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ORIGINAL PAPER

The impact of workplace conflict with superiors or colleagues on sickness absence and voluntary turnover

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Abstract
Organizational costs from sick leave and turnover underscore the importance of identifying their drivers. This study employs representative longitudinal data from the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP) to investigate the impact of burdensome workplace conflicts on two separate outcomes: sickness absence and voluntary turnover. The results show that conflicts with superiors are significantly positively related to both sickness absence and voluntary turnover. The analyses hint at self-reported health as a transmission channel. Interestingly, conflicts with colleagues are not linked to either sickness absence or voluntary turnover. Sample splits suggest that workers' responses to workplace conflicts differ to some extent by employment status, age, and gender. Organizations should prioritize conflict management to reduce sickness absence and voluntary turnover, with particular attention to conflicts involving superiors.

Keywords Absenteeism · Conflict · Coping · Quits · GSOEP · Sickness absence · Sick leave · Turnover · Voluntary turnover · Workplace conflict

JEL Classification J63 · M54

1 Introduction

Conflict plays a profound role in organizations and is one of the most important stressors in the workplace (Keenan and Newton 1985; Spector and Jex 1998). As a source of stress, workplace conflict can cause withdrawal coping behavior of employees. A short-term coping strategy is absenteeism (Quick et al. 1997), whereas a long-term

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coping strategy may be for employees to leave an organization on their own initiative (Giebels and Janssen 2005).

Sickness absence from work and voluntary turnover cause costs for organizations. Sickness absence can imply the continued payment of remuneration, overtime hours of present employees, and productivity losses (Stephan 1991). Voluntary turnover causes costs in terms of separation, replacement, new-hire training, general administration, and the loss of human and social capital (Dess and Shaw 2001). To reduce these costs, it is crucial to identify the determinants of sickness absence and voluntary turnover. Previous literature has identified a broad range of antecedents of sickness absence (e.g., Väänänen et al. 2003; Brborović et al. 2017) and voluntary turnover (e.g., Mueller and Price 1990; Rubenstein et al. 2018). This study focuses on one specific and often overlooked antecedent, namely workplace conflicts. The objective of this study is to examine how workplace conflicts with superiors or colleagues influence both sickness absence and voluntary turnover.

Only a limited number of studies have explored the relationship between workplace conflicts and sickness absence (e.g., Böckerman and Ilmakunnas 2008; Giebels and Janssen 2005; Lakiša et al. 2021; Sterud et al. 2022) as well as actual turnover (e.g., West 2007), warranting further investigation. This paper contributes to the literature in several ways. First, a key strength of this study lies in its large sample, covering a wide range of occupations and spanning the years 1985 to 2016, which enhances the generalizability of the findings. Second, this study adds evidence from Germany for this research question. Third, while much research has concentrated on the link between interpersonal conflicts and turnover intentions (e.g., Frone 2000; Giebels and Janssen 2005; Langove and Isha 2017; Medina et al. 2005; Morrison 2008; Palanci et al. 2021; Spector and Jex 1998), this study examines the impact of workplace conflicts on actual turnover behavior—a less frequently studied area due to the challenges in obtaining turnover data compared to self-reported turnover intentions (Byrne 2005). Fourth, this research differentiates between conflicts with colleagues and those with superiors, allowing for more nuanced implications than broader conflict measures employed in some prior studies (e.g., Böckerman and Ilmakunnas 2008, 2009). Fifth, Sterud et al. (2022) found that conflicts with colleagues were not significantly associated with sickness absence, unlike conflicts with superiors. Their finding is surprising within the framework of stress theories and prompts a re-examination. Sixth, this study explores heterogeneities within the sample such as different employment status, gender, and age.

The findings of this study are highly relevant for corporate practice. The European Company Survey (ECS) from 2019 has highlighted the challenges of sickness absence and turnover for organizations. About 21% of the total EU27 companies and 39% of the German companies participating in the ECS 2019 claimed that the level of sick leave in their establishment is too high (Eurofound 2019). Regarding turnover, 24% of the EU27 and 22% of the German companies surveyed in the ECS 2019 consider the retention of employees in the establishment as fairly difficult (Eurofound 2019). Meeting the challenges outlined in the ECS, this study offers evidence-based insights that allow managers, policy makers, and labor leaders to reduce sickness absence and turnover in organizations.

The empirical analysis is based on data from the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP). The conflicts data stem from 1985, 1987, 1995, 2001, 2006, 2011, and 2016. The results reveal that conflicts with superiors are significantly and positively related to sickness absence and voluntary turnover. Thus, conflicts with superiors seem to play a key role in explaining these two outcomes. Somewhat surprisingly, conflicts with colleagues do not show an association with sickness absence and voluntary turnover. Overall, the findings call for effective conflict management to reduce sickness absence and voluntary turnover.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. The next section is devoted to the theoretical background of this study and relevant previous empirical work. Section 3 describes the data, sample, variables, and method. Section 4 presents the results and Sect. 5 is devoted to robustness checks. Limitations, avenues for future research, and implications for practice are discussed in Sect. 6. Section 7 concludes.

2 Theoretical background and previous empirical work

2.1 Workplace conflicts and sickness absence

Conflict can be defined as an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties due to the perceived opposition of interests (Putnam 2006). A short-term strategy of employees for dealing with conflicts in the workplace is absenteeism (Quick et al. 1997).

Johns (2008, p. 160) defined absenteeism as 'the failure to report to work as scheduled.' Absenteeism can be conceptualized on an involuntary-voluntary continuum (Nicholson 1977; Steers and Rhodes 1978). At one end of the continuum, external factors (e.g., illness, accidents, family responsibilities, or transportation problems) constrain an individual's ability to attend work, causing involuntary absenteeism. At the other end of the continuum, an individual's low motivation to attend work causes voluntary absenteeism. Attendance motivation is determined by satisfaction with the work situation and various internal and external pressures to attend. For example, individuals may choose to be absent from work to escape a stressful work environment (Steers and Rhodes 1978). In Germany, employees are required to provide their employer with a physician's certificate of illness for sickness absences longer than three days (Continued Remuneration Act, Sect. 5). In the following, theoretical arguments for the potential relation between workplace conflicts and absenteeism are derived.

According to the Transactional Theory of Stress (Lazarus and Folkman 1984), workplace conflict is likely perceived as a stressful situation because it threatens people's basic need to perceive the world as controllable and predictable. The Allostatic Load Model (McEwen and Stellar 1993) suggests that repeated stress can lead to prolonged psychological and physiological hyperactivation, which in turn can cause illness. Thus, conflicts in the workplace—whether with superiors or colleagues—may lead to stress-induced health impairments that result in an inability to attend work (Steers and Rhodes 1978). In conclusion, conflict-induced adverse health effects may cause increased involuntary absenteeism.

