CHAPTER IV

ABSENTEEISM AND PRODUCTIVITY
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Absenteeism, on the part of workers of certain industry, plays a pivotal role to determine the rate of the growth of productivity. In fact, there is a close relationship between the rate of absenteeism and the rate of production. The former, directly or indirectly influences the smooth functioning of the industry, ultimately exercises alarming impact on the productivity of the industrial unit.

(A) MEANING OF ABSENTEEISM:

Absenteeism to a considerable extent, reflects industrial relations in a concern and as such serves as an important index of these relations. Although industry at large locks with great anxiety on the problem of absenteeism, yet it is the management which has to bear the brunt of the evil. Absenteeism, both authorised and unauthorised is a matter of vital concern to the management. But unauthorised absence poses a vital problem to the management which is solely concerned with the efficient, economic and uninterrupted functioning of the concern. When a worker does not report on his work without previous notice, the management is left in dark about the availability of the labour force for employment
and it has to make good such absence by employing additional labour force in order to prevent frequent obstruction in production. The absence of a worker, in one department, disturbs and dislocates the working of the entire plant and ultimately affects production adversely. If the management is aware of the absence of certain workers, no such problems arises, as it finds enough time well in advance, to think, and make suitable arrangements therefore and this way to some extent nullifies the consequences of the absence of certain workers, in the working of the concern. Thus unauthorised absenteeism poses a serious problem before the management and some times makes it annoyed and perplexed. This effects largely the outlook and attitude of the management towards labour, which ultimately influences the industrial relations in the undertaking.

The absenteeism has been defined by various authors in varying terminology. But the definition, given by the Department of Labour, Government of India, is considered to be the most precise, that gives the essential characteristics of absenteeism. The department defined absenteeism in the following words, "The absenteeism
rate is defined as the total man-shifts lost because of absence as a percentage of the total number of man-shifts scheduled. For calculating the rate of absenteeism, we require the number of persons scheduled to work and the number actually presented. A worker who reports for any part of a shift, is to be considered as present. An employee is considered scheduled to work when the employer has work available and the employee is aware of it, and when the employer has no reason to expect well in advance that the employee will not be available for the work at the specified time.... An employee, on a regularly scheduled vacation, should not be considered as scheduled to work or absent. The same is true during an employer orders lay off. On the other hand, an employee who requests time-off at other than a regular vacation period should be considered as absent---- until he returns, or until it is determined that the absence will be of such duration that his name is removed from the list of active employee. Similarly, an employee who quits without notice, should be considered as absent from scheduled work until his name is dropped from the active list -----. If a strike is in progress, workers on strike should be considered as neither scheduled to work nor absent, since data on time
lost because of strikes, are collected by other means.\(^1\)

The definition given by the Labour Department not only gives a clear cut idea of meaning of the term absenteeism but it also describes how the statistics related to absenteeism are collected and calculated. The data pertaining to absenteeism published by the Government agencies are reckoned on this basis. Following table shows the rate of absenteeism in various textile industry of India:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Bombay</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Sholapur</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>40.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Ahmedabad</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Madras</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) Madurai</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>28.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(f) Coimbatore</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(g) Kanpur</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(h) Karnataka</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>25.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(^1\)Efficiency of Industrial Labour- Certain tests-Monograph No. 56, pp. 708 (Artha Vanijya Gobesana Mandir, 12, Duff Street, Calcutta.
Table shows the average annual rate of absenteeism in cotton textile industry in India. The data collected for the last four years (1982 to 1985) shows approximately the similar tendency in the different cities of India.

In Uttar Pradesh at Kanpur, the cotton textile industry faced 20.9 average rate of absenteeism in 1982, which reduced to 19.4 in the year 1983 and 20.9 and 19.9 were found as an average rate of absenteeism for the year 1984-1985 respectively.

