

# Employees' Absenteeism, Its Causes and Impact on Productivity: A Sociological Case Study in Bagdogra Tea Estate

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**Abstract:** Bagdogra Tea Estate is established in 1969 by Ajit Kumar Agarwal. He is the owner of this tea estate. Bagdogra tea estate is situated in the foothills of the Himalayas in Darjeeling district at the upper Bagdogra and on the other side opposite to the Bagdogra Airport of Siliguri. "Absenteeism is the practice or habit of being an absentee and an absentee is one who habitually stays away from work" and "The Labour Department in India defined the absenteeism rate as the total man-shifts lost because of absence as a percentage of the total number of man-shifts scheduled". This study is based on primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected from field work and secondary data taken from some journals offline or online, books, different publications newspapers, blogs etc. In the beginning of the field work study have tried to establish rapport relation with the employees and management and introduced and explained to informants the purpose of visit for getting first-hand information. The rate of annual absenteeism among the labourers in the garden is very high. The management is not at all satisfied with this vexing problem and have chalked out some measures like service notice to the absent workers and also by setting up a domestic enquiry committee by the management and dismissal of the worker if found guilty of remaining absent for false reason.

**Key Words:** Absenteeism, Innocent Absenteeism, Culpable Absenteeism, Desertion.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

Absenteeism is a very serious problem in production houses whether in big industrial setup or in a small one. It is not a new problem in industries which has its long history but this paper is not dealing with its history but its causes and impact on tea industry. There are many causes which will be consulted in this paper and will try to locate its impacts on both employer and employee or workers side. It has become a major impediment towards the industrial growth and the social development. Work efficiency and commitment to work brings highest output to the production and can also bring fortune to the employers as well as to the workers condition. The overall development can be possible if the problem of absenteeism handled out properly by the management. Management should identify why there is growing trend in absenteeism in the workplace. For absenteeism, so many factors are responsible which needed to be controlled by the management. Several studies have been conducted and they have tried to identify the specific causes for absenteeism in various industries, tea plantation is one of them and this paper will try to locate the actual factors for absenteeism in this particular field along with the impact of absenteeism on employers as well as on workers and on their families. Management- worker relationship, recruitment procedures, rate of wages, working environment, leaves, alcoholism, working hours, overtime, welfare activities and many more factors working on the ground of absenteeism. The problem of absenteeism can be occurred due to the manifestation of the workers decision or sometimes, it is attributed by the poor management in a production houses.

## 2. CONCEPT OF ABSENTEEISM:

The concept of absenteeism is defined differently by many. According to Webster's Dictionary- "Absenteeism is the practice or habit of being an absentee and an absentee is one who habitually stays away from work." As per Labour Bureau of Shimla- "Absenteeism is the total man shifts lost because of absence as percentage of total number of man shifts schedule to work."

## 3. MEASUREMENT OF ABSENTEEISM:

Calculation of the rate of absenteeism is a very crucial task which needed very careful attention that follows scientific method to decide the exact rate of absenteeism in any kind of production houses. "The Labour Department in India defined the absenteeism rate as the total man-shifts lost because of absence as a percentage of the total number of man-shifts scheduled." So, for calculation of the rate of absenteeism we need to find the number of persons schedule to work and the number actually present. To measure the rate of absenteeism in work place the study followed a method through which the actual and authentic results can be found. For example,

A. Average number of employees in work force: 100

- B. Number of available workdays during the period: 20
- C. Total number of available workdays-(a\*b): 2000
- D. Total number of lost days due to absences during the period: 93
- E. Absenteeism percent-  $(d/c)*100:4.65\%$

Since absenteeism is a major barometer of employee morale, absenteeism above 5% has to be considered as very serious problem. Across most industries considered 3% as standard.

#### 4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The main objective of the study is to understand the present situation of the absenteeism of the employees and its causes and impact on productivity of the Bagdogra Tea Estate. Here, some objectives have been formulated are as follows;

- I. To identify the rate of absenteeism of employees.
- II. To identify the major causes of absenteeism.
- III. To find out its impact on the organizational health and productivity.
- IV. To assess the impact of absenteeism on workers family and their future prospects of the same.

