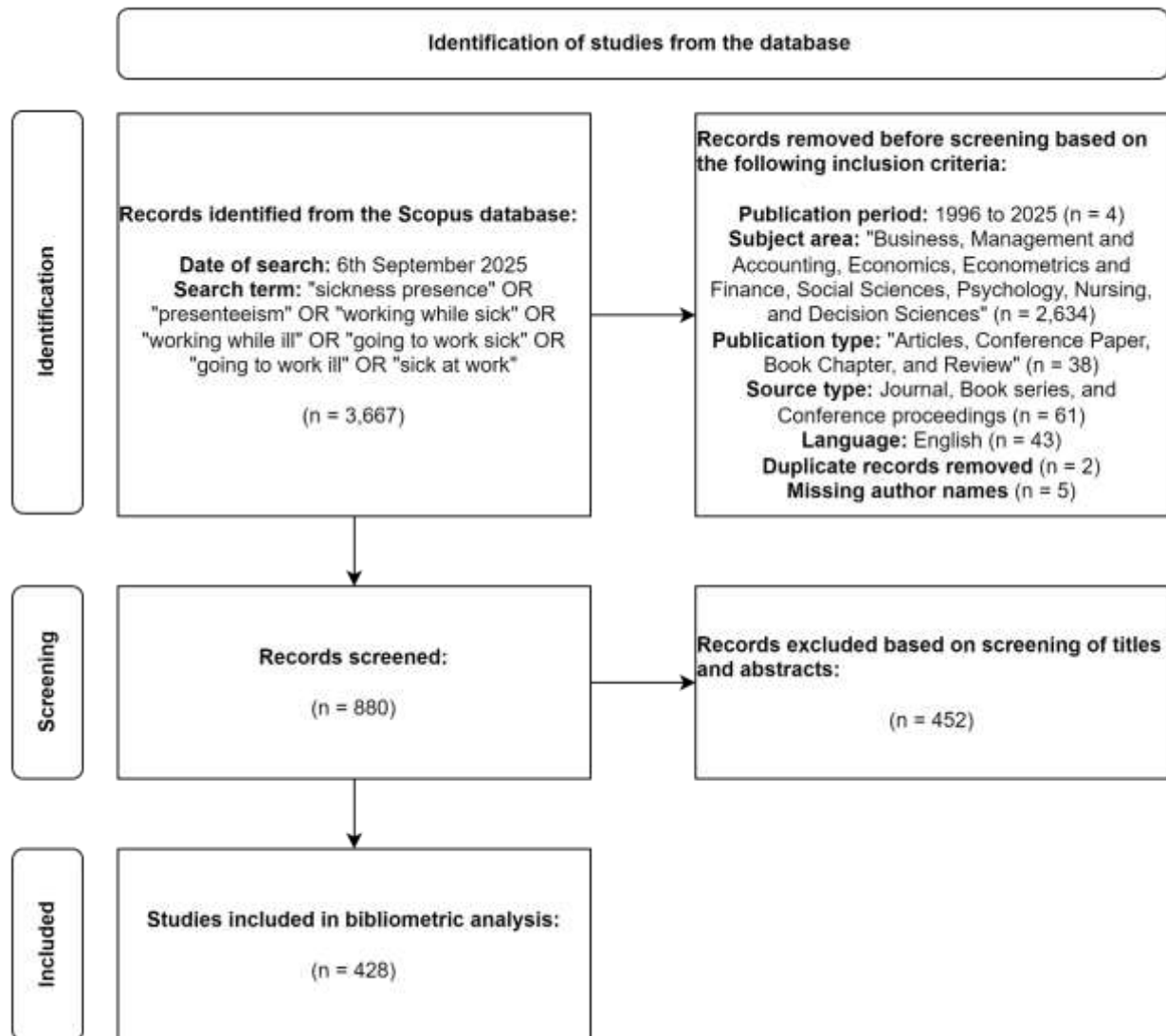
Table 1. Criteria for search and selection of records

Inclusion criteria	Eliminated	Accepted
Database: Scopus		
Date: September 6, 2025		
Search terms: “sickness presence” OR “presenteeism” OR "working while sick" OR "working while ill" OR "going to work sick" OR "going to work ill" OR "sick at work"		3,667
Period of Publication: 1996 to 2025	4	3,663
Subject areas: Business, Management and Accounting, Economics, Econometrics and Finance, Social Sciences, Psychology, Nursing, and Decision Sciences	2,634	1,029
Publication type: Articles, Conference Papers, Book Chapters, and Reviews	38	991
Source type: Journals, Book series, and Conference proceedings	61	930
Language screening: Records published in the English language only	43	887
Duplicate titles	2	885
Missing author names	5	880