(B) **TYPES OF ABSENTEEISM:**

(i) **Complete Absenteeism:**

A worker who is absent for full day, is known as complete-absenteeism. In this type, a worker, who is absent does not participate in production directly or indirectly. Due to complete absenteeism production suffers badly, because unattended work, is allotted to another person, who is unable to do work so efficiently as the original worker can. Therefore, complete absenteeism proves to be very harmful for the industry.
Partial Absenteeism:

Partial absenteeism occurs when a particular worker is not absent for full time. In such case, he leaves the department for a short time and due to this part time absent from the industry, the work assigned to him, is not completed in due time, this finally has an adverse impact on the rate of the growth of productivity.

There are some cases when workers are not absent from the department, they remain present in the area of work, but often leave the department, giving lame excuses, avoiding and neglecting their duty during the duty hours. Inspite of being present in the department, their physical presence proves to be of no worth or value, as the production of the industry is concerned. Such workers under the garb of lame excuses, shirk their responsibility, killing their inner conscience and bring down the level of production, by hindering the smooth functioning of the industry concerned. Some times workers are bound to break the continuity on certain reasonable grounds. They may seek advice and consultation of their senior officer regarding some confusion. Although, seeking of advice
on the part of the worker, is an urgent one yet it does affect the proper functioning of the industry, as the time wasted by the workers during this period of consultation, his own work remains pending, hence productivity is indirectly influenced.

(iii) **Forced Absenteeism**:

Some times there are cases, when workers, who are willing to work but due to some unavoidable causes, are forced to remain absent from their job. Forced absenteeism may be created by the employer, trade union leaders or by some other causes. Due to power-failure or breakage of machinery employer declares lay-off in the factory and workers who are willing to participate in the productivity, can not do so due to lay-off. Similarly in some cases of disputes, leaders of trade unions may also force them to participate in their agitation. Workers who are not in favour of strike, even then due to un-due pressure of trade unions they are compelled to remain absent and participate in the strike.
## Average Annual Rate of Absenteeism in the Cotton Textile Industry
### Of Uttar Pradesh and other Centers of INDIA
(October, 1985) (P)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cotton Mills</th>
<th>No. of returns</th>
<th>Total No. of man-days to work</th>
<th>Total Absenteeism (in per day)</th>
<th>Sickness</th>
<th>Accident and Maternities</th>
<th>Social and Religious causes</th>
<th>Other causes With/ pay</th>
<th>Without pay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,88,936</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madurai</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18,447</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coimbaore</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1,53,838</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tirunelively</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>43,332</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>30,305</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pondichery</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8,988</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kanpur</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2,27,472</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table shows that ten returns were submitted in Kanpur in the year 1985. Average annual percentage of absenteeism was 19.9 out of which 7.7% was due to sickness, accidents and maternities 10.6% due to social and religious causes and 1.6% due to other causes. Absenteeism in the year 1985 was 4.4% with pay and 15.5% without pay. The table shows that the average annual rate of absenteeism is the highest in Kanpur and the causes responsible for this absenteeism were mainly social and religious.

(C) CAUSES OF ABSENTEEISM:

Several causes are responsible for the existence of the problem of absenteeism in the cotton textile industry in U.P. Some of which are avoidable, while others are inevitable, while some are genuine and others are not so.

Sickness is the most inevitable causes of absenteeism. Due to low vitality of workers coupled with unhealthy housing and sanitary conditions, diseases and epidemics like Cholera, Small-pox, malaria often break out in industrial areas which force the workers to remain absent from their work. But in most of the cases, as reported by
different concerning authorities, workers pretend being sick and avail compensation under the Employee's State Insurance Scheme. Under various influences the E.S.I. doctors are pressurised to issue false certificates of sickness. It has been remarked that "Some workers often remain absent from duty, taking advantage of the liberal leave provisions as also the easy certification procedure under the scheme, thus affecting the production. It has been admitted by the E.S.I. authorities that there is a degree of tax certification by Medical Officers."¹ Cases have also been heard, where E.S.I. Doctors have issued medical certificates going out of way. "The percentage of absenteeism among workers in 1953 was about 13% in this centre which went on increasing every year and presently it is about 19% which establishes beyond doubt that E.S.I. scheme has resulted in increasing absenteeism among workers."² Thus this practice has contributed a lot to the increased rate of absenteeism.

