

Workplace flexibility associated with reduced absences and improved job commitment

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Workers who reported increased work flexibility from one year to the next also had fewer absences for illness and improved job commitment, according to new research from Wake Forest University School of Medicine. In addition, these workers were less likely to say that health problems affected their job performance.

The study's results, based on a health survey completed by 3,193 employees of a large multinational pharmaceutical company, are reported in the current issue of the *Psychologist-Manager Journal*.

"This study provides evidence that flexibility is associated with health or well-being over time," said Joseph G. Grzywacz, Ph.D., senior author and an associate professor of family medicine. "For managers, the results suggest that implementing flexible work arrangements can contribute to the bottom-line."

The researchers analyzed data obtained from health risk appraisals to determine how increases or decreases in perceived flexibility from one year to the next were associated with a variety of factors. Workplace flexibility refers to workers' ability to modify where, when and how long job-related work is performed. There are two main types of flexibility: location, such as telecommuting, and schedule, such as flextime and job sharing.

Results indicated that an increase in perceived flexibility was associated with a decrease in sickness absences and work-related impairment, and

improved job commitment. Decreases in perceived flexibility over the year were associated with a significant increase in impairment and reduced job commitment, but had little impact on absence.

“These results strengthen the evidence suggesting that programs and policies that promote flexibility in the workplace may have beneficial health effects for workers,” said Grzywacz.

The authors said there are several ways to create a culture of flexibility:

- Offer a variety of alternative work arrangements. The study’s results suggest that part-time, remote and flextime options may be especially useful in creating a culture of flexibility.

- Training managers and supervisors to be supportive of workers’ lives outside the office.

Source: Wake Forest University

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