Apart from involuntary absenteeism, conflicts in the workplace may also result in increased voluntary absenteeism. Voluntary absenteeism is a short-term strategy for coping with stress (Quick et al. 1997). In particular, employees involved in a conflict may want to escape the conflict situation through voluntary absenteeism (Steers and Rhodes 1978). Here, sickness absence from work is not a health-related outcome, but rather a behavioral response to conflicts.

Furthermore, Psychological Contract Theory (Rousseau 1995) can explain the relationship between workplace conflict and voluntary absenteeism. A psychological contract entails 'individual beliefs, shaped by the organization, regarding terms of an exchange agreement between individuals and their organization' (Rousseau 1995, p. 9). The psychological contract may include the expectation to be treated with fairness, respect, and appreciation at work (Rai and Agarwal 2017). Exposure to burdensome conflicts at work is likely to fall short of employees' expectations of fair treatment or favorable working conditions. This can result in perceptions of psychological contract breach. Psychological contract breach occurs when the employee experiences that the organization or its agents (e.g., supervisors) fail to fulfil the reciprocal obligations of the psychological contract (Rai and Agarwal 2017). Not only conflicts with superiors, but also the non-interference of employers in conflicts among colleagues may cause perceptions of psychological contract breach, as employers then fail to fulfill their responsibilities of care towards their employees (Parzefall and Salin 2010). According to the Social Exchange Theory (Blau 1964), employees reciprocate an unfavorable treatment at work by adjusting their work-related attitudes and behaviors downwards (Robinson 2008). Due to psychological contract breach, employees may feel less obligated to attend work than in a situation without contract breach, resulting in voluntary absenteeism.

Only very few studies have analyzed the relation between workplace conflict and sickness absence. Using data from 1997, Böckerman and Ilmakunnas (2008) found that workplace conflict was positively related to self-reported sickness absences among Finnish workers. In a cross-sectional study, Giebels and Janssen (2005) revealed that conflict stress (i.e., the intra-psychic tension directly associated with interpersonal conflict at work) was positively related to absenteeism among Dutch workers. On the basis of pooled cross-sectional data, Lakiša et al. (2021) showed that workplace conflict—especially conflicts with managers—significantly increased the odds of sickness absence among employees in Latvia. Lastly, Sterud et al. (2022) investigated relations between conflicts and subsequent registry-based sick leave for a sample of employees from Norway. They found that conflicts with superiors represent a risk factor for sick leave, while associations between conflicts with colleagues and sick leave were largely non-significant. Furthermore, there is a substantial body of literature examining the relationship between workplace bullying and sickness absence (e.g., Kivimäki et al. 2000; Nielsen et al. 2016); however, bullying is not synonymous with workplace conflict (Leymann 1996). Overall, the following hypotheses are derived on the basis of these theoretical arguments and empirical findings:

H1a *Workplace conflicts with superiors are positively related to sickness absence.*

H1b *Workplace conflicts with colleagues are positively related to sickness absence.*

2.2 Workplace conflicts and voluntary turnover

Workplace conflicts may not only be related to sickness absence, but also to voluntary turnover. Turnover is defined as the movement of organizational members across the membership boundary of the organization (Price 1977). As is typical for research on turnover, this study focuses on individuals leaving rather than entering the organization. Employees either leave an organization voluntarily (i.e., the employee decides to terminate the employment relationship) or involuntarily (i.e., the employer decides to terminate the employment relationship; e.g., employer dismissal, corporate bankruptcy, downsizing) (Dess and Shaw 2001). Voluntary and involuntary turnover can be referred to as avoidable and unavoidable turnover, respectively (Price 2001). To avoid the costs of unwanted quits, it is crucial that human resource managers concern themselves with the determinants of voluntary turnover (for an overview, see e.g.: Price 2001).

Workplace conflicts can lead to withdrawal behavior as a coping strategy. Voluntary turnover represents a potential long-term strategy for coping with conflicts (Giebels and Janssen 2005). Thus, the employee might leave the organization to escape the conflict situation. In addition, Psychological Contract Theory (Rousseau 1995) can explain the relation between conflicts and turnover. As described above, conflicts with superiors or the non-interference of the employer in conflicts between colleagues can cause perceptions of psychological contract breach (Parzefall and Salin 2010). As a consequence of psychological contract breach, employees may not feel as obliged to continue working for their employer compared to a situation without contract breach, evoking voluntary turnover.

In line with these theoretical arguments, empirical studies found significant positive relations between interpersonal conflicts in the workplace and turnover intentions (Frone 2000; Giebels and Janssen 2005; Langove and Isha 2017; Medina et al. 2005; Morrison 2008; Palanci et al. 2021; Spector and Jex 1998). Research on the relation between workplace conflicts and actual turnover is more limited. West (2007) found a significant positive relationship between conflict with superiors and turnover. While some studies investigated the relation between conflict-related constructs and employees' quit behavior, they did not specifically focus on workplace conflicts. Instead, these studies examined factors such as abusive treatment (Tews et al. 2019), dysfunctional interpersonal tendencies (Carson et al. 2012), coworker antagonism (Chiaburu and Harrison 2008), dispute resolution (Van Gramberg et al. 2020), and adverse working conditions (Böckerman and Ilmakunnas 2009). Accordingly, the following hypotheses state:

H2a *Workplace conflicts with superiors are positively related to voluntary turnover.*

H2b *Workplace conflicts with colleagues are positively related to voluntary turnover.*

3 Data, sample, variables, and method

3.1 Data

The empirical analysis is based on data from the German Socio-Economic Panel (GSOEP), an annual population representative survey of about 30 000 individuals (Goebel et al. 2019). The GSOEP is a very suitable data source for this study for several reasons. First, its panel structure allows for longitudinal analyses. Second, the data enable a differentiation between conflicts with superiors and colleagues. Third, the data include information not only about the incidence of sickness absence, but also about the total number of sick days per year. Lastly, the GSOEP offers a large sample from various occupational groups and a rich set of relevant individual- and job-related control variables.[1]

3.2 Sample

While some variables (e.g., demographic variables, sickness absence, and turnover) are included in every survey year, others are assessed on a less regular basis in the GSOEP. Data on workplace conflicts are taken from the GSOEP waves in 1985, 1987, 1995, 2001, 2006, 2011, and 2016, because conflicts were assessed in these waves. The sample consists of German employees who are between 18 and 67 years old and work in full- or part-time jobs. Individuals older than 67 years are excluded from the sample because this is the current statutory retirement age in Germany. Apprentices, marginally employed individuals, and the self-employed are excluded to obtain a homogeneous study sample (e.g. Götz et al. 2018; Lakisa et al. 2021). The sample is further restricted to individuals with a maximum of 200 sick days per year, excluding extreme cases of prolonged absenteeism. Extended absence may raise concerns about the individual's ability to engage in workplace interactions, such as conflicts (see e.g., Götz et al. 2018). Singleton observations (i.e., individuals with only one observation) are dropped from the sample to ensure a meaningful comparison between the fixed effects and pooled cross-sectional estimations.[2] Observations with missing information on any of the relevant variables are excluded from the analyses.