#### 5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The study was based on the topic “Employees absenteeism, its causes and impact on productivity”. Methodology and the selection of prior tools for research is a very important part of the research. Researcher should be compatible and familiar with the techniques of data collection, only then it would be possible to collect essential information’s from the informants. This study is based on primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected from field work and secondary data taken from some journals offline or online, books, different publications newspapers, blogs etc. In the beginning of the field work study have tried to establish rapport relation with the employees and management and introduced and explained to informants the purpose of visit for getting first-hand information. Their co-operation helped the study to extract valuable and authentic information’s. The study followed random sampling method for selection of the sample informants. 50 case studies were taken for the purpose of interview and analyzed. Study has collected information by group discussion with the workers. It leads to the very important and relevant factor of the absenteeism. To compare the statement of the workers, study has cross checked the collected information from the different trade unions.

#### 6. BACKGROUND OF THE ESTATE:

Bagdogra Tea Estate is established in 1969 by Ajit Kumar Agarwal. He is the owner of this tea estate. Bagdogra tea estate is situated in the foothills of the Himalayas in Darjeeling district at the upper Bagdogra and on the other side opposite to the Bagdogra Airport of Siliguri. The estate is 15km. away from siliguri. It covers the area of 279.23 Hector or 689.69 acres of land. The tea estate is divided into two parts, garden and factory. Here, in this tea estate there are three types of workers exists, namely – Permanent, Line Basti, and Bigha workers. There are 317 permanent workers which consists two types of workers, firstly daily workers, they are around 279 from which 130 is male and 149 is female. Secondly, sub-staff they are 38. The number of Line Basti workers is 232 in which 52 are males and 180 females. And lastly Bigha workers they are casual in nature. They appointed to works as the number required by the garden for a specific job and after finishing the work they been fired from work. Management doesn’t have any responsibility for these kinds of workers. This bigha workers recruited by the management directly.

The Bogdogra Tea Estate is owned by the Ajit Kumar Agarwal but run by the managers. There are levels of managers exists and they maintained and manage every aspect of the tea estate. The power is vested upon the managers. There is one area manager and one factory manager and seven assistant managers are there to run the management smoothly and comfortably. There is no welfare officer due to small number of workers. In this tea estate there is two trade unions operates and trying to maintain human relation within the estate and look after the grievances and benefits on the behalf of the workers. Trade unions are- “Terai Dooars Plantation Workers Union” (TDPWU) – that operating by the Trinimul Party and another trade union is, “Progressive Tea Workers Union” (PTWU) – this trade union is run by the Adivasi Bikash Parisod. These two trade unions participate in each and every activities of the estate and consult on a regular basis.

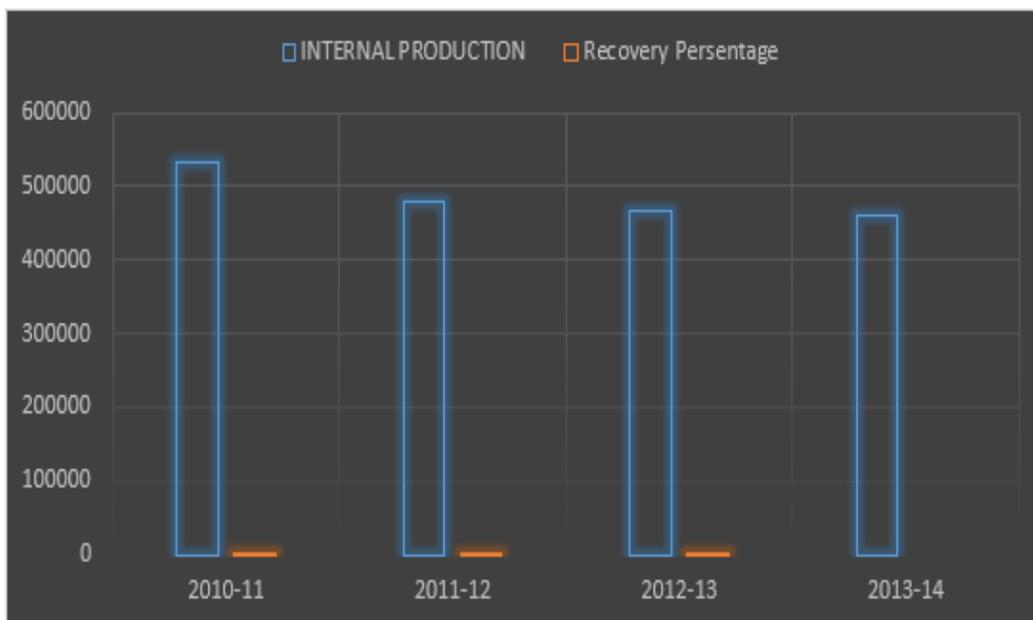
#### 7. TRENDS IN PRODUCTION:

