



FAST FACTS

Questions and Answers about Extreme Work-Hour Employment

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What are extreme work hours?

- **Fact 1:** “long hours conscripts, who report working at least 50 hours per week but prefer less than 50,” (Drago et al. 2009: pp. 579).
- **Fact 2:** “very long hours, or extreme work hours, or extreme work, all used as synonyms throughout the article, are conceptualized and operationalized as individuals’ weekly work hours of 50 or more.” (Burger 2018: pp. 1066).
- **Fact 3:** “According to the 2015 European Working Conditions Survey, 22 percent of EU28 workers devote free time to their jobs several times a month, and 30 percent regularly work more than 40 hours a week (Eurofound 2016).” (Avgoustaki & Cañibano 2020: pp. 356).
- **Fact 4:** “Long job work hours refer to a working time greater than standard working hours of around 40 h per week or 8 h per day (Bannai and Tamakoshi 2014).” (Thomas et al. 2018: pp. 476).

How common are extreme work hours?

- **Fact 1:** “The final sample included 383 working adults (188 paper-and-pencil; 195 web-based).” ... “with an average workweek of 47 h (SD = 8.1). Work hours ranged from 40 to 90 h per week.” (Matthews et al. 2011: pp. 237-238).
- **Fact 2:** “The study sheds new light on the self-employed. These workers tend to report long hours, and many do so voluntarily.” (Drago et al. 2009: pp. 592).

To what extent do extreme work hours vary between societies?

- **Fact 1:** “In fact, the United States is the only Western nation without a work-hour law restricting weekly hours (Gornick and Heron 2006; Heymann, Earle, and Hayes 2004). Long work hours are also common in many Asian nations, whereby overwork is more culturally central than in Europe (Schaufeli, Shimazu, and Taris 2009). With the exception of the United States, most Western industrial nations have legislated a 40-hour workweek (International Labor Organization 2012).” (Ruppanner & Maume 2016: pp. 696).
- **Fact 2:** “...the biggest increases in work-time dissatisfaction occur in countries with shorter-than-legislated work hours.” (Ruppanner & Maume 2016: pp.708).
- **Fact 3:** “For instance, the International Labor Office (2006) reported that the proportion of American employees working at least 40 hours per week has increased over the last decade (1996-2006) and that the US now has the second largest share of people working at least 40 hours per week (76.6 per cent) among developed economies.” (Thomas & Feldman 2008: pp.853).

Why do people work extreme work hours?

- **Fact 1:** “With advances in technology (e.g., internet and telecommunication), more employees to work outside the traditional office space and outside the traditional nine-to-five-workday (Cooper, 1998). These changes in the career landscape, too, have created new opportunities for employees devote more time to work.” (Thomas & Feldman 2008: pp. 854).
- **Fact 2:** “...different employees may have vastly different interpretations of what tasks are discretionary and non-discretionary (Morrison, 1994). For instance, some workers may perceive that working late is required and therefore non-discretionary, while other workers may believe that staying late goes beyond prescribed job duties and is therefore discretionary.” (Thomas & Feldman 2008: pp.855).
- **Fact 3:** “Fourth, the ever-rising demand for consumer goods means that workers work more to earn more (Schor, 1998).” (Moen & Sweet 2004: pp.216).
- **Fact 4:** “So long as ‘time at work’ is the metric to assess productivity, so long as workplace and workforce polices remain tied to work hours, and in the absence of policies to the contrary, jobs will remain ‘greedy institutions’ requiring ever more of workers’, and families’, time (Bailyn & Harrington, 2004). (Moen & Sweet 2004: pp. 216).

What are the consequences of extreme work hours?

- **Fact 1:** “Extreme work hours remain a persistent requirement of many organizations, despite the increasingly evident detrimental effects thereof. They undermine long-term productivity and well-being (Perlow & Porter, 2009), they reinforce gender inequality (Reid, 2015), and they cost the U.S. healthcare system an estimated \$37 billion annually (Goh, Pfeffer, & Zenios, 2016).” (Blagojev & Schreyogg 2019: pp. 1818).
- **Fact 2:** “The deleterious impact of work on health is compounded by the quantity of work, with those working long hours (41 to 50 hours) reporting worse mental and physical health (Kleiner and Pavalko 2010).” (Ruppanner & Maume 2016: pp. 693).
- **Fact 3:** “Second, how long employees work may directly affect organizational productivity. While long work hours may increase employees' output in the short run, long work hours may lower organizational productivity over the long haul, particularly in cases where employees' attention to detail and physical exertion are crucial to task success (Porter, 1996). Moreover, excessive dedication of time and energy to work activities may adversely affect employees' work-family balance and reduce their physical and mental health (Robinson, Flowers, & Carroll, 2001; Spence & Robbins, 1992)” (Thomas & Feldman 2008: pp. 854).

What can employers do?

- **Fact 1:** “Workplace flexibility is individuals' ability to make choices influencing when, where, and for how long they work (Hill et al., 2008). It is an important tool that organizations afford to their employees to help them to manage their work and non-work demands and to reduce work-nonwork conflict.” (Trefalt 2010: pp.1).
- **Fact 2:** “For effective management that supports the physical health of female employees, organizations could provide human resource interventions that promote work-life balance such as flexible working hours to help employees effectively contribute to their family role demands.” (Thomas et al. 2018: pp. 484)
- **Fact 3:** “Family-friendly policies could make part-time work more remunerative for sole earners by, for example, offering wage supplements, tax credits, or public subsidies for childcare (which are especially needed in the United Kingdom) to ensure the sustainability of part-time paid employment for parents of young children and help single mothers satisfy the simultaneous demands of work and family.” (Moilanen et al. 2019: pp. 227)
- **Fact 4:** “we suggest that job quality should encompass both conditions at work and conditions that facilitate employees' ability to manage their dual

responsibilities for paid work and family or personal obligations.” (Kelly et al. 2011: pp. 284).

What can governments do?

- **Fact 1:** “In response, many welfare states have instituted policies to promote work-life balance, encourage continuous maternal employment, and mitigate gender economic inequality (Fagnani and Letablier 2004; Gornick and Heron 2006; Gornick and Meyers 2003). These policies can take multiple forms, but we focus here on one dimension—work time—which we measure through policy (legislated maximum weekly work hours) and practice (normative weekly work hours).” (Ruppanner & Maume 2016: pp. 693-694).
- **Fact 2:** “What is required, we argue, is that corporations, unions, and governments broaden the pool of options – work hours, workweeks, work years, and career paths – available to workers, men and women, at all ages and stages.” (Moen & Sweet 2004: pp. 222).

Can quality employment buffer the impact of extreme work hours?

- **Fact 1:** “...employees with workplace flexibility are able to work longer hours (often equivalent to one or two 8-hr days more per week) before reporting work-life conflict” (Hill et al. 2010: pp. 349).
- **Fact 2:** “Analyses clearly demonstrate that the workplace initiative positively affects the work-family interface, primarily by increasing employees’ schedule control.” (Kelly et al. 2011: pp. 265).
- **Fact 3:** “The presented cross-sectional study confirmed that contemporary work characteristics, namely work variability and diversity, are positively associated with the employees’ perception of work overload. Those results indicate that work style in an organisation, where flexibility and agility play an important role, creates conditions favourable for work overload (Kelly and Moen, 2020).” (Pluta & Rudawska 2021: pp. 604).

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