Note that the samples of the sickness absence and voluntary turnover analyses are different. I do not use a mutual sample due to the characteristics of the dataset—particularly that sickness absence is assessed retrospectively while conflicts are not. The information on workplace conflicts and sickness absence must relate to the same employer. To ensure this, the sample for the analysis on sickness absence is restricted to individuals whose tenure equals at least two years at the time of the sickness absence assessment (see also: Lorenz and Goerke 2017). A tenure of at least

[1] For further information about the GSOEP see Wagner et al. (2007) and the website of the German Institute for Economic Research (DIW Berlin): https://www.diw.de/en/GSOEP. Schröder et al. (2020) provide an overview of the economic research potentials of the GSOEP.

[2] Dropping singleton observations might introduce a sample selection bias. To test this, I compared the means of the variables in the full sample to those in the reduced sample. Though most differences are significant, these differences are very small in magnitude, indicating that excluding singletons is unlikely to introduce meaningful sample selection bias.

two years cannot logically apply to the turnover sample, as this sample includes individuals who recently left their employment relationship. Restricting the sample to individuals with a tenure of two years (instead of one year) is necessary, since the interview month is not necessarily the same for the same individuals in different survey waves. Finally, individuals who changed their jobs before the month of the survey that assesses conflicts were excluded from the turnover sample. This ensures that voluntary turnover occurs after the conflicts assessment (instead of before), such that turnover can be a consequence (instead of an antecedent) of conflicts.

3.3 Variables

Workplace conflicts. In the GSOEP waves of 2006, 2011, and 2016, conflicts were assessed with the item 'With whom do you occasionally have arguments or conflicts that weigh upon you?' The first explanatory variable *conflicts with superiors* takes the value 1 if the person answers 'superiors at work' and 0 for all other answers (i.e., in the case of conflicts with no one or non-superiors). The second explanatory variable *burdensome conflicts with colleagues* takes the value 1 if the person answers 'work colleagues' and 0 for all other answers (i.e., in the case of conflicts with no one or non-colleagues).

Workplace conflicts were also assessed in the GSOEP in 1985, 1987, 1989, 1995, and 2001. Note that the relevant outcome variables for this study were not assessed in 1990, so that the data on conflicts from 1989 cannot be used. Slightly different items were used in these survey waves than the ones used in later waves. Conflicts with superiors were assessed with the item 'Do you often have conflicts with your boss?' The item 'Do you get on well with your colleagues?' can be interpreted as a rough measure of conflicts with colleagues. The answer categories were: 'applies fully,' 'applies partly,' and 'does not apply.' Dummy variables are created to match the other data (conflict = 1, no conflict = 0). For conflicts with the boss, the categories 'applies fully' and 'applies partly' are coded as 1, while 'does not apply' is coded as 0, following Ottenbacher (2016). In contrast, for conflicts with colleagues, 'applies partly' and 'does not apply' is coded as 1 and 'applies fully' as 0. The item measures whether individuals get along well with their colleagues; therefore, affirmative responses are coded as 0, indicating that there are likely no burdensome conflicts. For a review on scale adaptation see Heggestad et al. (2019).

Sickness absence. The question on the total number of sick days within one year reads: 'How many days were you unable to work in [survey year–1] due to illness? Please state the total number of days, not just the number of days for which you had an official note from your doctor.' The answer categories were: (a) None and (b) A total of X days. Given answers were used to generate the dependent variable *sick days per year* which takes non-negative integer values.

To complement the number of sick days, the binary variable *incidence of absence* is used, which takes the value 1 if an individual was sick for at least 1 day per year, and 0 if the individual had no sickness absence. On the one hand, the total number of lost days due to sickness could be regarded as more economically relevant than the incidence of sickness absence. On the other hand, self-reports are used and the inci-

dence of sickness absence may suffer less from measurement error than the number of sick days.

Note that in the GSOEP, information on sickness absence relates to the year before the survey year (t–1), while workplace conflicts are assessed at the survey date (t). To ensure that the information applies to the same year, the retrospective information on sickness absence recorded in the subsequent survey wave was matched with the current information on workplace conflicts and controls in the corresponding survey wave. Accordingly, the dependent variable captures sick days during the months immediately after the conflict assessment.[3]

Voluntary turnover. A further dependent variable is turnover initiated by the employee. Turnover was assessed with the yes-or-no question: 'Have you left a job since December 31, [survey year–2]?' If the answer was affirmative, individuals were further asked: 'How did that job end?' The binary variable *voluntary turnover* takes the value 1 if the answer category 'I resigned' applies, and 0 otherwise, i.e., for no turnover. Again, the retrospective information on turnover from the subsequent survey wave was matched with the current information on workplace conflicts and controls of the relevant wave.

Controls. A rich set of control variables is used, including individual- and job-related characteristics that have been shown to be related to sickness absence (Mastekaasa 2000; Barmby et al. 2002; Bekker et al. 2009; Piha et al. 2010; d'Errico and Costa 2012; Arnold et al. 2018) and voluntary turnover (Griffeth et al. 2000; Rubenstein et al. 2018). Controls regarding individual characteristics include gender (1 = female), age (ranging from 18 to 67 years), marital status (1 = married), number of children in the household, and years of schooling. A dummy for the place of residence in East Germany (1 = east) is also used as a control. In addition, the following job-related controls are used: gross hourly income, actual working hours (per week), firm size (3 categories), tenure, occupation (3 categories), and industry (7 categories). Survey year dummies are also included as controls.

3.4 Method

The following baseline model is used for the analyses:

$$Employee\,behavior_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * burdensome\,conflicts with\,superiors_{i,t} + \beta_2 * burdensome\,conflicts\,with\,colleagues_{i,t} + \gamma^* X_{i,t} + u_{i,t}.$$

The dependent variable $employeebehavior_{i,t}$ stands for sickness absence or voluntary turnover of individual *i* in year *t*, which are the outcome variables of interest in this study. Sickness absence is measured as the total number of sick days per year or

[3] Note that sick days in the months before the assessment of conflicts (i.e., before the survey month) are also included in this variable because there is annual (not monthly) information on sick days in the dataset. However, this is only a minor concern for two reasons. First, the wording of the item 'With whom do you occasionally have arguments or conflicts that weigh upon you?' suggests that conflicts likely have not only existed at the time of the interview but also beforehand. Therefore, sick days before the interview month might also be a result of conflicts. Second, most interviews were conducted in early months of a year, such that reverse causality problems (i.e., sickness absence affecting conflicts) are mitigated.

a dummy for the incidence of absence in a year. Voluntary turnover is a dummy indicating whether the individual chose to leave the organization or not. The explanatory variables refer to conflicts at work, distinguishing between conflicts with superiors and colleagues. The impact of these conflicts on employee behavior is captured by β_1 and β_2. Further, $X_{i,t}$ is the vector of control variables and $u_{i,t}$ is the error term.