Inclusion criteria	Eliminated	Accepted
Screening of titles and abstracts	452	428

Source: Created by the authors

Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram for identification and filtration of records



Source: Created by the authors

3. Findings

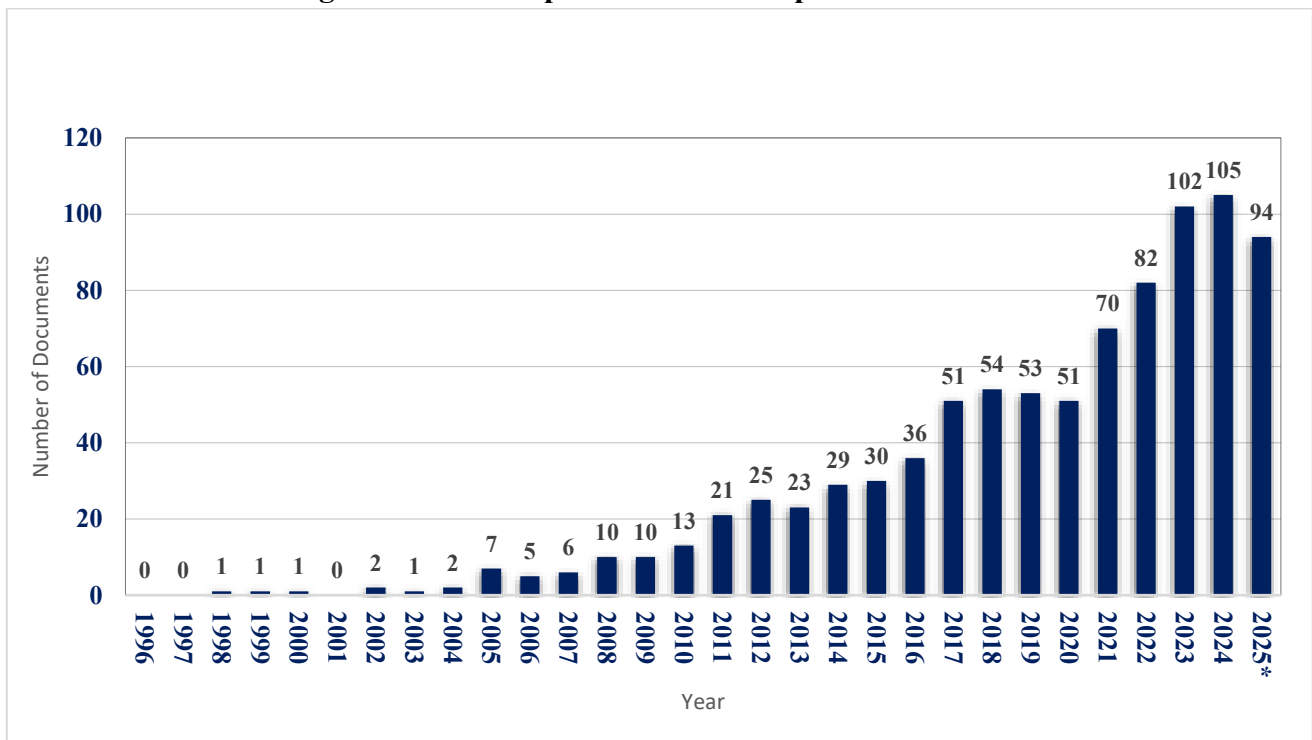
3.1. Performance Analysis

Performance analysis evaluates the activities and impact of scientific actors—such as scholars, organisations, nations, documents, and sources—in a given field (Cobo et al., 2011; Donthu et al., 2020). Performance analysis measures, such as metrics linked to publications and citations, are employed in this study.

3.1.1. Publication Trend

The global trend of publications on sickness presence research from 1996 to September 6, 2025, is depicted in Figure 2. Since the conceptualisation of this construct by Cooper in 1996, the field has witnessed a consistent increase in scholarly output, with annual publications reaching triple-digit numbers starting from 2023. With 105 publications, 2024 saw the most research output, marginally surpassing that of its immediately preceding year. However, 2025 is projected to emerge as the most productive year, having reached 94 publications as of September 6, 2025. This trend further suggests that scholarly output in this field will likely continue to grow in the forthcoming years.

