

Whose Life is it Anyway?

A report on the effects of poor work-life balance on mental health



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The Mental Health Foundation is the leading UK charity concerned with both mental health and learning disabilities policy, research and development. We work to help people survive, recover from and prevent mental health problems. Our work informs Government policy, promotes better understanding, and challenges discrimination. We aim to increase expertise and resources by creating partnerships for change across the voluntary, corporate and public sectors.

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CONTENT

Section	Page
1. Executive summary, key findings and significant statistics	4
2. Background	8
3. Methodology	10
3.1 Methods	10
3.2 Participants	10
4. Results	12
4.1 Work patterns	12
4.2 Reasons for long work hours and effects on life	16
4.3 Consequences of long working hours	19
5. Recommendations	22
6. Further reading and useful contacts	24
Appendix I The Work-Life Balance Survey Questionnaire	26

1 Executive summary

In 2000 a Department for Education and Employment survey revealed that around one in 8 employees was working more than 60 hours a week. That same year the Prime Minister launched the Work-Life balance campaign. Over the subsequent two years the number of people working more than 60 hours rose to 1 in 6. The number of women working these hours more than doubled over the same period.

This unabating rise in hours worked has a range of implications for the workforce – perhaps most alarming in the area of mental health. Immediate effects are fairly well researched and documented. It is estimated that nearly three in every ten employees will experience a mental health problem in any one year, and that half of all lost days will be due to work-related stress. A small number of employers are now developing mental health policies, and offering related services such as workplace counselling. But the longer-term implications for the mental health of the workforce are less widely understood.

The Mental Health Foundation exists to promote mental wellbeing, and is keen to help people tackle the problems they face in protecting their mental health from day to day. The pressure of an increasingly demanding work culture in the UK is perhaps the biggest and most pressing of these challenges for the general population. The cumulative effect of increased working hours is having an important effect on the lifestyle of a huge number of people, which is likely to prove damaging to their mental wellbeing. *Most importantly, we are concerned that a sizeable group of people are 'building out' or neglecting the factors in their lives which make them resistant or resilient to mental health problems.*

We mounted a survey to highlight this area of concern. A total of 577 respondents completed a questionnaire which sought information on the amount of time they devote to work, their reasons for it, their feelings about it and the impact it has on other aspects of their life.

A significant proportion of the respondents (34%) were found to be working more than 50 hours per week, and over a third (36%) were unhappy with the time they spent at work. Many people reported feeling irritable, anxious or depressed as a result of their working hours and a number reported specific mental health problems, including attempted suicide as a direct result of pressure at work.

Our study has identified a positive correlation between the number of hours worked and the number of hours spent thinking or worrying about work outside of working hours. This can be summed up as a regressive tax on one's private thoughts. The more you work, and the less free time you have, the more of your free time you spend thinking or worrying about work. We also found that as a person's hours increase they are more likely to experience feelings of unhappiness towards their job.

Outside forces including financial need and pressure to complete tasks were the most frequently cited reasons for respondents continuing to work hours they are unhappy with.

Activities that respondents most frequently sacrificed in order to work longer hours were exercise (48%), quality time with partner (45%) time with friends and social activities (42%) and hobbies/entertainment (41%). Crucially, these are all factors which are known to promote good mental health, help relieve mental health problems when they occur, and/or make individuals resilient to mental ill-health. It is of great concern that these represent the most frequently neglected areas of respondents' lives. The neglect of social networks and personal relationships outside the workplace is a particular problem for a population with a much longer post-work life expectancy than previous generations.

The individual stories we collected as part of the study presented a picture of loss on a large scale. Many people documented relationship breakdown, loss of friendship, poor relationships with children, and nearly a fifth reported having lost or left jobs due to overwork. Others reported regret at having missed out on spending time with their children when they were young, or being too busy to spend time with a terminally ill parent or friend who needed support, or failing to pursue a hobby, interest or talent. While existing relationships suffer, a number of respondents pointed out that long hours can also jeopardise any chance of meeting a partner or having a child. Single people who have no children reported longer working hours than those who are partnered or married and those who have children.

The overall tone of many of the individual stories was one of great anxiety. More than half of the sample felt irritable, one third was anxious and a quarter felt depressed. Though these are not diagnoses they do suggest a compromised sense of wellbeing and may in some cases be markers for the development of more serious mental health problems.

Repeated attempts on the part of Government and the voluntary sector to promote a better work-life balance seem then to have had little effect to date. At the end of the report, we make a series of recommendations. These are not only for employers. We believe it is crucial for individuals to gain an awareness about the cumulative effect of their daily decisions to work long hours, and assess their own work-life balance.

In the DTI's 2002 survey twice as many employees reported that they would rather work shorter hours than win the lottery. Yet the same survey showed, although respondents wanted a better work-life balance, a quarter felt their career would suffer because of it. Our survey suggests that those who have a choice (ie self-employed people) tend to place the most pressure on themselves by working longer hours than those who aren't self-employed. Action is needed on the part of individuals as well as employers. Accepting responsibility for our own work-life balance is an important part of the process. This report is designed to help individuals take this step.