For sickness absence as the outcome variable, I start with pooled cross-sectional analyses. Since sickness absence days can only take non-negative values, I apply a pooled negative binomial model (NEGBIN) with heteroscedasticity robust standard errors. The overdispersion parameter α corresponds to 3.48. The negative binomial model is suitable for such overdispersed data. In addition, I make use of a pooled ordinary least squares (OLS) regression with heteroscedasticity robust standard errors. To obtain valid estimates of partial effects, OLS is feasible because the functional form does not need to be perfectly right (see also: Lorenz and Goerke 2017). Furthermore, individual fixed-effects panel estimations (FE) are applied to examine whether intraindividual changes in workplace conflicts are associated with intraindividual changes in sickness absence. FE makes use of the longitudinal nature of the data and eliminates the problem of time-constant unobserved heterogeneity. The Hausman test (1978) is performed and its significant result points to the use of a fixed-effects model being preferable over the use of a random-effects model. FE is also applied for the analyses on the incidence of sickness absence and voluntary turnover, again making use of the panel structure of the data.

Overall, the cross-sectional analyses offer valuable complementary insights to the panel analyses by capturing variations between employees or groups. Utilizing both approaches offers a more comprehensive perspective that captures individual changes alongside group differences, achieving a deeper understanding of the data.

4 Results

4.1 Descriptive statistics

Table 1 provides an overview of the descriptive statistics of the main variables in the sickness absence and voluntary turnover samples. The unbalanced panel for the analysis on sickness absence consists of 25 470 observations and 9 587 individuals. About 15% of individuals in the sample occasionally have burdensome conflicts with superiors and 16% report occasionally having burdensome conflicts with colleagues. The average number of sick days amounts to 9.58 days per year. The standard deviation of 19.50 days indicates that there is a lot of variation. The distribution of sick days in the sample is skewed to the right with a mass point at zero. About 60% of the sample have at least one day of sickness absence per year. Individuals who are involved in conflicts with superiors miss 11.25 days due to sickness absence, while individuals without conflicts with superiors miss 9.27 days due to sickness absence on average per year ($p<0.01$, two-sided t-test). In comparison, the average number of sick days per year is 10.20 for individuals who have conflicts with colleagues and 9.46 for individuals without conflicts with colleagues ($p<0.05$, two-sided t-test).

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of main variables

Variable	Sickness absence sample				Voluntary turnover sample			
	Mean	Std. dev	Min.; Max	Obs	Mean	Std. dev	Min.; Max	Obs
Explanatory variables								
Burdensome conflicts with superiors	0.15	0.36	0; 1	25 470	0.13	0.34	0; 1	23 367
Burdensome conflicts with colleagues	0.16	0.37	0; 1	25 470	0.15	0.36	0; 1	23 367
Dependent variables								
Sick days per year	9.58	19.50	0; 200	25 470				
Incidence of absence	0.60	0.49	0; 1	25 470				
Voluntary turnover					0.02	0.15	0; 1	23 367

The unbalanced panel for the analysis on turnover consists of 23 367 observations and 8 965 individuals. About 2% of the sample left the organization because they resigned. The differences in voluntary turnover between individuals with vs. without conflicts with superiors (4.14% vs. 1.96%) and between individuals with vs. without conflicts with colleagues (3.02% vs. 2.12%) are significant ($p<0.01$, respectively, two-sided *t*-tests). Table 3 in the appendix presents the descriptive statistics for the control variables.

4.2 Multivariate statistics

Table 2 reports the main results. Model 1 estimates a pooled negative binomial regression with heteroscedasticity robust standard errors, controlling for individual- and job-related characteristics, region, and survey year. Burdensome conflicts with superiors are associated with a 22% increase in the expected number of sick days ceteris paribus ($p<0.01$). The results from pooled OLS estimations in Model 2 reveal that individuals involved in conflicts with superiors are on average around 2.395 additional days absent per year compared to individuals who are not involved in such conflicts ($p<0.01$). Conflicts with colleagues are not significantly related to sickness absence in these models.

Since individuals may differ in time-invariant, unobserved characteristics which could affect the relation of interest, individual fixed-effects panel estimations are applied in Model 3. Thereby, I make use of the longitudinal structure of the data. The results show that having conflicts with superiors is associated with on average around 1.357 additional absence days per year compared to a situation without such conflicts ($p<0.01$). Again, conflicts with colleagues do not seem to affect sickness absence. In Model 4, a dummy for the incidence of absence is the dependent variable. Burdensome conflicts with superiors are positively related to the incidence of absence ($p<0.01$), while the estimated coefficient for conflicts with colleagues is insignificant.

In sum, independent of the chosen estimation method, burdensome conflicts with superiors are significantly positively related to sickness absence. These results clearly

Table 2 The impact of workplace conflicts on sickness absence and voluntary turnover

Dependent variable	Sick days per year			Incidence of absence	Voluntary turnover
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Pooled NEGBIN	Pooled OLS	FE	FE	FE
Burdensome conflicts with superiors	0.221***	2.395***	1.357***	0.046***	0.012***
	(0.033)	(0.368)	(0.468)	(0.010)	(0.004)
Burdensome conflicts with colleagues	0.022	0.343	−0.358	−0.004	0.004
	(0.032)	(0.330)	(0.416)	(0.010)	(0.004)
Individual controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Job-related controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Survey year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	25 470	25 470	25 470	25 470	23,367
Individuals	9 587	9 587	9 587	9 587	8,965
Pseudo R-squared	0.007	0.035	0.006	0.000	0.161

***$p<0.01$, **$p<0.05$, *$p<0.1$. Robust standard errors clustered at the individual level in parentheses. Individual-related controls: gender, age, marital status, number of children in the household, residence in east or west Germany, and years of schooling. Job-related controls: gross hourly income, actual working hours per week, firm size, tenure, industry, and occupation. Survey year dummies are also included as controls. Table 4 in the appendix shows the results for the control variables

support H1a. Somewhat surprisingly, H1b is not supported. There is no significant link between burdensome conflicts with colleagues and sickness absence.

Model 5 analyses the relation between workplace conflicts and voluntary turnover by applying individual fixed-effects panel estimations. Conflicts with superiors are positively related to voluntary turnover ($p<0.01$), supporting H2a. Regarding conflicts with colleagues, there is no significant relation to voluntary turnover. Somewhat surprisingly, H2b is not supported.