Bagdogra Tea Estate produces tea from internal and external sources. Internal source means, the plantation produces tea on the basis of their own tea leaf and External sources means, they buy tea leaves from out sides and produce or make tea by that leaves. Their all production is sold out to the Siliguri Tea Auction. They are not selling their tea in outside market because marketing is supervised by Tea Auction. Their production figures are given as follows; Internal production in 2010- their total production of tea leaves was 532106 kg., and from that leaves tea recovered 23.17%, in 2011 total leaves 478715 kg., and recovery was 24.05%. In 2012 total leaves 466159 kg., and recovery

23.50%. And lastly, in 2013 production was 460936 and recovery was 14.14%. (Table No. 1). Total production of the tea estate combining by internal and external sources accordingly, in 2010- 1523115 kg., and recovery was 22.40%, in 2011-1435160 kg., and recovery 22.60%, in 2012- 1366162kg., and recovery 22.58%, and lastly in 2013 production was 1291325kg., and recovery is 22.85%. (Table No. 2). In Bagdogra Tea Estate, the total internal production along with the trend in absenteeism rate are also analyzed and shown in table no. 3.

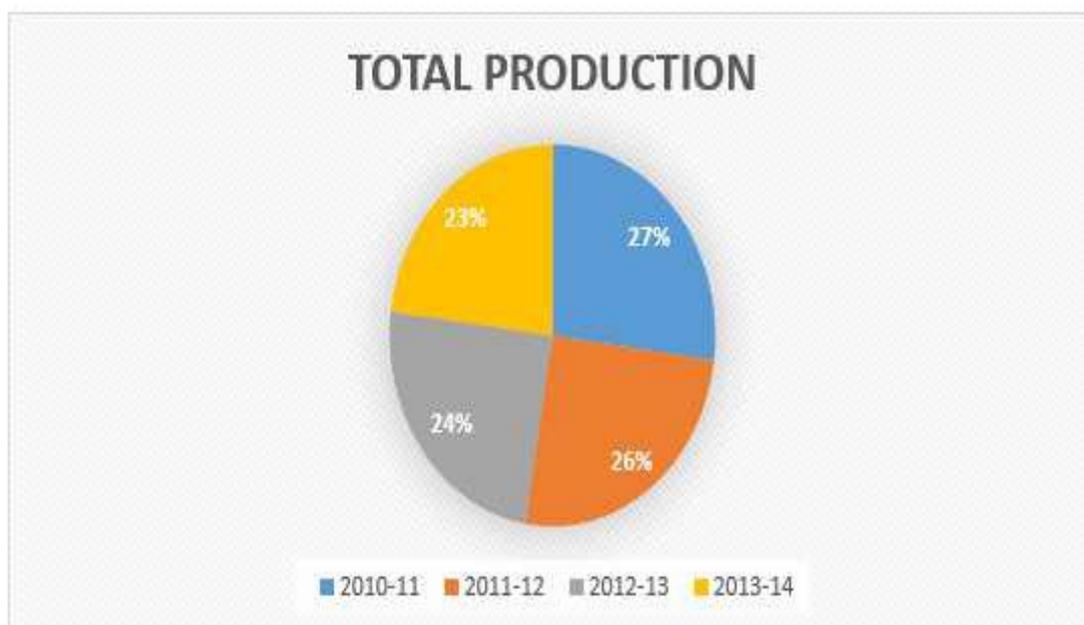
**Table no. 1**

Distribution of internal production with recovery percentage of Bagdogra Tea Estate.