Figure 2. Sickness presence research publication trend



Note: *Till September 6, 2025

Source: Created by the authors

3.1.2. Influential Scientific Actors

The most influential as well as prolific researchers, organisations, and nations in the field of sickness presence research are shown in Table 2. Cooper, C. L. is the most impactful researcher with 481 citations across 8 publications, followed by Lu, L. with 437 citations across 9 publications, and Ferreira, A. I. with 421 citations across 9 publications. The most influential institution is Nottingham Trent University, United Kingdom with 553 citations across 7 publications, followed by the University of East Anglia, United Kingdom with 380 citations across 7 publications, and National Taiwan University, Taiwan with 371 citations across 7 publications. Similarly, the most impactful nation is the United Kingdom (U.K.) with 3,440 citations across 63 publications, followed by Canada with 2,689 citations across 30 publications, and the United States with 2,350 citations across 71 publications. Moreover, Lu, L. and Ferreira, A. I. are the most prolific authors, and the United States of America (U.S.A.) is the most prolific nation with 71 publications.

Table 2. Most influential and productive researchers, organisations, and nations

TC	Researcher	TP	TC	Organisation	TP	TC	Nation	TP
481	Cooper, Cary L.	8	553	Nottingham Trent University, United Kingdom	7	3440	United Kingdom	63
437	Lu, Luo	9	380	University of East Anglia, United Kingdom	7	2689	Canada	30
421	Ferreira, Aristides I.	9	371	National Taiwan University, Taiwan	7	2350	United States	71
348	Martinez, Luis F.	6	358	Lancaster University, United Kingdom	2	974	Germany	32
297	Rainbow, Jessica G.	8	191	Laval University, Canada	2	903	Denmark	11
262	Habermann, Wolfgang	4	145	Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, Germany	2	871	Australia	29
262	Lohaus, Daniela	4	138	University Of Arizona, United States	2	685	Portugal	18
240	Biron, Caroline	5	134	Aarhus University, Denmark	2	629	China	57
236	Karanika-Murray, Maria	4	112	University of Tours, France	2	597	Netherlands	12
164	Steege, Linsey M.	4	98	Henan University, China	4	506	Taiwan	14
146	Li, Yongxin	7	89	Cornell University, United States	2	354	Sweden	13
146	Wang, Shengnan	6	89	ETH Zurich, Switzerland	2	352	Switzerland	11
129	Guo, Shujie	5	81	Tokyo Medical University, Japan	2	281	Japan	22
124	Inoue, Takeshi	5	71	University Of Barcelona, Spain	2	248	Spain	16
124	Shimura, Akiyoshi	5	65	Sejong University, South Korea	2	241	South Korea	23
116	Lauzier, Martin	4	63	Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Portugal	2	228	Brazil	18
86	Shan, Geyan	6	59	University of Oviedo, Spain	2	177	Pakistan	9
86	Wang, Wei	6	58	Stockholm University, Sweden	2	173	Norway	10

TC	Researcher	TP	TC	Organisation	TP	TC	Nation	TP
52	Min, Ari	6	55	Karolinska Institute, Sweden	2	163	Turkey	17
47	Fujimura, Yota	4	49	The University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom	2	80	Malaysia	12

Note: TC = Total number of citations, TP = Total number of documents published

Source: Created by the authors

3.1.3. Impactful Journals

Table 3 depicts the most impactful sources for the research on sickness presence. The most impactful source in this research domain is *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* with 1,069 citations and 9 publications. The most prolific journal is *Frontiers in Psychology* with 24 documents, followed by *BMC Nursing* with 16 publications. *Journal of Organisational Behaviour*, with 971 citations and 7 publications, is the most influential and productive journal in the business, management and accounting domain. The time period of 2011-2015 is the most productive for the most impactful journal, whereas 2021-25 is the most productive for the most impactful journal in the domain of business, management and accounting.

Table 3. Most impactful sources for sickness presence research

Journal	TC	TP	Business Mgt.	1996 to 2000	2001 to 2005	2006 to 2010	2011 to 2015	2016 to 2020	2021 to 2025
Journal of Occupational Health Psychology	1069	9					4	3	2
Journal of Organizational Behavior	971	7	X			1			6
Social Science and Medicine	940	7				2	3	1	1
Frontiers in Psychology	475	24						2	22
Journal of Affective Disorders	364	6				1	2	1	2
Work and Stress	251	5					2	3	
International Journal of Stress Management	236	4					1	2	1
European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology	190	5	X				1	1	3
Journal of Nursing Management	177	8						2	6
International Journal of Human Resource Management	165	4	X				2	1	1
International Journal of Hospitality Management	126	4	X			1		2	1
International Journal of Occupational Safety and Ergonomics	119	7					1	3	3

