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Having mental health problems but not sickness absent: factors of importance among privately employed

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Background:

Knowledge is scarce on individuals who are experiencing mental health problems but who have low or no sickness absence (SA). The aim of this study was to identify individual-level characteristics, including sociodemographic factors, morbidity, and lifestyle, among privately employed individuals with previous depression/anxiety but no SA during follow-up.

Methods:

This prospective cohort study included 750 twin individuals born in Sweden in 1959-1986, employed in the private sector and with a history of depression/anxiety. Depending on the birth year, the twins were invited to participate in two different health-screening surveys in 2005, when study participants were aged 19-20 or 20-30, respectively. Survey data were used to evaluate depression and anxiety, self-rated health, stressful life events, emotional neglect, level of physical activity, and alcohol use. Study participants were prospectively followed regarding SA occurrence between 2006 and 2018. Data on SA, socio-demographic factors, outpatient healthcare use, and use of prescribed antidepressants were obtained from the Swedish national registries. Descriptive statistics will be reported with further analyses for the presentation.

Results:

Preliminary results showed that despite previous depression or anxiety, 35% of women and 52% of men were not on SA during the follow-up period. Those who had no SA during follow-up were more likely to have higher education >12 years (49%), experienced fewer stressful life events (43%) and emotional neglect (56%), had better self-rated health (95%), along with a lower use of antidepressants (11%) and outpatient healthcare (88%), as compared with those on SA (33%, 65%, 66%, 90%, 17%, and 98%, respectively).

Conclusions:

Higher education, being male, fewer life adversities, good self-rated health and low use of antidepressants and outpatient healthcare were individual-level factors of importance for those with previous depression or anxiety and no incident SA during follow-up.

Key messages:

- Individuals with previous depression/anxiety, but not sickness absent, were more likely to have higher education, be male, and have lower morbidity, as compared to individuals on sickness absence.
- Identification of factors that prevent sickness absence among those with mental health problems may potentially be used to improve sickness absence prevention strategies.