Key findings

- In order to work long hours, people are neglecting activities that are most likely to protect them from mental health problems
- When working long hours more than a quarter of employees feel depressed (27%), one third feel anxious (34%), and more than half feel irritable (58%)
- The more hours one spends at work, the more hours outside of work one spends thinking or worrying about it
- As a person's weekly hours increase, so do their feelings of unhappiness
- Many more women report unhappiness than men, which is probably a consequence of competing life roles – and more pressure to 'juggle'
- Nearly two thirds of employees have experienced a negative effect on their personal life, including lack of personal development, physical and mental health problems, and poor relationships and home life
- There is evidence of a work culture that expects staff to work long hours in the UK
- One third of respondents feel unhappy or very unhappy about the time they devote to work
- Men work longer paid hours than women, which is partly explained by the higher proportion of women who work part time

Significant statistics

- 17.7% of men work 60 hours or more per week compared with 7% of women
- 14% of employees devote 11 hours per week or more to thinking about work outside of working hours
- 1 in 3 employees feel unhappy about the time they have to commit to work
- 42% of women express unhappiness at their work-life balance compared with 29% of men
- 41% of respondents said they work long hours because of pressure to complete tasks

- More than 40% of employees are neglecting aspects of their life in place of work, which may increase their vulnerability to mental health problems
- 61% of employees report a negative consequence in their personal life of working long hours

2 Background

Compared to the rest of the European Union, full-time workers in the United Kingdom work on average the longest hours per week¹. In the year 2000, 1 in 8 UK employees reported working more than 60 hours per week². Two years later this figure rose to 1 in 6 employees³. Men, and in particular fathers, have been identified as the group most likely to work long hours. However, the number of women who work more than 60 hours per week doubled between 2000 and 2002³.

To date the consequences of long working hours have been primarily flagged up in terms of lost productivity and disruptions to family life. It is estimated, for example, that stress related sick leave costs British industry £370 million every year⁴ or approximately 91 million working days⁵. Effects on the family have been considered in terms of fathers' contribution to total parental childcare. A recent survey identified this to be approximately one third which, as a result, means women often have little choice about how to balance their own family and work commitments⁶.

A less publicised consequence of Britain's work culture is its effect on an individual's mental well being. It is known that exposure to prolonged work related stress can increase the risk of mental health problems and a direct association between the two has been reported in the literature⁷. Though currently estimated that 3 in every 10 employees experience a mental health problem in any one year⁵, the recent and dramatic rise in Britain's working hours would suggest this is likely to increase. It is therefore timely that this report explores the impact of long work hours on other aspects of people's lives including those behaviours that can offer protection against mental ill health.

The association between work-related stress and mental ill health is complex. Although we need a certain amount of stress to perform effectively in the work environment there is a point at which increasing stress will result in reduced performance. Thus, choosing to regularly work longer hours can have cumulative effects that are damaging to our mental well being. It is known that these effects are in part brought about by the neglect of other areas in a person's life⁷. For example, exercise⁸, leisure activities⁹ and social interaction¹⁰ are all thought to offer some protection or resilience against mental ill health. If we neglect them in favour of work then we increase our risk of developing mental health problems. Conversely, by promoting a better work-life balance we can protect our mental health.

There is evidence that employees are increasingly aware of some of these potential difficulties. In a much publicised survey of job seekers¹¹, almost half (46%) chose flexible working as the benefit they would most look for in their next job, and one third opted for flexible working hours rather than a salary increase. In another survey of employees, twice as many reported preferring to work shorter hours than win the lottery³. Although these results are encouraging, flexible work hours may only serve to assign the pressures of work to a different time schedule. It is known also that despite these aspirations many employees feel unable to affect changes in their work-life balance.

In a survey of employees who wanted a better work-life balance, more than a quarter felt their careers would suffer because of it³. In support of this finding it is known that very few employers have any official policy on mental health and the majority does not offer any form of flexible work arrangements^{5,6}. On this basis people's reasons for working longer hours may reflect employer expectations rather than their own personal desires.

The context for the work contained in this report is therefore troubling and complex. British working hours continue to grow and there is evidence of increasing lost productivity and disruptions to family life. This brief review has specifically highlighted concern for the mental well being of the British workforce, which has generally received less media and research attention. However, we know that exposure to prolonged work related stress, which involves neglecting other areas of a person's life outside of work, increases the risk of serious mental health problems including depression and disabling anxiety⁵.

Against this backdrop we may question what is in store for the British workforce. Increasing stress and resulting sickness would seem likely if current trends continue. It therefore seems prudent to take stock of the current situation and to raise both employees' and employers' awareness of the association between work related stress and mental ill health. The survey contained in this report endeavours to do both. It asks people to reflect on their work-life balance and to consider not only the amount of time they devote to work but also their reasons for it, their feelings about it and the impact it has on other aspects of their lives.

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 3. Department of Trade and Industry (2002) *UK Workers struggle to balance work and quality of life as long hours and stress take hold* [on line]. Available: <http://164.36.164.20/work-lifebalance/press300802.html>
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 11. Department of Trade and Industry (2003) More people want flexible hours than cash, company car or gym [on line]. Available: <http://www.lowpay.gov.uk/work-lifebalance/newsurevy.html>

3 Methodology

3.1 Methods

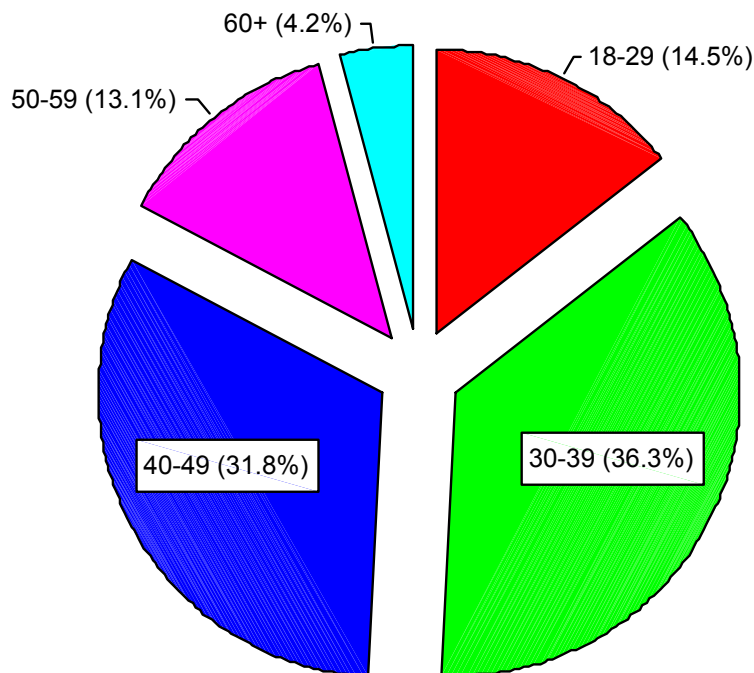
A questionnaire was developed to gather the data for this survey (see Appendix I). A paper version and web-based version were produced for ease of completion. The questionnaire was distributed to approximately 10,000 people who are connected with the mental health foundation, either as face to face fundraising recruits or as names on the mailing list of our main web site.