Journal	TC	TP	Business Mgt.	1996 to 2000	2001 to 2005	2006 to 2010	2011 to 2015	2016 to 2020	2021 to 2025
Revista Latino-Americana de Enfermagem	108	6					2	2	2
International Journal of Nursing Practice	96	4					1	1	2
Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology	96	5	X				1		4
Journal of Nursing Administration	84	5			1				4
International Nursing Review	81	5						2	3
Current Psychology	76	6							6
Journal of Workplace Behavioral Health	75	4				1	1	1	1
BMC Nursing	73	16							16

Note: TC = Total number of citations, TP = Total number of documents published, Business Mgt. = X if a source is categorised as business, management and accounting as per the Scopus database

Source: Created by the authors

3.1.4. Impactful Articles

Publications with the highest impact and citations in the field of sickness presence research are displayed in Table 4. With 876 citations, the article *“Presenteeism in the workplace: A review and research agenda”* by Johns (2010, p. 1) is the most impactful in this field of study. Johns (2010) conducted the first systematic literature review in this domain, paving the way for future research by clarifying issues pertaining to the definition and measurement of the construct. The second most influential article—with 564 citations—is *“Presenteeism: At work - But out of it”* by Hemp (2004, p. 1), followed by *“Going ill to work - What personal circumstances, attitudes and work-related factors are associated with sickness presenteeism?”* by Demerouti et al. (2009, p. 1) with 402 citations.

Table 4. Most impactful publication on sickness presence

Author(s)	Document Title	TC
Johns (2010)	“Presenteeism in the workplace: A review and research agenda”	876
Hemp (2004)	“Presenteeism: At work - But out of it”	564
Demerouti et al. (2009)	“Present but sick: A three-wave study on job demands, presenteeism and burnout”	402
Hansen and Andersen (2008)	“Going ill to work - What personal circumstances, attitudes and work-related factors are associated with sickness presenteeism?”	374
Miraglia and Johns (2016)	“Going to work Ill: A meta-analysis of the correlates of presenteeism and a dual-path model”	350
Evans-Lacko and Knapp (2016)	“Global patterns of workplace productivity for people with depression: absenteeism and presenteeism costs across eight diverse countries”	286

Author(s)	Document Title	TC
Caverley et al. (2007)	“Sickness presenteeism, sickness absenteeism, and health following restructuring in a public service organisation”	273
Dew et al. (2005)	“‘Choosing’ to work when sick: Workplace presenteeism”	246
Johns (2011)	“Attendance Dynamics at Work: The Antecedents and Correlates of Presenteeism, Absenteeism, and Productivity Loss”	230
Lohaus and Habermann (2019)	“Presenteeism: A review and research directions”	220
Letvak et al. (2012)	“Nurses' presenteeism and its effects on self-reported quality of care and costs”	212
Simpson (1998)	“Presenteeism, power and organisational change: Long hours as a career barrier and the impact on the working lives of women managers”	198
Skagen and Collins (2016)	“The consequences of sickness presenteeism on health and wellbeing over time: A systematic review”	186
Gosselin et al. (2013)	“Presenteeism and absenteeism: Differentiated understanding of related phenomena”	185
Sanderson et al. (2007)	“Which presenteeism measures are more sensitive to depression and anxiety?”	143
Ruhle et al. (2020)	“To work, or not to work, that is the question—Recent trends and avenues for research on presenteeism”	133
Karanika-Murray and Biron (2020)	“The health-performance framework of presenteeism: Towards understanding an adaptive behaviour”	127
Baker-McClellan (2010)	“Absence management and presenteeism: The pressures on employees to attend work and the impact of attendance on performance”	120
Lu et al. (2013)	“Unhealthy and present: Motives and consequences of the act of presenteeism among Taiwanese employees”	110
Côté et al. (2021)	“The relationship between presenteeism and job satisfaction: A mediated moderation model using work engagement and perceived organisational support”	106

Note(s): TC = Total number of citations

Source: Created by the authors

3.1.5. Top References for Sickness Presence Research

The top references for articles on sickness presence based on local citations (LC) and global citations (GC) are shown in Table 5. LC refers to the number of citations that a publication receives exclusively from articles in the review corpus, and GC refers to the total citations that an article receives without any filtration. While documents with high GC show significance across disciplines, those with high LC show significance within the discipline, whereas publications with high GC indicate impact and influence across disciplines. The article “*Presenteeism in the workplace: A review and research agenda*” by Johns (2010, p. 1) has the highest LC of 215 (24.54%), indicating high impact within this field of study, while its high GC of 876 suggests high impact across disciplines as well.