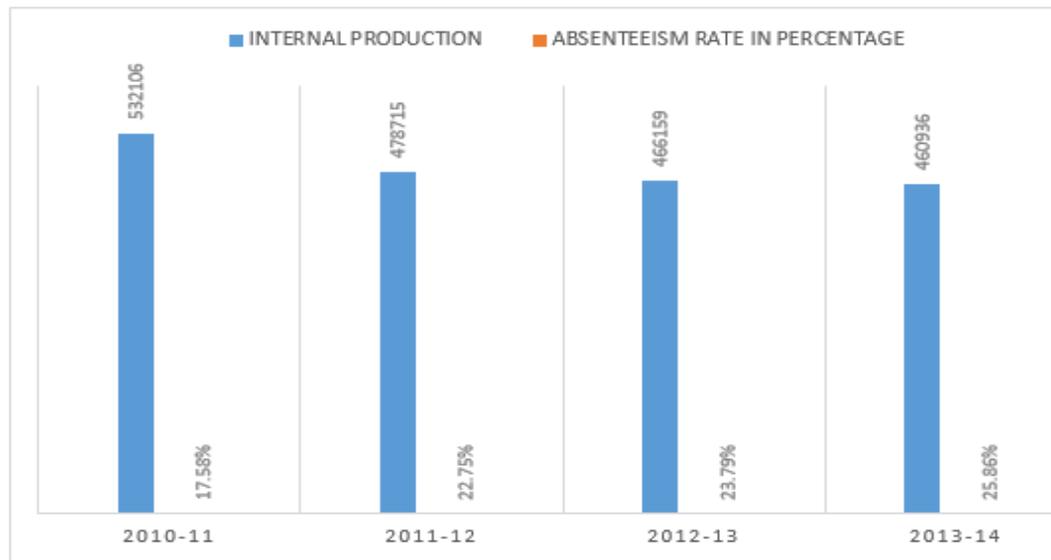
**Table no. 2**

Distribution of total production (Internal and External) with recovery percentage of Bagdogra Tea Estate.



**Table no. 3**

Shows the rate of absenteeism in Tea Estate and its impact on productivity.



Here, in this tea estate worker getting wages of Rs. 95 per day and facilities provided by the tea garden. Workers are assured to get work throughout the year. The welfare activities provided by the tea estate are- Housing facility has been provided by the management for free of cost to the employees or workers, drinking water supply, for primary treatment medical assistance they have got one dispensary, and for emergency medical problem they refer Bogdogra Hospital, Naxalbari and North Bengal Medical College and Hospital. Other welfare activities like- fire woods, transport, clothing, raincoats, umbrella, shoes, masks etc. provided to the workers for their safety, well-being and good performance at work.

### 8. CAUSES OF ABSENTEEISM:

The concept of absenteeism simply put unauthorized absence from work; it takes place when an employee is not where he should be during working hours. In other words, he is absent from the work place or at the place where he or she has been posted. For this study, it is therefore important to expand and broaden the understanding of possible causes and reasons that can provide a sense what can be done to prevent this absenteeism. An absence from work place refers to the time when a team member is not on the job during schedule working hours, except for a granted leave of absence or holiday. A contract of employment is a component of the employer or employee relationship. Some employee disappear from work for up to almost three hours, disappear to such an extent that this cannot be referred to as normal absenteeism or desertion of their posts. Ordinary absenteeism would be when an employee is absent from work for a short period of time and reappears to give an explanation to the employers as to where he or she has been and why he or she was absent. There are two general types of absenteeism each of which requires a different type of approach in dealing with, namely; Innocent Absenteeism and Culpable Absenteeism.

Innocent Absenteeism: it refers to those cases where employee are absent for reasons beyond their control, such as sickness, injury and death of a close relative. Innocent Absenteeism is not culpable or deliberate which should therefore not lead to blame or be constructed as an offence or transgression of company conditions of work. Culpable Absenteeism; it refers to employees who are absent without authorization for a reasons or reasons which are within their control. For instance, an employee who is on sick leave even though he or she is not sick is guilty of absenteeism be culpable is to be blame worthy. There are numerous ways in which absenteeism can take place in the work situation. The easiest way to identify unauthorized absenteeism is where the employee does not come to work at all. In this case the employee has not reported for duty and has done this without permission; this kind of absenteeism can lead to dismissal.

The study attempts to determine the real causes of absenteeism in the Bogdogra Tea Estate which impacts the working condition and productivity on large extent.

### ALCOHOLISM:

The practice of alcoholism in any society has become a recognized social problem nowadays although some considered it as a Personal problem that can be encountered by workers and that can hinder them from going to work. Alcohol consumption is one of the vital reasons for absenteeism in different production houses especially in tea industry.

### **UNCONTROLABLE EVENTS:**

In these point workers fails go to work due to heavy rain fall, family tragedy etc. This can range from a sick child who has to be taken to hospital or to the death of a close relative or domestic crisis where by the worker has to stay at home to handle the situation.