A total of 577 questionnaires were returned and subject to descriptive analyses. Not all respondents completed all items on the questionnaire, therefore the number of responses upon which each result is based varies throughout the findings. Specific associations between variables of interest were analysed using relevant statistical procedures.

3.2 Participants

Of the 532 participants who provided details of their gender, the majority was female (64.5% n=343) with 35.5% (n=189) being male. The age range of participants is presented in Figure 3.1 with the majority falling between the ages of 30 and 49 (66.7%).

Figure 3.1: Age of respondents

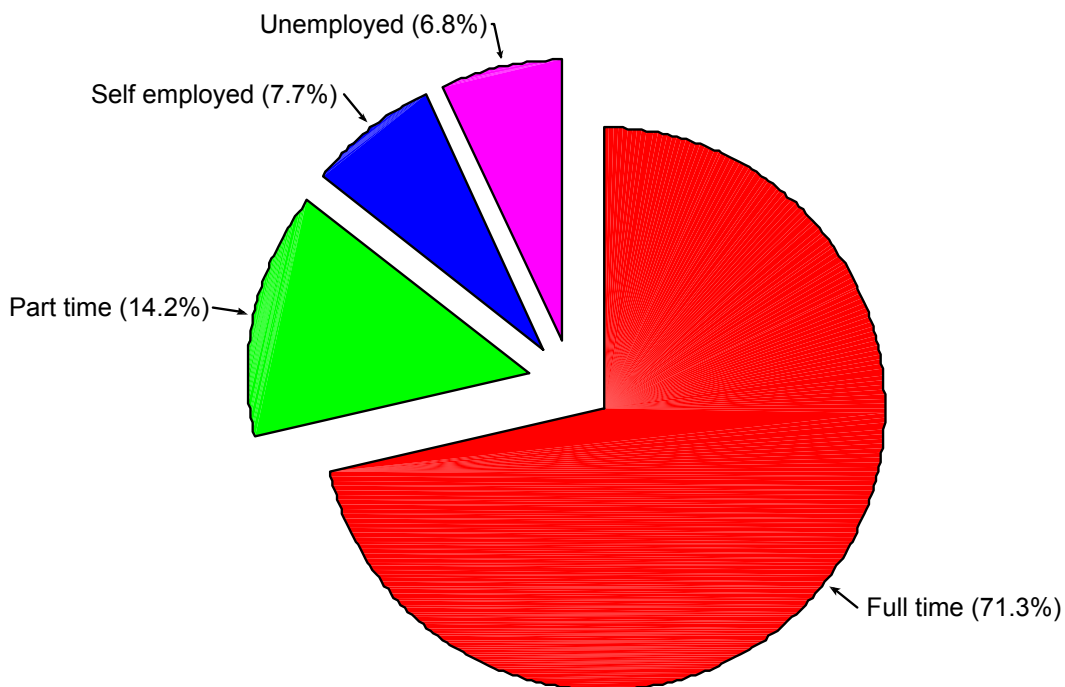


Of those who chose to reply (n=526), a little under one third (31.4%) were single and the remainder were either married or partnered (68.6%). Nearly one half of respondents (47.7%) reported having children.

Figure 3.2 presents the employment status of respondents, the majority of whom were in full time employment (71.3%). Women were more likely to work part time and men were more likely to be self-employed. The small group of unemployed people (6.8%) is excluded from subsequent analyses except where indicated.

Of those in employment the majority (47.9%) were working in the private sector, 33.4% worked in the public sector, 10.8% in the voluntary sector and 7.7% were self-employed. Women were more likely to work in the voluntary sector, and the self-employed were likely to be older in age.