Table 5. Top references for sickness presence research

Document	DOI	LC	GC	LC/GC ratio (%)	Normalised	
					LC	GC
Johns (2010)	10.1002/job.630	215	876	24.54	4.10	4.22
Demerouti (2009)	10.1108/13620430910933574	120	402	29.85	2.93	2.84
Miraglia and Johns (2016)	10.1037/ocp0000015	114	350	32.57	7.34	5.68
Hemp (2004)	N/A	108	564	19.15	1.89	1.76
Hansen (2008)	10.1016/j.socscimed.2008.05.022	102	374	27.27	3.52	3.28
Lohaus and Habermann (2019)	10.1016/j.hrmr.2018.02.010	92	220	41.82	8.65	4.38
Caverley (2007)	10.1111/j.1467-6486.2007.00690.x	81	273	29.67	2.11	1.64
Johns (2011)	10.1037/a0025153	78	230	33.91	5.53	4.28
Dew et al. (2005)	10.1016/j.socscimed.2004.10.022	67	246	27.24	2.73	2.47
Karanika-Murray and Biron (2020)	10.1177/0018726719827081	55	127	43.31	6.81	3.57

Note(s): LC = Number of local citations, GC = Number of global citations

Source: Bibliometrix package in R

3.2. Science Mapping

Science mapping evaluates the relationship among scientific actors to unearth the social connections and intellectual structure (Cobo et al., 2011; Donthu et al., 2021). Co-citation analysis, bibliographic coupling, co-occurrence analysis, and thematic map techniques of science mapping are employed in this study.

3.2.1. Knowledge Foundations through Co-Citation Analysis

The co-citation network depicted in Figure 3 provides a structured view of the intellectual foundations of the sickness presence research domain. The nodes represent cited references, whereas the weight of citations is represented by the size of each node. The frequency with which two documents are cited together is indicated by the linkages between nodes, and the colours correspond to clusters identified by VOSviewer. The network reveals four dominant clusters: Cluster 1 (Red) – Foundational Studies, Cluster 2 (Green) – Conceptual and Measurement Development, Cluster 3 (Blue) – Reviews and Integrative Frameworks, and Cluster 4 (Yellow) – Contemporary Applied Contexts. These clusters are discussed in detail in the subsequent sections.

Cluster 1 (Red): Foundational Studies

This cluster includes seminal works such as Johns (2010), Aronsson and Gustafsson (2000, 2005), and Demerouti et al. (2009). These studies focus on the prevalence rates of the phenomenon and link it with job demands, burnout, and attendance pressure. Together, they form the core intellectual base of the sickness presence research.

Cluster 2 (Green): Conceptual and Measurement Development

Studies on measurement tools and frameworks anchor this cluster, notably the Stanford Presenteeism Scale (Koopman et al., 2002), attendance dynamics (Johns, 2011), and reviews of instruments for measuring

workplace productivity loss (Lofland et al., 2004). It highlights methodological contributions that enabled systematic assessment of sickness presence and its correlates.

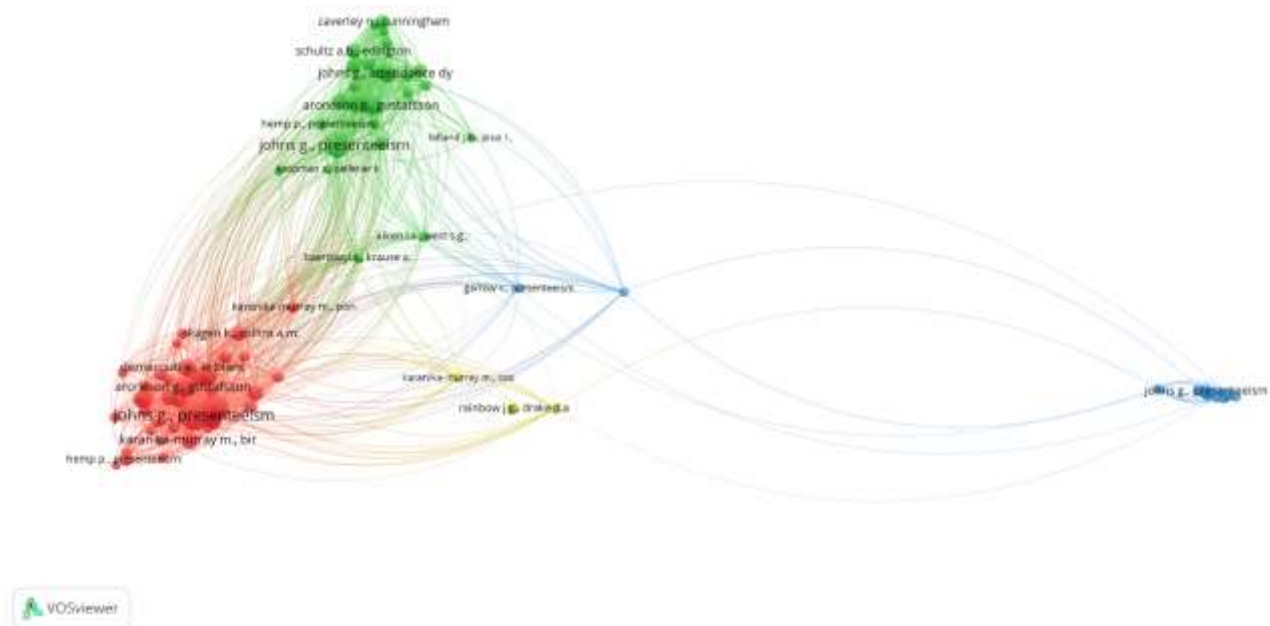
Cluster 3 (Blue): Reviews and Integrative Frameworks