### **UNREST VIOLENCE AND POLITICAL STAY AWAY:**

These reason are often seen by employer “employees who are absent from work because of stay away have sound reasons for doing so mainly the fact that their lives or properly will be in danger if they attempt work.

### **DELIBERATE AND WILLFUL ABSENCE:**

This occurs when the employee does not to go to work because he does not want to. It happens to a conservable extend in the private industry where “No Work No Pay” applies. The worker absent knowingly that a belief person will be called into cover his or her post. There are no valid reasons for his or her absence. The fact that the worker has chosen to stay away from work, there may often be a pattern of willful absenteeism, such as when an employee is often absent the day after pay day or takes a day off after public holiday a long weekend etc.

### **DELIBERATE ABSENCE AFTER PERMISSION HAS BEEN REFUSED:**

Here, describe this type of absence after a worker has asked for permission was refused for good reasons. For example there is no stand by available at that particular time to cover his or her post. Due to refusal of the permission they feel that they are being treated unfairly when it comes being granted leave or off time that is they feel they are entitle to take leave whenever they require. As a result in response to such refusal to grant them valid off time they simply do not arrived for work on a chooses day without informing supervisors or managers of such intended absences.

### **DESERTION:**

A deserter would be defined as an employee who you can show has left your employ without your permission with any intension of ever returning to work. Absent due to external demands: this is another cause of absenteeism. An employee may be summoned or subpoenaed to appear in court as a key witness at the time when he or she should be at work. The time and resource constraints of the employee may prevent the employee from communicating with the employer regarding such absences from work. The employee may legally not refuse an employee a call to attend a court case because it would than constituted legal offence. If an employer were to dismiss or discipline an employee for such absences would constitute an illegal labour practice. There may be other external causes such as financial problems. Level of motivation: one of the major reasons of workers absenteeism is motivation. The employees need to be motivated. Job satisfaction, Job Situation, Values and Expectations, Family responsibilities, Managerial Policies and Attitudes all factors that impact on workers satisfaction with the job influence an employee’s motivation and morale and therefore indirectly affect the quality of the service that they render and whether they would make frequent use of absenteeism merely to stay away from an unhappy work situation.

### **INDEBTEDNESS:**

In tea garden indebtedness or borrowing money from money lenders or from management is a very popular and common activity done by the workers. In garden area usually the ‘Babu’s’ (clerks) used to give money as loan to the workers on a very high rate of interest. These loans paid by the workers by working through the week. Workers usually getting their wages in a week day which calls pay day in the garden. The wages paid by the babu’s to the workers. Those who have taken loan from the management they gave their weekly wage amount after cutting the installment of their loans. For instance, if any worker work for seven days and earn 1000 rupees but he has taken one amount approximately 10000 from management which cost weekly installment 500 rupees. Then the management will take their installment first and paid the rest amount to the worker. That means, 500 rupees paid to the worker for his maintenance through the week. This indebtedness or loan system in tea garden influences absenteeism because after working whole week they have got very small amount to maintain their families. So, they start doing job outside by absenting themselves from the schedule work of the tea estate.

### **MIGRATION:**

Indebtedness influences migration in tea garden areas. People used to migrate to make their life better. Here, the scenario depicts another story. Due to low level of education they are unable to find suitable and settle work, outside the garden area. Some of them used to work as stone picker from the river or as construction labour by absenting themselves from the garden schedule work.

## **INDUSTRIAL FATIGUE:**

In organization industrial fatigue is a very crucial factor and an important element for absenteeism. Low wages, excess working hours without overtime leads worker towards industrial fatigue which results in absenteeism in production.

## **ADDITIONAL FAMILY LABOUR:**

This is another very vital cause of absenteeism on the male side. If, family labour is high then the absenteeism of the male worker of that particular family becomes high. Example if one family has one male headed and two or more women worker within the family like mother, wife, sisters then the male worker of that family becomes addicted to absent from work because his family operate smoothly without his work that's why he absent himself from work regularly.

## **ABSENT OF ADEQUATE WELFARE ACTIVITY:**

Welfare activities always encourage workers to work efficiently. Inadequate welfare activities always discourage worker for continuous work attention and presence. Welfare activities includes clean drinking water, canteen, shelter room, rest room, washing and bathing facilities, first appliances and safety devices should be provide by the authority.