¹ Memorandum on Labour Policy in the Fourth Five Year Plan, submitted by the Council of Indian Employers, p.10.

² Memorandum to the National Commission on Labour by The U.P. Textile Mills Association, Kanpur, p.67.
(a) **Political Cause:**

Some times political leaders influence the workers of various units for agitation against the employers. Often they ask them to attend their office for helping them in chalking out their plan and thus when workers go to the office of the politicians during working hours, thinking that it will be more beneficial for them, in the long run, it results in absenteeism.

There are some occasions like reception of a political leader at the railway station or at some other part of the city. If such leader has to address a public meeting or the workers-meeting during the working hours, a workers absent themselves from their jobs, in order to attend such meeting.

(b) **Religious Functions:**

In case a saint or a renowned sadhu or a prophet addresses a meeting or perform a yagya or some other religious ceremony which is regarded very important by the workers, from religious point of view and the timing of this performance co-insides with the working hours of the factory, then workers absent themselves from duty and participate in the religious functions.
(c) **Social Causes:**

There are many social functions among all communities of India like, marriage parties and ceremonies related with that. If their social functions and ceremonies are held during the working hours of their duty, workers absent themselves and participate them.

(d) **Sympathetic Absenteeism:**

If a strike has taken place in a certain cotton mill, then, to show sympathy with the workers of that mill, workers absent themselves from their own factory. This is on reciprocal basis because one industrial unit sympathesises with other, in order to make other unit strong.

(e) **Absenteism due to Power-failure:** In the advanced age of science and technology, it is impossible to think of production in the absence of regular supply of electricity. If supply of electricity is stopped, due to some reason or their is power failure in the factory, the work is stopped. Even when power is restored, some of the workers are under wrong impression that it might have not been restored, hence they absent themselve
from duty on the basis of their wrong estimation and lack of proper communication, hence production suffers.

(f) **Absenteeism due to Breakage of Machinery:**

Sometimes, there are cases, when the machinery employed in the industrial unit needs repair and this leads to the inevitable interruption in the normal functioning of the industry. The workers, although physically present, yet are regarded as absent as they fail to contribute to the production work owing to the untimely breakage and repairing of machinery under use.

(g) **Absenteeism Due to taking more time by senior officers in communication of orders etc.**

When a junior approaches the senior for certain consultation regarding the work of industry, the senior officer unnecessarily takes more time to communicate his views to the junior, whatever instructions or advice can be given in two minutes, he takes ten minutes for the same. Hence for 8 minutes which senior officer has taken uselessly, the junior officer remains away from his work. This is also regarded as absence from the duty and in this case there is no fault on the part of the junior officer for this absence but the production
suffers in two ways, firstly, the junior could not do work in this extra time wasted by the senior officer and secondly, senior also neglecting his own duties could not utilise this extra time for the better job for which his services were meant.

(h) Absenteeism due to Miscellaneous Reasons:

Some times due to some religious or political riots in the city or heavy rain which results in the form of flood, workers fail to attend their duties in the factory. Thus they are compelled to absent from their work. There are many other such reasons, on account of which workers, though, willing to go to factory, are not in a position to do so. Therefore, workers, who are unable to go to their employment remain absent and the proper functioning of the industry is indirectly affected, bringing down the rate of the growth of production considerably.

(D) EFFECTS OF ABSENTEEISM:

(Absenteeism is a curse, the consequences of which have to be borne by all, the labour, the employer, the management, or industry, the government----, the community and thus the humanity at large.)

Absenteeism means a reduction in workers' earnings which causes imbalance in workers' income and expenditure
Due to this deficit usually workers are compelled to borrow money from money lenders. Thus evils of workers' indebtedness appear on the horizon of their life that make the saying, a reality—"Indian workers are born in debt, live in debt, die in debt." All this effects workers' efficiency, disciplinary attitude and morale adversely and consequences of which again take the situation from bad to worse. The worker, being the member of community, has also to suffer from what absenteeism does to community.