Works such as Lohaus and Habermann (2019), along with systematic reviews by Miraglia and Johns (2016), synthesise prior research and identify theoretical gaps. This cluster connects earlier empirical traditions with recent efforts to consolidate sickness presence as a distinct research domain.

Cluster 4 (Yellow): Contemporary Applied Contexts

Emerging contributions, including Rainbow and Drake (2020) on nursing and patient safety, and Karanika-Murray and Biron (2020) on the framework for health and performance, expand sickness presence research into healthcare and applied organisational contexts. This cluster suggests a shift towards practical applications and industry-specific studies.

Figure 3. Co-citation analysis



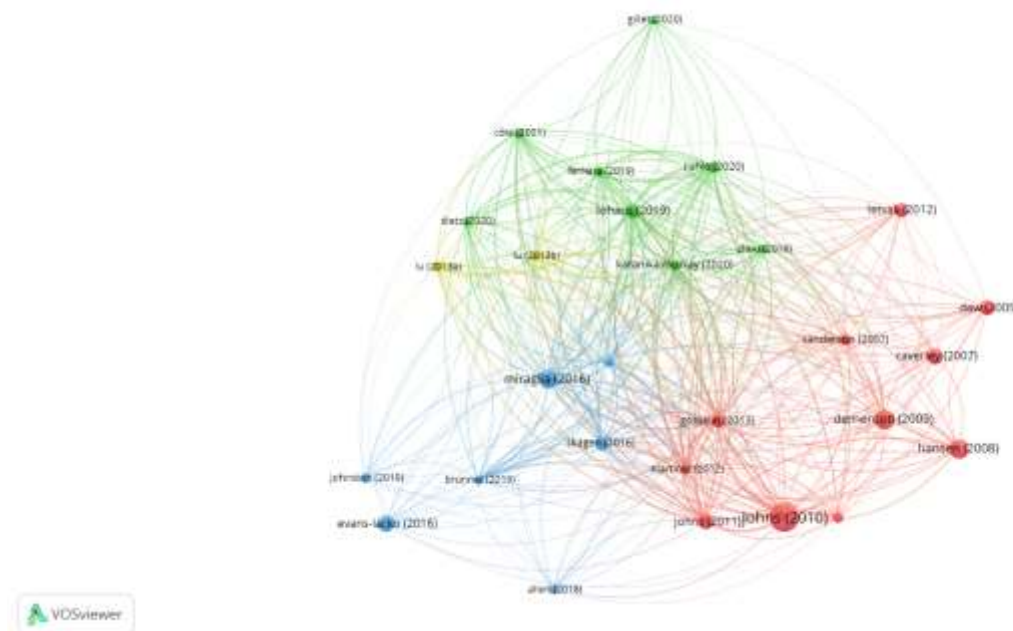
Source: VOSviewer

3.2.2. Contemporary Themes through Bibliographic Coupling

The bibliographic coupling network depicted in Figure 4 represents the present thematic clusters in the domain of sickness presence research. Bibliographic coupling is predicated on the logic that the publications which have more references in common are similar to each other (Donthu et al., 2021). Each node represents a publication, and the edges (links) represent the degree of overlap in the references of two publications. The closer and more strongly connected the nodes, the more similar their bibliographic foundations. Node size reflects citation strength or link strength, while colours (clusters) indicate thematic groupings. Four main clusters can be observed: Cluster 1 (Red) – Foundational and conceptual frameworks, Cluster 2 (Green) – Contemporary reviews and integrative models, Cluster 3 (Blue) – Health

and wellbeing perspectives, and Cluster 4 (Yellow) – Cross-cultural and comparative studies. The following paragraphs discuss these clusters in detail.