Figure 3.2: Employment status of respondents

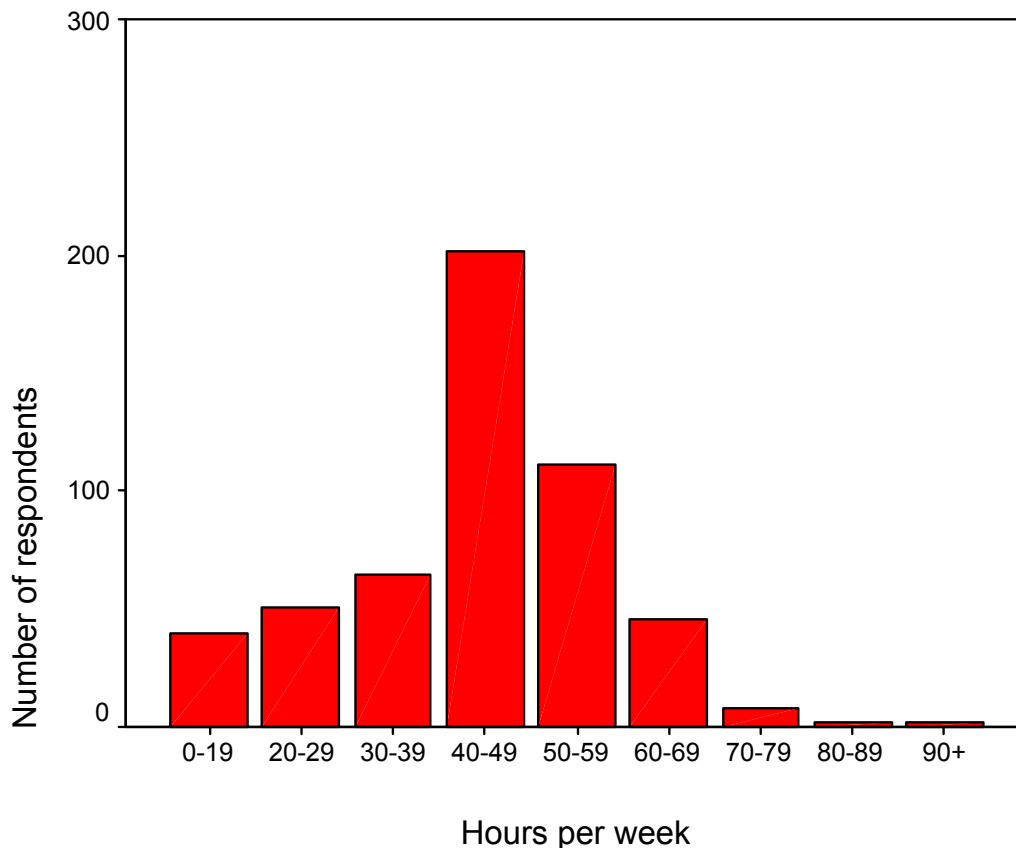


4 Results

4.1 Work patterns

Respondents were asked to indicate, on average, how many hours per week they spend at work and travelling to work. The results are presented in Figure 4.1. The majority of respondents (59.4%) were working between 40 and 59 hours per week, 34% were working more than 50 hours per week and 11% more than 60 hours per week. If part time workers are removed from this calculation then the number of full time and self employed respondents working more than 60 hours per week increases to 13%.

Figure 4.1: Average hours per week spent at and travelling to work



Some interesting differences were found when hours worked were considered across groups of respondents. For example, 17.7% of men worked more than 60 hours per week compared with 7% of women. This finding is in part explained by a higher proportion of women (18%) working part time compared to their male counterparts (8%). A difference was found also in terms of the sectors in which people worked. Self-employed, public and private sector staff worked similar hours whilst voluntary sector staff worked significantly less. This finding is likely to reflect the tendency for more part time work to take place in the voluntary sector.

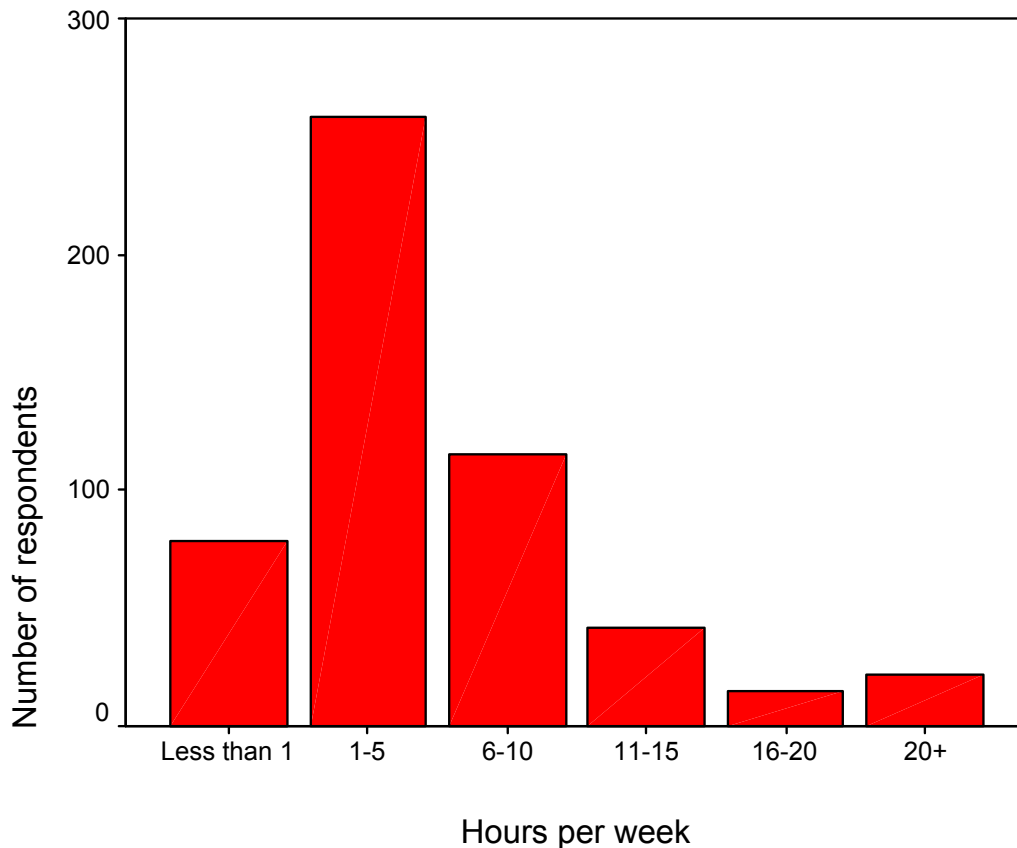
The age of respondents was also associated with the average number of hours worked. As age increased there was a reported tendency to work either fewer or more hours per week

than the average. Also a younger age did not necessarily correspond to longer working hours. Among those whose age was 29 or under only 7.6% worked more than 60 hours per week compared with 11.6% of those aged 30 years or above.