4.3 Heterogeneity analyses

The associations between conflicts and employee behavior might differ with workers' circumstances and characteristics. I continue by exploring such potential differences.

Firstly, full-time and part-time workers might be affected by conflicts with different intensity. The sample is split into full- and part-time workers. The results are given in Table 5. The relations between conflicts with superiors and sickness absence as well as voluntary turnover seem to be driven by full-time workers. Interestingly, the relation between burdensome conflicts with superiors and voluntary turnover is statistically insignificant for part-time workers. One possible explanation is that part-time workers are less exposed to such conflicts given their lower working time. Secondly, employees' age could also matter for the effects of workplace conflicts. The sample split in Table 6 shows that both younger and older workers exhibit increased sickness absence in response to conflicts with superiors. Interestingly, younger employees tend to leave the organization after conflicts with colleagues, whereas older employees do

so after conflicts with superiors. Thirdly, an exploratory sample split is conducted based on gender. For women, conflicts with colleagues are negatively associated with sick days in the within-estimation. They might try to avoid conflict escalation by attending work. Notably, conflicts with colleagues are significantly positively related to voluntary turnover only for women. One reason could be that women tend to set more value on their job environment than men (Chevalier 2007). Overall, the sample splits suggest that workers' responses to workplace conflicts differ to some extent by employment status, age, and gender.

5 Robustness checks

As a first robustness check, the models are re-estimated using only data from 2006 onwards, excluding older data. The wording of the items used to assess workplace conflict changed slightly in 2006, although the underlying construct remained the same. The results shown in Table 8 in the appendix are mostly consistent with those obtained from the full sample. Yet the coefficient of conflicts with superiors is insignificant in model (3). This missing statistical significance in the individual fixed-effects panel estimations is likely explained by the low within variance of the variable burdensome conflicts with superiors and the reduced sample size. Moreover, in contrast to H1b, model (3) shows a significant and negative relationship between conflicts with colleagues and sick days ($p < 0.05$), which is surprising. This negative relation might be explained by pressures to attend to avoid conflict escalation.

To ensure that outliers are not dominating the results, the estimations are rerun excluding observations with over 30 absent days per year. The results are reported in Table 9 in the appendix. Conflicts with superiors show a significant positive relation to sickness absence in all models. The magnitude of the coefficients diminishes compared to the main results. In models (1) and (2) conflicts with colleagues are significantly positively associated with sick days, which is in contrast to the insignificant main results and the significant negative relation in model (3) of Table 5. Overall, the findings on the relationship between burdensome conflicts with colleagues and sick days seem to be mixed.

Finally, in an attempt to disentangle motivational and health-related absenteeism, I compare the estimations with and without employees' self-reported health as a control variable (see e.g., Lorenz and Goerke 2017 for a similar approach). This is shown in Table 10. Regarding sickness absence, the magnitudes of the estimated conflicts coefficients decline to some extent when health is included as a control. Thus, the results hint at health as a transmission channel in the relation between workplace conflicts with superiors and sickness absence. However, the conflicts coefficients remain of moderate size and significant after controlling for health, which suggests that not only health but also motivation to attend are relevant explanatory mechanisms. Furthermore, health does not emerge as a relevant mechanism in explaining voluntary turnover. In sum, there is suggestive evidence that both health and motivation might serve as transmission channels in the relation between workplace conflicts with superiors and sickness absence.

6 Discussion

This study investigated conflicts with superiors and colleagues as potential risk factors for sickness absence and voluntary turnover. Burdensome conflicts with superiors were significantly positively related to sickness absence and voluntary turnover. Burdensome conflicts with colleagues showed no clear effects.

It is a priori ambiguous whether conflicts with colleagues or with superiors might have more detrimental effects on sickness absence and voluntary turnover. On the one hand, conflicts with colleagues may be more detrimental, as individuals typically spend more time interacting with their peers than with their superiors. As a result, they are more often exposed to the conflict. On the other hand, conflicts with superiors might have more far-reaching consequences for individuals, such as potentially limiting their career opportunities and causing performance pressure. The results show that conflicts with superiors are positively associated with sickness absence. Yet the relation between conflicts with colleagues and sickness absence is mostly insignificant. This is in line with Sterud et al. (2022) who also found an insignificant relation between conflicts with colleagues and sickness absence.

Regarding voluntary turnover, in comparison to conflicts with superiors, conflicts with colleagues may not to the same extent pose a threat to an individual's professional work role in terms of opportunities for professional development and career possibilities (Sterud et al. 2022). Moreover, since supervisors act as agents or representatives of the organization, perceptions of psychological contract breach may be stronger in the case of conflicts with superiors as opposed to conflicts with colleagues. This might result in stronger negative reciprocity towards superiors. The results support the notion that some employees quit bosses, not jobs. Furthermore, the magnitude of the coefficients is relatively low for voluntary turnover. In contrast, the effect of interpersonal conflicts on turnover intentions was moderate in previous studies (e.g., Spector and Jex 1998; Palanci et al. 2021). This hints at an intention-behavior gap, meaning that not all employees actually realize their turnover intentions (Sheeran and Webb 2016).

6.1 Limitations

This study is hampered by some limitations. First, the study does not allow for establishing causal effects, but possible endogeneity issues are mitigated to some extent. By using a rich set of control variables, omitted variable bias is reduced resulting in more precise parameter estimates. Panel estimations were applied to eliminate the problem of time-constant unobserved heterogeneity. Yet the reported estimation results may be biased if conflict-seeking behavior or resilience to conflict changes over time.

Second, the empirical analysis is based on self-reported data. Self-reports are prone to inaccuracies due to memory recall issues, social desirability bias, and self-delusion (Johns and Miraglia 2015). Regarding sickness absence, self-reported data may be less reliable than administrative data due to potential recall bias. However, research has shown relatively good agreement between these two sources (Ferrie et al. 2005; Voss et al. 2008). Additionally, self-reports on sickness absence have the advantage

of capturing sick days that may not be officially recorded (Götz et al. 2018). Furthermore, social desirability tendencies could cause employees to underreport workplace conflicts, sickness absence, and quits to present themselves or their organization in a better light. Thus, the effect sizes observed in this study likely underestimate the true impact of workplace conflicts. Underestimation leads to more cautious and reliable estimates, ensuring the findings are conservative and credible. It also prevents the overstatement of results that may not truly exist. Overall, despite potential underreporting, this study still reveals an effect.

Third, workplace conflicts are measured using slightly different items in the surveys conducted before 2006 compared to those from 2006 onward, as detailed in the variables section. Nevertheless, incorporating data from all available waves enhances the statistical power of the analyses and leads to more robust conclusions, which may be considered more important than the minor measurement inconsistencies. The core construct remains intact, albeit assessed slightly differently.