Figure 4. Thematic clusters of sickness presence research through bibliographic coupling



Source: VOSviewer

Cluster 1 (Red): Foundational and conceptual frameworks

These are seminal works that laid the theoretical groundwork for the sickness presence research, addressing definitions, antecedents, and early conceptualisation. Key nodes comprise Johns (2010, 2011), Demerouti (2009), Hansen (2008), and Dew (2005), with Johns' reviews (2010, 2011) acting as intellectual anchors.

Cluster 2 (Green): Contemporary reviews and integrative models

This cluster reflects the evolution of sickness presence into a multidisciplinary research stream, with a focus on integrated frameworks, leadership, and human resource management (HRM) applications. It includes recent literature reviews (Ruhle, 2020), theoretical frameworks (Karanika-Murray, 2020), and studies linking sickness presence with job satisfaction, organisational support, and leadership.

Cluster 3 (Blue): Health and wellbeing perspectives

This cluster emphasises the psychological and health-related consequences of working while ill, with cross-national and longitudinal perspectives. It focuses on mental health, depression, wellbeing, and the health economics of sickness presence, with Miraglia & Johns' (2016) meta-analysis acting as the central node.

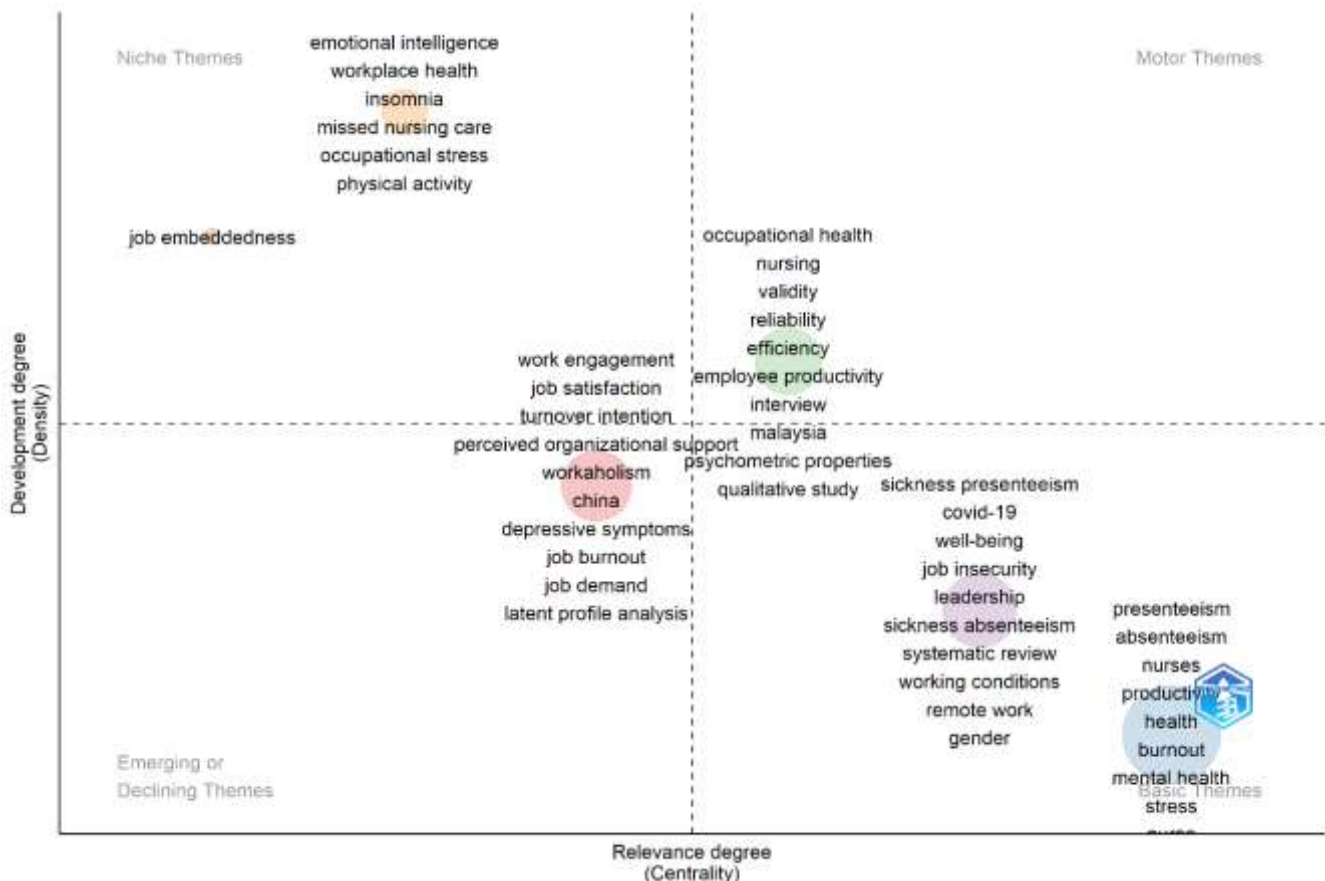
Cluster 4 (Yellow): Cross-cultural and comparative studies

This cluster represents the contextual and cultural diversity in sickness presence studies, expanding the phenomenon beyond Western-centric frameworks. It has strong links with East Asian and European perspectives.

