The impact of pain on labor force participation, absenteeism and presenteeism in the European Union.


Source

College of Pharmacy, University of Minnesota, Minnesota, MN 55455-0343, USA. P8366@MSN.com

Abstract

OBJECTIVES:

The aims of this paper are to generate estimates of the association between the experience and burden of pain, by severity and frequency, with (1) labor force participation and workforce status in five EU countries (the UK, France, Spain, Germany and Italy) and (2) patterns of absenteeism and presenteeism for the employed workforce.

METHODS:

Data are from the internet-based 2008 National Health and Wellness Survey (NHWS). This survey covers both those who report experiencing pain in the last month as well as the no pain population. A series of regression models are developed with the no pain group as the reference category. The impact of pain, categorized by severity and frequency reported, is assessed within a labor supply framework for (1) labor force participation and (2) absenteeism and presenteeism. In the former case both binomial and multinomial logistic models are estimated; in the latter case ordered logit models are estimated.

RESULTS:

The results demonstrate that, in the context of health status, the experience of frequent severe and moderate pain has a dominant, independent and negative association with labor force participation and employment status as well as absenteeism and presenteeism. The presence of severe daily pain is associated with a 20-point reduction in the probability of being employed full-time; with moderate daily pain associated with a 10-point reduction. The impact of pain is far greater than the potential impact of other health status measures (e.g., chronic comorbidities and BMI). The experience of pain, notably severe and frequent pain, also outstrips the impact of other health status factors in absenteeism and presenteeism.

CONCLUSIONS:

The experience of pain, in particular severe daily pain, has a substantial negative association with labor force participation in these five European countries as well as reported absenteeism and presenteeism. As a measure of health status, it clearly outweighs other health status measures. Whether or not pain is considered as a disease in its own right, the experience of chronic pain, as defined here, presents policy makers with a major challenge. Programs to relieve the burden of pain in the community clearly have the potential for substantial benefits from societal, individual and employer perspectives.

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