Finally, the dataset lacks detailed information on the nature, duration, and severity of the conflicts, which could impact the outcomes differently. This results in an incomplete understanding of the conflict. The study still provides valuable insights into overarching dynamics and serves as a foundation for further analyses, even if not all specific details of a conflict are captured.

6.2 Future research directions

This study points to several avenues for future research. First, although the data offer the advantage of differentiating between conflicts with superiors and colleagues, the GSOEP survey was not developed for the particular purpose of research on workplace conflicts. For example, the dataset does not contain information about the nature, prevalence, and content of the conflict. Research on workplace conflict often distinguishes task conflict from relationship conflict (e.g., Jehn 1995). Task conflict, or cognitive conflict, refers to perceived disagreements about the substantive content of decisions and involves incompatibilities in ideas and opinions. Relationship conflict, or affective conflict, arises from interpersonal incompatibilities not directly related to the task, and typically includes animosity and tension (Jehn 1995). Kuriakose et al. (2019) found that the different types of conflict each adversely affected employee wellbeing. Future research could compare relationship conflict and task conflict as potential antecedents of sickness absence and voluntary turnover.

Second, sickness absence reasons, workplace accidents, and work engagement were not assessed in the surveys. Future research could collect such absence reasons to disentangle health- and motivation-induced absenteeism. In terms of voluntary turnover, separation interviews could offer insights into the underlying reasons.

Third, future research could consider whether individuals who voluntarily quit their jobs continue to stay in the labor market or drop out of employment. If some workers already have an intention to exit the labor market due to different reasons (motivation, burnout, or other unobserved factors), then they may disengage from their job, and consequently, have conflicts with their superiors and colleagues. Investigating workers' subsequent labor-market trajectories could help to mitigate this potential reverse causality issue.

Fourth, the sample of this study consists of individuals from a wide variety of jobs, which rules out the possibility of cohort-specific effects. Nevertheless, restricting the sample to full- and part-time employees renders some fractions of the labor market unconsidered, limiting the applicability and external validity of the findings. Future research could focus on other groups, such as self-employed workers and apprentices.

Fifth, the empirical findings are based on data from Germany. The results may not be generalizable to other countries with different regulations of sick leave or with different presenteeism tendencies. Future research should examine whether the findings are universal, or if they are influenced by country-specific factors, such as workplace norms and labor laws.

Sixth, only very few studies used the data on workplace conflicts from the GSOEP so far (e.g., Heywood et al. 2005; Ottenbacher 2016). Future research could consider using the GSOEP dataset to explore further antecedents and outcomes of workplace conflicts. However, the most recent conflict data were from 2016. This raises the question as to whether the results also hold nowadays. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, changes in working conditions have emerged. One long-term change is increased telecommuting (Mohammadi et al. 2022). Telecommuting implies less in-person interactions so that employees can escape interpersonal conflicts more easily. In the case of increased teleworking, the adverse effects of workplace conflicts on sickness absence and voluntary turnover might decrease to some extent (Bollestad et al. 2022). Future research should analyze the relations of interest with post-pandemic data and explore the role of remote work.

Seventh, the focus of this study is on negative conflict-induced outcomes, but this shall not undermine the beneficial outcomes of conflicts in certain contexts. An optimistic view of conflict is grounded on the assumption that conflicts surface issues which otherwise might be neglected (De Dreu and Weingart 2003). For instance, in top management teams task conflicts have been shown to positively affect decision quality (Amason 1996). A meta-analysis by De Dreu and Weingart (2003), however, revealed that both task and relationship conflict hurt team member satisfaction and team performance. Thus, conflicts may only be beneficial for specific outcomes or under specific circumstances, and future research should devote further efforts towards detecting these circumstances. Finally, given the rather surprising findings, a closer examination of how conflicts with colleagues influence sickness absence and voluntary turnover should be a priority for future research.

6.3 Implications for practice

The results show that workplace conflicts with superiors are significantly positively related to sickness absence and voluntary turnover. Sickness absence causes costs due to continued payment of remuneration, overtime hours of present employees, and productivity losses (Stephan 1991). The individual fixed-effects panel estimations show that having conflicts with superiors leads to about 1.357 additional sick days per employee per year on average. This represents an increase of 13.57%, considering that the mean number of sick days in the sample is about 10 days per year. Voluntary turnover is related to costs due to separation, replacement, new-hire training, general administration, as well as the loss of human and social capital (Dess and

Shaw 2001). The costs of an employee leaving are often roughly approximated as 1.5 times the annual salary of the job (Phillips 1990). This study suggests that conflict prevention and resolution are crucial to reduce sickness absence and voluntary turnover and the associated costs.

Thus, organizations could offer conflict management trainings to employees. When conducting cost–benefit analyses prior to the introduction of conflict management trainings, it is recommended to also consider the expected cost reduction resulting from decreased sickness absence and voluntary turnover. Furthermore, employee surveys might prove useful to identify the occurrence of workplace conflicts in the organization. Regarding conflict resolution, Giebels and Janssen (2005) found that offering third-party help can mitigate the adverse effects of conflict stress on absenteeism. Moreover, early intervention is necessary in practice to prevent conflicts from escalating to higher levels (Zapf and Gross 2001). Leon-Perez et al. (2015) showed that managing conflicts in a cooperative and active way (i.e., problem solving) can prevent them from escalating to higher emotional levels, while avoiding conflicts can result in conflict escalation. Furthermore, Dunford et al. (2020) revealed that employees have lower turnover rates, if their managers provide high-quality conflict management interviews.

As the associations were only evident for conflicts with superiors, organizations should be aware of the importance of the relationships between superiors and their subordinates for employee behavior. The results also provide support for the notion that some employees might quit bosses, not jobs.

7 Conclusion

This study utilizes longitudinal data from the GSOEP to demonstrate the relevance of workplace conflicts for both sickness absence and voluntary turnover. The results indicate a significant positive association between conflicts with superiors and both sickness absence and voluntary turnover. The findings also suggest that health may serve as a transmission channel for the relationship between conflicts with superiors and sickness absence. Somewhat surprisingly, burdensome conflicts with colleagues do not appear to influence how often employees call in sick or whether they decide to quit in the full sample. The sample splits suggest that workers' responses to workplace conflicts differ to some extent by employment status, age, and gender. This study underscores the importance of conflict prevention and resolution to mitigate the costs associated with sickness absence and voluntary turnover. Conflicts—particularly those involving superiors—seem to be detrimental, potentially leading to higher employee absence and voluntary turnover.