3.2.3. Thematic Map

The thematic map of sickness presence research themes is shown in Figure 5. The thematic map categorises the themes along two dimensions: Centrality, i.e. degree of relevance, shown on the X-axis, represents the importance or influence of the theme in the overall domain, and density, i.e. degree of development, shown on the Y-axis, represents the internal development and cohesiveness of the theme. The ‘Motor Themes’ section at top-right denotes themes which are both thoroughly researched and essential to the field, and, thus, are crucial for shaping theory and practice. It includes themes such as occupational health. The ‘Niche Themes’ section in the top-left represents topics which are extensively researched but isolated from the mainstream, such as job embeddedness and workplace health. The bottom-left section ‘Emerging or Declining Themes’ depicts the themes which may be underexplored or losing momentum in sickness presence research, such as perceived organisational support, workaholism, burnout, job demands, etc. The bottom-right ‘Basic Themes’ quadrant shows themes that are central but underdeveloped. These themes, such as sickness presenteeism, sickness absenteeism, the COVID-19 pandemic, nursing, mental health, and stress, are essential building blocks of sickness presence research but need more theoretical and empirical development.

Figure 5. Thematic map of sickness presence research



Source: Bibliometrix package in R

4. Future Research Agenda

The directions for future research in the area of sickness presence research, as inferred from bibliometric

patterns, can be categorised into five key areas: advancing conceptual frameworks and theories, health and psychological dimensions, measurement and methodological improvements, leadership, HRM practices, and organisational culture, as well as cross-cultural, sectoral, and contextual expansions.

Advancing Conceptual Frameworks and Theories: Further theoretical integration is needed, particularly linking sickness presence to work engagement, resilience, and recovery theories, as well as distinguishing between the functional and dysfunctional aspects of the phenomenon. Comparative testing of models across contexts can establish theoretical robustness.

Health and Psychological Dimensions: Research should examine how leadership role modelling, flexible work arrangements, and health-oriented HRM practices influence sickness presence. The role of organisational culture and presenteeism climate should also be more rigorously tested.

Measurement and Methodological Improvements: Validated and standardised measures of sickness presence should be developed to enhance comparability across studies. Such measures should combine self-reports, objective health/productivity data, and digital monitoring. More multi-level, mixed-method, and longitudinal approaches are needed to capture both individual and organisational effects.

Cross-Cultural, Sectoral, and Contextual Expansions: Future research should explore cultural variations, industry-specific dynamics (e.g., healthcare, education, gig economy), and crisis contexts (such as pandemics or economic downturns). Comparative studies between developed and developing economies will deepen understanding of structural and cultural influences.

Policy and Societal-Level Implications: There is a pressing need to integrate sickness presence into public health, labour policy, and social insurance debates. Future work should evaluate cost–benefit analyses of interventions (e.g., workplace wellness, flexible sick leave policies) and their broader socio-economic outcomes.

5. Conclusion

The present study has mapped the pattern of global research, influential constituents, and thematic developments in the domain of sickness presence research. Data from the Scopus database have been analysed using various bibliometric approaches of performance analysis and science mapping. The evolution of the domain sickness presence across different time periods is highlighted, offering insights into the thematic progression and key areas of scholarly focus. It also outlines future research directions that scholars can explore to inform advancements in the research domain. In doing so, this study enhances understanding of the field's development, highlights emerging themes, and proposes avenues for future inquiry.

The review carries several significant implications for practitioners and researchers. It equips them with a one-stop source for an overview of the field by providing details of prominent and influential contributors, key knowledge foundations, and current themes. Moreover, by identifying knowledge gaps in the field of sickness presence, this study shall assist them in deriving fresh ideas for future research studies and positioning their studies towards the advancement of the field.

However, the scope of this study is restricted to the Scopus database. Future studies may integrate data from multiple databases to expand the scope of the reviews, as many high-impact publications are indexed exclusively in different databases. Additionally, future studies may combine systematic literature reviews (SLR) with bibliometric methodology to gain comprehensive insights into the field of study.

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