Does the type of track incident (in terms of victim status) affect return to work time in train operators working for Transport for London?

Dr Sheetal Chavda, 2014

ABSTRACT

Background: Track incidents including near misses and those leading to serious injury or death are a psychological hazard for train operators. Few studies have investigated the impact that near misses have on sickness absence and no study has directly looked at how train operators are affected depending on what happens to the victim of the incident.

Aims: To compare sickness absence of train operators following track incidents categorised by victim status. In addition, to ascertain the impact of near misses (i.e. when there is no or minor injury to the victim) on sickness absence.

Methods: A total of 687 historical track incidents were analysed from period April 2008 to October 2013. Track incidents were divided into 4 categories according to victim status (near miss - platform, near miss - track, significant injury and fatality). Information was then collected on sickness absence of train operators following the event along with additional data such as age, gender and previous relevant history.

Results: There is a significant difference in sickness absence taken after incidents that resulted in ‘no injury’ compared to ‘injury’ incidents (p=0.000). There is also a significant difference in sickness absence in train operators who witness a fatality compared to those who witness significant injury (70 days vs 47 days, p=0.003). Just over half of the train operators who experienced near misses (‘no injury’) took time off and the mean return to work time in these incidents was 9 days.

Conclusion: Sickness absence in train operators following a track incident increases in line with the perceived severity of the incident, i.e. the effect on the victim. Therefore, track incidents resulting in fatalities caused the highest levels of sickness absence with incidents causing significant injury coming second. The impact of near misses has tended to be under-appreciated until now but this study shows that such incidents also cause substantial levels of sickness absence.