Table 3 Descriptive statistics of control variables

	Sickness absence sample 25470 observations			Voluntary turnover sample 23367 observations		
	Mean	Std. dev	Min.; Max	Mean	Std. dev	Min.; Max
Individual-related characteristics						
Age	43.96	9.59	18; 66	43.96	9.46	18; 66
Female	0.41	0.49	0; 1	0.45	0.50	0; 1
Married	0.74	0.44	0; 1	0.71	0.45	0; 1
Number of children	0.79	1.02	0; 8	0.79	1.02	0; 8
East Germany	0.20	0.44	0; 1	0.25	0.44	0; 1
Years of schooling	12.39	2.76	7; 18	12.77	2.70	7; 18
Job-related characteristics						
Gross income per hour	15.41	11.09	0; 416.28	16.21	8.83	0; 237.79
Actual weekly working hours	39.93	9.72	1; 99	39.79	10.08	1; 99.90
Tenure	14.35	9.53	0.58; 49.83	13.20	9.97	0; 49.83
Firm size						
Firm size (<20 employees)	0.16	0.36	0; 1	0.18	0.38	0; 1
Firm size (20–199 employees)	0.28	0.45	0; 1	0.29	0.46	0; 1
Firm size (>=200 employees)	0.56	0.50	0; 1	0.53	0.50	0; 1
Occupation dummies	Two broad occupation dummies for white-collar and civil servant (reference group: blue collar)					
Industry dummies	Six broad industry dummies for manufacturing, construction, trade, transport, banking/insurance, and services (reference group: agriculture, energy, mining, and other)					

Table 4 Full regression table with control variables

Dependent variable	Sick days per year			Incidence of absence	Voluntary turnover
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Pooled NEGBIN	Pooled OLS	FE	FE	FE
Burdensome conflicts with superiors	0.221***	2.395***	1.357***	0.046***	0.012***
	(0.033)	(0.368)	(0.468)	(0.010)	(0.004)
Burdensome conflicts with colleagues	0.022	0.343	−0.358	−0.004	0.004
	(0.032)	(0.330)	(0.416)	(0.010)	(0.004)
Age	0.015***	0.167***	0.232***	0.005***	−0.002***
	(0.002)	(0.019)	(0.083)	(0.002)	(0.001)
Female	0.222***	2.178***	–	–	–
	(0.034)	(0.348)			
Married	−0.021	−0.357	−0.057	−0.009	−0.001
	(0.033)	(0.341)	(0.619)	(0.014)	(0.005)
Number of children	0.023	0.303**	0.026	−0.006	−0.002
	(0.014)	(0.150)	(0.212)	(0.005)	(0.002)
East Germany	0.083**	0.359	1.318	−0.023	−0.001
	(0.036)	(0.349)	(1.413)	(0.063)	(0.031)
Years of schooling	−0.083***	−0.718***	0.273	0.009	−0.002
	(0.007)	(0.059)	(0.427)	(0.011)	(0.005)
Gross income per hour	−0.003**	−0.026**	−0.006	0.000	−0.001***
	(0.001)	(0.011)	(0.014)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Actual weekly working hours	0.000	0.020	0.003	0.000	−0.000
	(0.002)	(0.015)	(0.028)	(0.001)	(0.000)
Tenure	−0.000	−0.010	0.110***	0.003***	0.002***
	(0.002)	(0.018)	(0.038)	(0.001)	(0.000)
Firm size (reference: < 20)					
20–199 employees	0.254***	2.412***	1.111	0.026	−0.012
	(0.047)	(0.358)	(0.732)	(0.018)	(0.007)
> = 200 employees	0.399***	4.088***	1.658**	0.047**	−0.022***
	(0.044)	(0.348)	(0.779)	(0.019)	(0.008)
Occupation dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Industry dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	2.443***	9.458***	−6.487	0.226	0.151**
	(0.160)	(1.374)	(7.038)	(0.174)	(0.068)
Observations	25 470	25 470	25 470	25 470	23,367
Individuals	9 587	9 587	9 587	9 587	8,965
Pseudo R-squared	0.007	0.035	0.006	0.000	0.161

***$p<0.01$, **$p<0.05$, *$p<0.1$. Robust standard errors clustered at the individual level in parentheses

Table 5 Robustness check: splitting the sample into full- and part-time workers

Dependent variable	Sick days per year			Incidence of absence	Voluntary turnover
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Pooled NEGBIN	Pooled OLS	FE	FE	FE
Full-time workers					
Burdensome conflicts with superiors	0.236***	2.510***	1.567***	0.044***	0.011**
	(0.035)	(0.389)	(0.486)	(0.011)	(0.004)
Burdensome conflicts with colleagues	0.000	0.033	−0.483	−0.008	0.001
	(0.034)	(0.343)	(0.460)	(0.011)	(0.004)
Individual controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Job-related controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Survey year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	20 937	20 937	20 937	20 937	18,470
Individuals	8 297	8 297	8 297	8 297	7,553
Pseudo R-squared	0.008	0.040	0.010	0.000	0.188
Part-time workers					
Burdensome conflicts with superiors	0.147	2.080*	0.129	0.047	0.010
	(0.095)	(1.133)	(1.982)	(0.034)	(0.014)
Burdensome conflicts with colleagues	0.157*	1.907*	−1.614	−0.004	0.009
	(0.083)	(0.996)	(1.317)	(0.027)	(0.012)
Individual controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Job-related controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Survey year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	4 533	4 533	4 533	4 533	4,897
Individuals	2 309	2 309	2 309	2 309	2,528
Pseudo R-squared	0.007	0.031	0.001	0.017	0.004

***$p<0.01$, **$p<0.05$, *$p<0.1$. Robust standard errors clustered at the individual level in parentheses. Individual-related controls: gender, age, marital status, number of children in the household, residence in east or west Germany, and years of schooling. Job-related controls: gross hourly income, actual working hours per week, firm size, tenure, industry, and occupation. Survey year dummies are also included as controls

Table 6 Robustness check: splitting the sample by age

Dependent variable	Sick days per year			Incidence of absence	Voluntary turnover
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Pooled NEGBIN	Pooled OLS	FE	FE	FE
Younger workers (Age≤40)					
Burdensome conflicts with superiors	0.152***	1.245***	1.127*	0.061***	0.014
	(0.046)	(0.429)	(0.675)	(0.019)	(0.009)
Burdensome conflicts with colleagues	0.058	0.592	−0.539	−0.023	0.025***
	(0.049)	(0.448)	(0.708)	(0.019)	(0.009)
Individual controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Job-related controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Survey year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	9 088	9 088	9 088	9 088	8 413
Individuals	5 047	5 047	5 047	5 047	4 850
Pseudo R-squared	0.006	0.032	0.005	0.000	0.185
Older workers (Age>40)					
Burdensome conflicts with superiors	0.279***	3.221***	1.390*	0.042***	0.016***
	(0.045)	(0.542)	(0.762)	(0.015)	(0.005)
Burdensome conflicts with colleagues	−0.003	0.217	−0.216	0.008	−0.002
	(0.041)	(0.447)	(0.632)	(0.013)	(0.004)
Individual controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Job-related controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Survey year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	16 382	16 382	16 382	16 382	14 954
Individuals	7 731	7 731	7 731	7 731	7 072
Pseudo R-squared	0.007	0.036	0.000	0.003	0.009