Two factors were found to be associated with working fewer hours. Those who were married or partnered and those who had children reported fewer hours than single people and those who had no children. However this association was true only of women. Men who reported having children were more likely to work longer hours than those who did not have childcare responsibilities. Interestingly however, whether married/partnered or single did not differentiate the number of hours men worked.

Respondents were also asked to indicate, on average, how many hours per week they spend thinking or worrying about work. The results are presented in Figure 4.2. The majority of respondents (63.4%) spent 5 hours or less in these activities but nearly 14% were devoting 11 hours or more of thinking time per week to their job. A positive correlation was found also between hours spent at work and hours spent thinking about work. Thus, as a person's hours at work increase so does their tendency to think about it outside of work hours.

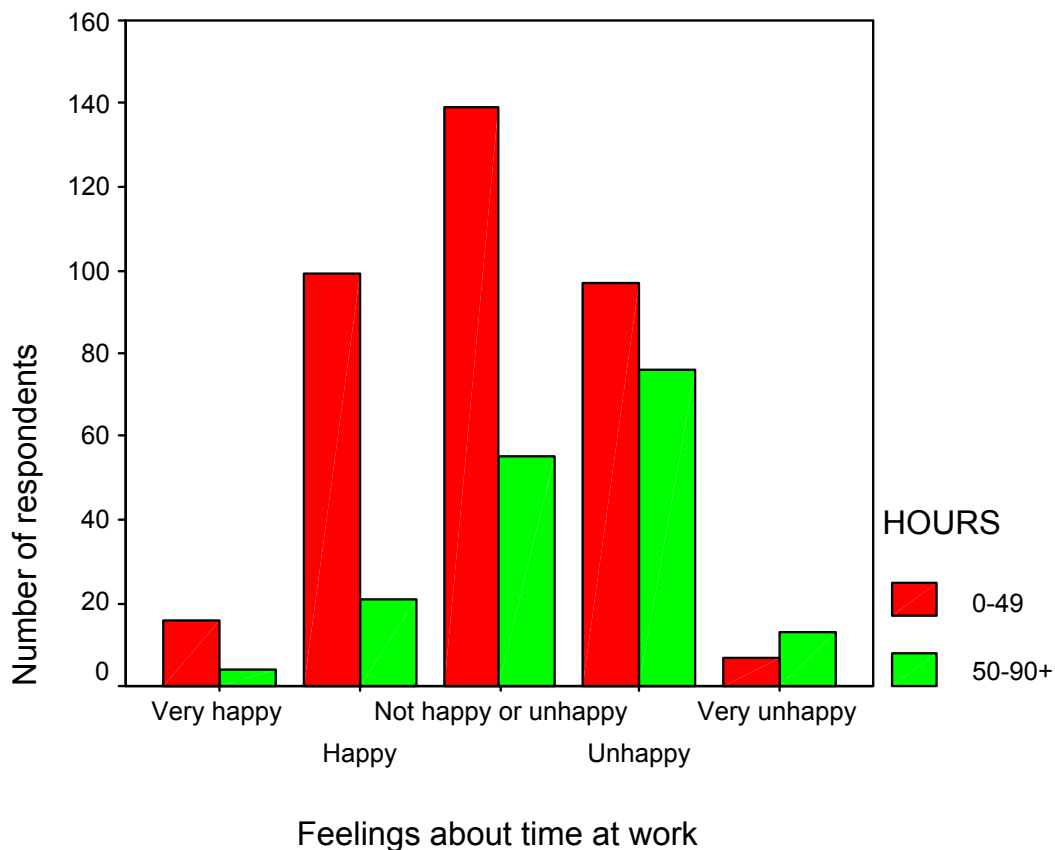
Figure 4.2: Average hours per week spent thinking or worrying about work



An association was found between thinking hours and the type of employment or sector in which respondents worked. People who were self-employed reported more hours per week in this respect. No other associations were found between number of hours spent thinking about work and respondents' age, gender, marital status or whether they had children.

Finally in this section respondents were asked how they felt about the proportion of time they spend at work. Over one third (36.2%) reported feeling either unhappy or very unhappy and a little over one quarter (26.7%) felt happy or very happy. A significant association was found between hours worked per week and feelings of unhappiness, which is represented in Figure 4.3. As a person's hours increase they are more likely to experience feelings of unhappiness toward their job.

Figure 4.3: Association between hours worked and feelings toward work



Interestingly the degree of unhappiness a person feels toward their work was found to be associated with employment type, work sector and gender. Thus, full time employees tend to report more unhappiness, the self-employed report slightly less unhappiness and women are more likely to report being unhappy or very unhappy than men (42% versus 29%). Whether married/partnered or single and whether having children or not did not differentiate people's experiences of unhappiness.

The findings from this section demonstrate that people experience increasing unhappiness in relation to their job as their working hours increase. One third of respondents were working 50 hours or more per week and one third also reported feeling unhappy or very unhappy. Additionally, nearly 14% of respondents were devoting 11 hours or more thinking time per week to their work, and as work hours increased so too did thinking time. At the extreme end of this sample there are therefore employees working 60 hours or more per week and devoting at least 11 hours thinking time per week outside of these hours.

Consistently devoting more than 70 hours each week to work will necessarily interfere with the pursuit of other activities, which may increase an individual's vulnerability to mental ill health. Employees should be aware of these associations and, when considering their own work-life balance, they need to include the time spent thinking about work outside of working hours.

A further important finding from this survey is the disproportionate number of women who express unhappiness in relation to their hours worked compared with men. This may reflect the ability of women to more effectively communicate emotions. If this is so then the mental well being of the British workforce is at greater risk than the results of this survey suggest. We know also however, that women with children often have little choice about how to balance their own family and work commitments because their male partners work longer hours and are thus less available for childcare. The high proportion of women who express unhappiness may therefore be a consequence of these competing life roles.