There are some other causes of absenteeism these are as follows:-

- 1) Serious accident and illness
- 2) Low morale
- 3) Poor working conditions
- 4) Boredom on the job
- 5) Lack of job satisfaction
- 6) Inadequate Leadership and Poor supervision
- 7) Low pay
- 8) Lack of proper education and knowledge

## **9. IMPACT OF ABSENTEEISM ON ORGANIZATION:**

Absenteeism is undesirable for employees, their colleagues and employers. It impacts on organizations profitability and on productivity, service delivery efficiency, work ethic, labour relation, worker co-operations, and with management and company owners. Absenteeism can cause overtime, late deliveries, dissatisfied customers and a decline in morale among workers expected to cover for absent colleges. Absenteeism, no matter what the cause, incurred losses for the employer who is not at fault. The damage suffered by the employer must be weighed against the employee's right to expect the employee to attend regularly and fulfill the employment contract will outweigh the employees right to be sick at such a point the termination of the employee may be justified. Absenteeism is a gravely disruptive and costly factor in the work place.

## **THE COST AND IMPACT ON ABSENTEEISM:**

**LOSS TO EMPLOYER-** Due to absenteeism employer has following losses: **Decrease in productivity:** Those employees who at work may have to carry an extra work load due to absenteeism. This may have impact on their physical and mental strength, overall productivity and outputs. Employees at work may be required to spend extra time out of their own work schedules to train and oriented new temporary replacements or relief workers. As a result of these extra work loads (overtime) and demands on time staff morale and employee service and production may suffer. The high rate of absenteeism cause decreases in productivity rapidly. This is the major loss of the owner or employer.

**Financial Cost:** There might also be the additional cost associated with the payment for retraining or induction of the replacement workers in that particular post. In addition there would be the cost of semi-insured income protection plants which a company will also have to bear plus the wage cost of any replacement employers.

**Administrative cost:** Loss of productivity time spends by the managers to secure replacement employees and reassigning the remaining employees. Additional management is required to maintain administrative system dealing with any control measures for absenteeism.

**Social cost:** Management has to incur the social cost for absenteeism. Due to absenteeism the interpersonal between management and workers becoming very weak and the adjustment and co-operation has been lost or becoming very poor.

## **LOSS TO WORKER:**

Due to the habit of being absenting frequently workers income is reduced to a larger extent. It is because there is general principle of “No Work NO Pay”. Thus the time lost in terms of absenteeism is a loss of income to workers and they tie themselves with indebtedness. Further the workers those who absent themselves from work the gradually denied to the facilities provided by the management.

## **9. CONCLUSION:**

The study contribute some important prospective through the use of analysis of the data alongside the discourse of the workers. Absenteeism is a very evil practice within the work place if damages both the employer and worker side. The term absenteeism is a very serious problem within the work place and it have to minimize for the sake of better performance bright full future of the organization. The management of the garden is fully aware of the problem of absenteeism and they constantly try to minimize the problem. From 2010 to till the 2014 date there is significant rate of absenteeism is in decreasing pattern and they have try to take down the absenteeism rate in best possible level. They have taken necessary step to reduce the problem of absenteeism. The working conditions of the labourers are satisfactory but the authority is not being able to provide one of the basic requirements of modern life. That is the service of electricity to the labour quarters for as the garden authority has not been able to pay the dues to the electricity department. The rate of annual absenteeism among the labourers in the garden is very high. The management is not at all satisfied with this vexing problem and have chalked out some measures like service notice to the absent workers and also by setting up a domestic enquiry committee by the management and dismissal of the worker if found guilty of remaining absent for false reason. That kind of steps have been found to taken there are enough reasons to being absent from the work with or without early notice. There are some major causes identified these are alcoholism, personal problem, political problem, level of motivation, serious accident, deliberate and willful absences, illness, industrial fatigue etc. Absenteeism; no matter what are the causes but it incurred losses for the employer who is not at fault. The damage suffered by the employer must be weighed against the employee’s right to be sick. However there is a point at which the employers right to expect the employee to attend regularly and fulfill the employment contract will outweigh the employees right to be sick at such a point the termination of the employee may be justified. Absenteeism is a gravely disruptive and costly factor in the work place. For absenteeism employer and employee both have to incur losses from their sides. Decrease in productivity, incurring financial cost, administrative cost, social cost etc. are the losses from the employer or from the organization side and “NO WORK NO PAY’ that principle brings losses from the part of workers side. So therefore organization is always trying to minimize the evil practice of absenteeism from the work place and if it’s possible to some extend then productivity will increase rapidly and organization will progress their stamina and build their strength.

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