***$p<0.01$, **$p<0.05$, *$p<0.1$. Robust standard errors clustered at the individual level in parentheses. Individual-related controls: gender, age, marital status, number of children in the household, residence in east or west Germany, and years of schooling. Job-related controls: gross hourly income, actual working hours per week, firm size, tenure, industry, and occupation. Survey year dummies are also included as controls

Table 7 Robustness check: splitting the sample by gender

Dependent variable	Sick days per year			Incidence of absence	Voluntary turnover
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Pooled NEGBIN	Pooled OLS	FE	FE	FE
Women					
Burdensome conflicts with superiors	0.229***	2.711***	0.570	0.046***	0.017**
	(0.053)	(0.649)	(0.797)	(0.017)	(0.007)
Burdensome conflicts with colleagues	0.020	0.236	−1.257*	−0.012	0.011*
	(0.049)	(0.543)	(0.662)	(0.015)	(0.006)
Individual controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Job-related controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Survey year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	10 534	10 534	10 534	10 534	10 430
Individuals	4 029	4 029	4 029	4 029	4 043
Pseudo R-squared	0.007	0.032	0.010	0.005	0.084
Men					
Burdensome conflicts with superiors	0.227***	2.264***	1.713***	0.045***	0.009*
	(0.042)	(0.448)	(0.574)	(0.013)	(0.005)
Burdensome conflicts with colleagues	0.026	0.379	0.228	0.001	−0.001
	(0.042)	(0.412)	(0.531)	(0.013)	(0.004)
Individual controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Job-related controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Survey year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	14 936	14 936	14 936	14 936	12 937
Individuals	5 558	5 558	5 558	5 558	4 922
Pseudo R-squared	0.008	0.039	0.002	0.000	0.207

***$p<0.01$, **$p<0.05$, *$p<0.1$. Robust standard errors clustered at the individual level in parentheses. Individual-related controls: gender, age, marital status, number of children in the household, residence in east or west Germany, and years of schooling. Job-related controls: gross hourly income, actual working hours per week, firm size, tenure, industry, and occupation. Survey year dummies are also included as controls

Table 8 Robustness check: using recent conflicts data from 2006 onwards

Dependent variable	Sick days per year			Incidence of absence	Voluntary turnover
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Pooled NEGBIN	Pooled OLS	FE	FE	FE
Burdensome conflicts with superiors	0.241***	2.795***	1.219	0.053***	0.020***
	(0.056)	(0.672)	(0.973)	(0.019)	(0.006)
Burdensome conflicts with colleagues	−0.030	−0.151	−1.514**	−0.022	0.001
	(0.045)	(0.454)	(0.645)	(0.016)	(0.005)
Individual controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Job-related controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Survey year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	13 702	13 702	13 702	13 702	15 931
Individuals	7 009	7 009	7 009	7 009	8 075
Pseudo R-squared	0.006	0.030	0.014	0.000	0.012

***$p<0.01$, **$p<0.05$, *$p<0.1$. Robust standard errors clustered at the individual level in parentheses. Individual-related controls: gender, age, marital status, number of children in the household, residence in east or west Germany, and years of schooling. Job-related controls: gross hourly income, actual working hours per week, firm size, tenure, industry, and occupation. Survey year dummies are also included as controls

Table 9 Robustness check: excluding observations with sick days > 30

Dependent variable	Sick days per year		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Pooled NEGBIN	Pooled OLS	FE
Burdensome conflicts with superiors	0.211***	1.223***	0.591***
	(0.025)	(0.147)	(0.173)
Burdensome conflicts with colleagues	0.053**	0.282**	−0.135
	(0.024)	(0.136)	(0.159)
Individual controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Job-related controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Survey year	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	23 802	23 802	23 802
Individuals	9 494	9 494	9 494
Pseudo R-squared	0.005	0.044	0.001

***$p<0.01$, **$p<0.05$, *$p<0.1$. Robust standard errors clustered at the individual level in parentheses. Individual-related controls: gender, age, marital status, number of children in the household, residence in east or west Germany, and years of schooling. Job-related controls: gross hourly income, actual working hours per week, firm size, tenure, industry, and occupation. Survey year dummies are also included as controls

Table 10 Self-reported health as a potential transmission channel

Dependent variable	Sick days per year						Incidence of absence		Voluntary turnover	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
	Pooled NEGBIN	Pooled NEGBIN	Pooled OLS	Pooled OLS	FE	FE	FE	FE	FE	FE
Burdensome conflicts with superiors	0.237***	0.132***	2.518***	1.432***	1.148**	0.956*	0.046***	0.044***	0.013***	0.012***
	(0.038)	(0.036)	(0.420)	(0.401)	(0.537)	(0.521)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Burdensome conflicts with colleagues	0.018	−0.036	0.308	−0.345	−0.518	−0.585	−0.010	−0.010	0.004	0.004
	(0.036)	(0.035)	(0.360)	(0.347)	(0.431)	(0.430)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Health (ref.: bad)										
Poor		−0.751***		−22.463***		−18.275***		−0.048		0.012
		(0.089)		(3.298)		(4.234)		(0.034)		(0.008)
Satisfactory		−1.387***		−32.035***		−25.431***		−0.105***		0.004
		(0.085)		(3.235)		(4.235)		(0.034)		(0.008)
Good		−1.792***		−35.057***		−27.792***		−0.134***		0.003
		(0.085)		(3.229)		(4.229)		(0.034)		(0.008)
Very good		−2.134***		−36.687***		−27.783***		−0.148***		0.003
		(0.099)		(3.235)		(4.227)		(0.037)		(0.009)
Individual controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Job-related controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Survey year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	20 545	20 545	20 545	20 545	20 545	20 545	20 545	20 545	23 241	23 241
Individuals	8 431	8 431	8 431	8 431	8 431	8 431	8 431	8 431	8 960	8 960
Pseudo R-squared	0.007	0.015	0.032	0.101	0.004	0.058	0.000	0.005	0.000	0.000

***$p<0.01$, **$p<0.05$, *$p<0.1$. Robust standard errors clustered at the individual level in parentheses. Individual-related controls: gender, age, marital status, number of children in the household, residence in east or west Germany, and years of schooling. Job-related controls: gross hourly income, actual working hours per week, firm size, tenure, industry, and occupation. Survey year dummies are also included as controls

Appendix

See Tables 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10.

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