Data from this survey would certainly seem to support this explanation. Men with childcare responsibilities worked longer hours than male colleagues who did not have children. It is possible that these fathers are drawn to more work as they endeavour to provide for their family. A more cynical interpretation is that work is preferred over childcare duties. This is an important point when the implications for the work-life balance of mothers are recognised.

These findings highlight the importance of incorporating childcare responsibilities in any evaluation of work-life balance. They also hint at a continuing need for fathers to share the burden of childcare more equitably. In this respect the Government has introduced legislation from April 2003 that allows the parents of young and disabled children to request flexible working hours from their employer. The evidence suggests that fathers will need encouragement to make the most of such opportunities.

4.2 Reasons for long work hours and effects on life

Findings are presented in this section for the reasons people work long hours and the effect this has on other aspects of their life (Table 4.1). ‘Financial reasons’ were the most frequently cited, which may represent personal desires or needs. It is noted also that personal enjoyment and the self-esteem to be gained from doing a job well are important motivators. However, other factors including pressure to complete tasks, expectations of the boss and work colleagues, and the need to work long hours to gain promotion suggest external pressures brought to bear by the employer. These reasons were found to be consistent across gender and age groups.

Table 4.4: Reasons for working longer hours when unhappy with work

Reason	% of respondents
Financial reasons	48.4
Pressure to complete tasks	41.2
Self-esteem gained from doing job well	30.5
Because I enjoy my job	25.1
My boss expects me to work these hours	15.4
My other colleagues expect me to work these hours	7.9
I need to work these hours to gain promotion	4.3

In addition to the content of Table 4.1 respondents provided additional reasons for working long hours. A handful of these were altruistic in nature such as *‘feel the need to support and serve profession’* and *‘to improve the quality of patients lives’*. However, by far the majority indicated that the reason was more to do with their employer and the culture in which they worked. Comments included:

‘threats by employer if seen to be slacking’

‘expectations of others’

‘demands made by others’

‘no one else to do the work’

‘volume of work’

‘the company’

‘not enough working hours’

‘difficulty finding a new job’

‘haven’t found a new job yet’

‘guilt at work left undone’

‘Government pressure’

Respondents were asked also, if working long hours, which aspects of their life do they spend less time on. Table 4.2 presents the results. As emphasised in the background to this report, exercise, leisure activities and social interaction are known to provide protection against mental health problems. It is therefore concerning that these represent the most frequently neglected areas of respondents' lives. Once again these findings were consistent across gender and age groups. In combination with the work patterns data reported in the previous section it would seem that significant numbers of the workforce have an unhealthy work-life balance that places them at risk of mental health problems.

Table 4.5: Activities most likely to be sacrificed for longer working hours

Activity	% of respondents
Exercise	48.2
Quality time with partner	44.5
Time with friends and social activities	41.8
Hobbies/entertainment	41.4
Sleep	28.3
Quality time with child	23.4
Cooking	21.3
Home/garden improvement	17.8
Time with other family members	15.4
Adult education	8.2
Religious or spiritual activities	6.1

In addition to the content of Table 4.2 a few respondents reported other areas of their lives that they spend less time on when working long hours, each of which is associated with mental well being. These include:

'general recreation'

'relaxation'

'personal studies'

Respondents were then asked, if they had more free time away from work, which aspects of their life would they spend more time on. Table 4.3 presents the results. It is interesting to note that proportionately, these data are similar to those presented in Table 4.2. Thus, the top four neglected aspects of life are the same four that respondents would spend more time on if able to. This points to the importance of these activities for the respondents and also suggests consistency in their responses to items in the questionnaire.

Table 4.3: Aspects of life devoted more time if less time spent at work

Activity	% of respondents
Exercise	49.8
Quality time with partner	47.3
Time with friends and social activities	46.6
Hobbies/entertainment	46.2
Quality time with child	26.7
Home/garden improvement	21.2
Sleep	18.4
Time with other family members	18.2
Adult education	12.9
Cooking	11.0
Religious or spiritual activities	7.8

In addition to the content of Table 4.3 a few respondents reported other areas of their lives they would focus on if they worked fewer hours. These include:

'quality time for self'

'housework'

'relaxation'

'studies'

'pursue other lines of work'

'self development'

'travel'

'voluntary/community work'

An important finding from this section is a work culture that appears to expect employees to work longer hours. Whilst some respondents cited personal desires as their motivation the majority reported external pressures that were more often attributes of the organisations in which they worked. More than two fifths worked longer hours because of pressure to complete tasks. Many of the qualitative comments reveal simple expectations that staff will put in the hours or suffer the consequences when a job is not completed.

Aspects of life that are neglected when working longer hours emphasise the possible risks of this situation. Exercise, time with friends and social activities, hobbies and entertainment are known resilience factors that guard against mental ill health. These are also the very activities most frequently neglected by respondents in place of work. On this basis significant numbers of employees are placing themselves at increased risk of mental ill health.

Tackling this problem is the responsibility of both employees and employers. The former must acknowledge individual responsibility for their work-life balance, which means being able to say when expectations are too high or demanding. Though this may not always be easy to achieve an increased awareness of the risks to mental health can provide a valuable impetus. Equally, there is an onus on employers to be responsive to the work-life balance agenda. They must appraise their own policies and practices and equip themselves to understand and accommodate the needs of a modern workforce.

4.3 Consequences of working long hours

The final items in the questionnaire invited respondents to describe any changes in their lives that had occurred as a result of working long hours. Nearly one fifth (19.4%) of the total sample (including those currently unemployed) reported having lost their job due to overwork. No associations were found between this outcome and the sector in which people work, their marital status or gender. However, younger respondents were more likely to experience job loss due to overwork, and those with children were less likely.

