

Risk factors of work absence in mental health claims

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Background

Mental health claims (MHC) account for a small proportion of all work-related claims in Western Australia but are disproportionately associated with prolonged work absence and high costs. The longer people are off work, the less likely they are to return to work and the higher the risk of poor health and wellbeing.

Objective

The objective of this study was to examine the factors associated with mental health claims and establish if there are differences in the factors associated with short duration work absence versus long duration work absence; and to explore the factors associated with claims that settle prematurely versus claims that do not.

Methods

This study was a retrospective cohort study of worker's compensation data in Western Australia from 2005 to 2015. Potential associations were analysed using chi-squared test of independence between sociodemographic, disease- and employment- related factors and long-term work absence (> 60 days in total) in a cohort of 5045 workers with accepted claims due to a mental health condition. Further analysis was conducted between the same factors and claim status (progression to completion or premature settlement).

Results

Long duration mental health claims were associated with older age, professionals, work pressure, the Education sector and larger employers. Short duration work absence was found to be associated with exposure to a traumatic event, exposure to occupational violence and the Retail trade, Wholesale trade, Construction, Mining and Manufacturing sectors. Workers older than 50 years and claims resulting from work pressure or bullying and harassment were more likely to settle their claim.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study identified differences in the factors associated with duration of work absence and premature claim settlement, which may assist prevention and return to work strategies.