The absenteeism causes a tremendous loss to employers also. Quality and quantity of production suffer. The level of discipline and morale of workers decline. All this depreciate goodwill and reputation of the concern in the market. Although cotton textile mills in U.P. keep a separate labour force as substitute workers, but their performance is poorer than that of the permanent workers and their attitude more mischievous and indisciplined.

Loss in production to the concern, due to absenteeism, diminishes, the total production of the company. Any obstruction to the achievement of production—target may disturb entire planning of the country. Similarly absence or lack of morale and discipline, in concern may cause a dispute, resulting in tremendous loss of man-power that
may vitiate the congenial industrial climate. Thus, the cost of absenteeism is heavy to the Government and Community, as a whole. Practically every employer recognizes that lost time is a source of waste for him. The absence of a regular worker means that machinery and equipment remain idle or are handled by less experienced workmen, if not by inexperienced ones. Occasionally, a less experienced workman performs the new task with greater enthusiasm than the experienced worker. Generally speaking, however, the output is not so great, and there is more likelihood of damage to machinery and equipment. Another source of waste growing out of absenteeism is the fact that frequently tasks and operations are performed by a group of workers who are untrained and inexperienced and unless every effort is made to train each of the workmen to take the place of the other, the absence of one or more of the group reduces the general productivity. In any event, the absence of regular employees inevitably has an adverse effect upon the profits of the employer, hence ultimately production suffers. There is an exception also in this case, sometime few workers, who are piece-rate worker perform the work with very high speed in order to fulfil
their quota of the period of absence. This tendency results in wastage of raw materials and making the quality definitely inferior, though outwardly it may not appear so.

It has already been pointed out that absenteeism is responsible for reducing the quantity of manufacturing output. Its workmen not only suffers immediate and direct financial loss but it also results in the loss of skill and efficiency of worker. Interest in the occupation and in the plant is decreased, and while returning to work, worker finds it difficult to connect the broken link of their work and to regain his old stride. A lowering of output is especially noticable among piece-workers when absence has interrupted their habit of work. Absence in the habit of work make the worker dull after remaining absent for few days. When worker comes and joins, it takes time to work at the normal speed that is he cannot work so efficiently on the same day as he was doing before being absence. The result is there is an increase in the prices. Due to high price consumer suffers, even the worker gets less remuneration, due to reduction of wages for the period of absence hence their standard of living also goes down.

It may be concluded that absence is harmful to all, the three; namely, employer, employee and the consumer
thus there is an adverse impact of absence on the
society and the nation as a whole.

(E) A SURVEY OF ABSENTEEISM IN VARIOUS TEXTILE UNITS:

Researcher made a survey of Elgin Mills No.1, in order to find out the causes and effects of absenteeism in this unit. A very surprising fact was noticed in this connection. In one dispute, a certain officer unexpectedly misbehaved with a worker, the result was that, not only that worker but all his associates absented themselves from duty as a protest against this mis-behaviour. A close contact with the officer, the real cause came to be known that he never mis-behaved on the other hand his method of talking was mis-interpreted by the workers. Thus the conclusion is derived that it was the way of communication which resulted in creating unpleasant situation within the industry and the work of the factory suffers. It was also noticed during the survey that many causes of absenteeism were due to the mis-interpretation of the statements, given by the officer.

Through above discussion, it can be concluded that the impact of absenteeism on productivity is inevitable. To a great extent, absenteeism is responsible for the prevailing decreasing trend of productivity of various
textile units of Uttar Pradesh. Absenteeism, whether complete or partial, voluntary or forced equally forcefully exercises its influence on productivity. Although employers are fully well acquainted with the adverse consequences of absenteeism, yet they fail to check the indispensable causes, leading to absenteeism for example the religion, social, political and causes related to natural calamities.