Respondents were asked whether working long hours made them feel happy, motivated, irritable, anxious, depressed or whether their feelings were unaffected. More than one response could be chosen and the results are presented in Table 4.4. The frequency with which people experience negative consequences from long working hours, and the infrequency with which they experience positive consequences is immediately apparent from this table.

Nearly two thirds of respondents (61.4%) felt that the proportion of time they spend at work had had a negative effect on their personal life. This finding was true regardless of age, gender, marital and employment status. However, the more hours someone worked the more likely they were to experience a negative effect in their personal life. The questionnaire included space for respondents to say more about these negative

experiences. Their descriptions can be broadly grouped into four themes or areas of a person's life; personal development; health; relationships; and home life.

Table 4.4: Feelings associated with working long hours

Feeling	% of respondents
Irritable	58.9
Anxious	34.3
Depressed	27.1
Does not affect my emotions	12.8
Motivated	9.6
Happy	3.2

Personal development includes a lack of time to pursue studies or to have personal quality time. One respondent alluded to the development of a *'negative attitude to life'* and another felt unable to plan ahead. The theme of health included both physical and mental well being. Physical health was compromised by *'no time to exercise'* and *'weight gain'*. Others reported general tiredness and exhaustion. Mental well being was affected by mood swings, feelings of guilt, anxiety and a lack of motivation. One respondent reported excessive use of alcohol whilst another reported trying to commit suicide because of work commitments.

The relationship theme contains general problems such as *'losing touch with friends'* and *'no social life'*. Predominantly however respondents described specific relationships that had suffered as a consequence of their working hours. Husbands, wives, partners and children were all mentioned. One respondent had divorced because of their work. Whilst existing relationships suffer, a number of respondents pointed out that long hours can also jeopardise any chance of meeting a partner or having a child.

Home life was negatively affected because of insufficient time to maintain aspects of the home. Some respondents stated that they were never at home long enough because of work. Others reported having to bring work home, which invaded and spoilt their home life.

The findings in this section reveal the ultimate costs of long working hours on the British workforce. Nearly 20% reported losing their job because of overwork and large numbers reported negative feelings in relation to work. More than half of the sample felt irritable, one third was anxious and a quarter experienced depression. Though these are not clinical

diagnoses they do suggest a compromised sense of well being and may in some cases be markers for the development of serious mental health problems.

Nearly two thirds of respondents also felt that the proportion of time they spend at work had negatively affected their personal lives. This was more likely the more hours a person worked. Descriptions of these negative effects reveal a heavy burden including a lack of boundaries between home and work life, divorce and attempted suicide. These reported consequences should serve to bolster employees' resolve to address their work-life balance. For example, allowing work to invade your home life should act as a warning sign and is something that most of us have the ability to remedy by maintaining separate work space and time. It is by taking personal responsibilities of this type that we can improve our work-life balance and our sense of well being.

5 Recommendations

Two sets of recommendations have been formulated from this work. One is specifically for individual employees and the other for the organisations in which they work and the institutions that govern UK working practices.

Individuals should:

- take personal responsibility for their work-life balance, which means speaking up when work expectations and demands are too much. Employers need to be aware of where the pressures lie in order to address them
- try to ‘work smart – not long’. This involves tight prioritisation – allowing oneself a certain amount of time per task – and trying not to get caught up in less productive activities such as unstructured meetings, that tend to take up lots of time
- try to ensure that a line is drawn between work and leisure: if you do need to bring work home try to ensure that you only work in a certain area of your home – and can close the door on it
- take seriously the link between work-related stress and mental ill health and try to reduce stress – through exercise, relaxation, hobbies etc
- recognise the importance of protective factors including exercise, leisure activities and friendships, and try to ensure that these are not sacrificed in working longer hours, or try to ensure that spare time is spent on these things – eg taking some exercise during lunchtimes rather than staying at your work station
- undertake a self-assessment of your work life balance either by using the questionnaire in appendix 1 of this report or by obtaining the Work-Life Balance Self-Assessment Questionnaire from the DTI press office (020 7215 5377/5614)
- self-assess. This is an ongoing process that involves daily awareness of the work-life choices that are made
- watch out for the cumulative effect of deciding to work long hours by keeping track of your working hours over a period of weeks or months rather than days
- take account of hours spent worrying or thinking about work when assessing your work-life balance. These are legitimate part of work and a good indicator of work-related stress
- if possible, self assess in collaboration with peers and with the support and involvement of managerial staff – the more visible the process the more likely it is to have an effect

Organisations should:

- promote the above messages to individuals in the workplace
- encourage a culture of openness about time constraints and workload. Employees must feel able to speak up if the demands placed on them are too great
- Give better training to managers. This means that they will not only be able to spot stress, poor work-life balance and its effects, and address problems with individuals, but they should be able to develop better systems. In many cases, over work on the part of individuals is due to processes not being designed properly, so pressure points arise and individuals suffer
- promote a culture of ‘working smart-not long’, as outlined above
- ensure that employees’ jobs are manageable within the time for which they are contracted
- audit their work environments to identify elements of practice, policy or culture that may be detrimental to a healthy work-life balance e.g. inflexible work hours, staff working to jobs rather than to agreed hours
- develop policies that acknowledge the association between work related stress and mental health, describe the roles and responsibilities of employees at all levels in the organisation in promoting mental health, and describe mechanisms to support staff who experience mental health problems
- regularly monitor and evaluate policies against performance indicators such as sickness, absence and improvements in staff satisfaction
- allow staff to attend counselling and support services during working hours as they would for other medical appointments
- encourage factors that promote good mental health eg. exercise and social relationships wherever possible within the framework of jobs – eg lunchtime exercise or relaxation classes

Government

The Mental Health Foundation welcomes the Work-life Balance Campaign, but believes the Government needs to go a lot further to address the problem. We recommend that it:

- Leads by example. It is of little use the Government advocating better work-life balance to industry and workers when government and public sector employees are among the most stressed and over stretched members of the workforce

- Sets up an independent agency to:
 - modernise industrial practice across the UK
 - encourage new ways of working and disseminating good practice so our industry works 'smart – not long'
 - facilitate better, wider management training
 - develop a culture of workers 'coming out' safely when pressure is too great, expectations unrealistic and stress increases

6 Further reading and useful contacts

Cartwright S and Cooper C (1997) *Managing Workplace Stress*. London: Sage

Cooper C and Cartwright S (1996) *Mental Health and Stress in the workplace: a guide for employers*. London: HMSO

Cooper C, Drewe P and O'Driscoll M (2001) *Organizational Stress*. London: Sage

Crouter A, Bumpus M, Head M and McHale S (2001) Implications of overwork and overload for the quality of men's family relationships. *Journal of Marriage and Family* **63** 404-417

Department of Health (2001) *Working Minds: Making mental health your business*. London: DH

Doherty N and Tyson S (1998) *Mental Well Being in the Workplace: A Resource Pack for Management Training and Development*. Norwich: HMSO

Gray P (2000) *Mental Health in the workplace: Tackling the effects of stress*. London: Mental Health Foundation

Health and Safety Executive (2000) *Help on work related stress: a short guide*. Suffolk: HSE

Health and Safety Executive (1995) *Stress at Work: a guide for employers*. Suffolk: HSE

Health Education Board for Scotland (2000) *Stress in the Workplace: a simple Guide* Scotland: HEBS

Industrial Society (2001) *Managing Best Practice: Research Summaries No.83: Occupational Stress*. London: Industrial Society

MIND (2001) *Managing for Mental Health: The Mind Employers resource pack*. London: MIND

Taylor R (2002) *The future of work-life balance: Economic and Social Research Council 'Future of work programme'*. Sheffield: ESRC

Useful contacts

Department of Trade and Industry Work-Life Balance Team

1 Victoria Street, London, SW1H 0ET

020 7215 6249

www.dti.gov.uk/work-lifebalance

Flametree

Information and advice on flexible working

6 Wrights Lane, London W8 6TA

020 7376 0618

www.flametree.co.uk

New Ways to Work
Information and advice
26 Shacklewell Lane, Dalston, London, E8 2EZ
020 7503 3283
www.new-ways.co.uk

The National Work-Life Forum
c/o The industrial Society
020 7479 2141
www.worklifeforum.com

The Equal Opportunities Commission
Advice and advocacy
Helpline 08456 015901
www.eoc.org.uk

Employers for Work-Life Balance
Best practice examples and policy information
www.employersforwork-lifebalance.org.uk

Work-Life Research
Information and advice
www.workliferesearch.org

APPENDIX I
The Work-Life Balance Survey Questionnaire

1. Are you currently employed:

- Full time Part time
 Self employed Unemployed/unwaged
(if unemployed or unwaged please go to question 10)

2. On average, how many hours a week do you spend at work and travelling to work?

- 0-19 20-29 30-39 40-49
 50-59 60-69 70-79 80-89 90+

3. How many hours per week (when you are not at work or travelling to work) do you spend thinking or worrying about work?

- Less than 1 1-5 6-10
 11-15 16-20 20+

4. How do you feel about the proportion of your time spent at work, travelling to work and thinking about work?

- Very Happy Happy Neither happy nor unhappy
 Unhappy Very unhappy

5. If you are unhappy with the number of hours you work, can you say why you continue to work these hours?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Financial reasons | <input type="checkbox"/> My boss expects me to work these hours |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pressure to complete tasks that can't be completed in shorter working hours | <input type="checkbox"/> My other colleagues expect me to work these hours |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Self esteem gained from doing a job well | <input type="checkbox"/> I need to work these hours in order to gain promotion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Because I enjoy my job | Other (please specify) |
| | _____ |
| | _____ |

**6. If you work longer hours than usual, which of these do you spend less time on?
(Please tick a maximum of three)**

Quality time with your children or children if you have them

Hobbies/entertainment

Quality time with your partner if you have one

Home/garden improvement

Time with other family members

Religious or spiritual activities

Time with friends and social activities

Adult education

Exercise

Sleep

Cooking

Other (please specify)

7. If you had more free time away from work, which would you spend more time on? (Please tick a maximum of three)

Quality time with your children or children if you have them

Hobbies/entertainment

Quality time with your partner if you have one

Home/garden improvement

Time with other family members

Religious or spiritual activities

Time with friends and social activities

Adult education

Exercise

Sleep

Cooking

Other (please specify)

8. Can you tick any of the following statements you agree with? Working long hours makes me feel:

- Happy Irritable Motivated
 Does not affect my emotions Anxious Depressed

9. Do you feel that the proportion of time you spend at work has ever had a negative effect on your personal life? (e.g. loss of friendships, relationship breakdown, poor relationships with friends or family, adverse reaction from your child or children)

- No Yes (if yes, please tell us more about your experience)

10. Have you ever left or lost a job due to over work?

- Yes No

11. Please use this space for anything relevant that you would like to add

12. About you

If you are in work, which sector do you work in?

- Public sector (e.g. Government department, local authority, NHS)
 Voluntary sector (e.g. charity, voluntary agency, housing association)
 Private sector Self employed

Age:

- 18-29 30-39 40-49 50-59 60+

Gender:

- Male Female

Are you:

- Single Married Partnered

Do you have children?

- Yes No