

# Hard work could be detrimental to your well-being and your career

15 August 2018, by Kyla Jardine



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The old saying that "hard work pays off" may be a thing of the past following evidence from a new study that reveals working too hard not just predicts poor well-being, but also poor career-related outcomes.

The research paper, "Implications of [work](#) effort and discretion for [employee](#) well-being and career-related outcomes: an integrative assessment," to be published in the Industrial and Labor Relations Review, also concludes that the level of intensity we apply to the work we do is generally a stronger predictor of unfavourable well-being and career outcomes than overtime work.

The researchers, Dr. Argyro Avgoustaki, assistant professor of management at ESCP Europe, and Dr. Hans Frankort, senior lecturer in strategy at Cass Business School, studied data from 51,895 employees from across 36 European countries, looking at the relation of work effort to stress, fatigue, and job satisfaction, as well as to career prospects, job security, and recognition. The researchers compared people who had similar jobs and education levels.

## Key findings

- Increased work effort, whether defined as overtime or work intensity, did not predict any positive outcomes for employees.
- Employees who repeatedly work under

intense conditions (tight deadlines, fast-paced and pressured environments) or overwork report reduced well-being.

- Increased work effort was associated with inferior career-related outcomes.

"Practitioners and policymakers worry a lot about long hours and overtime," said the study's co-author Dr. Hans Frankort. "Yet, our findings could imply that [work intensity](#) (i.e. the amount of effort per unit of time) might be the more pressing issue."

He added, "Additionally, it's worth noting that the career benefits of excessive work effort – such as putting in longer hours at the office or working harder than is typical in one's occupation – may never materialise. Sacrificing well-being in the hopes of improving one's career may be a mistake."

## A possible solution?

The researchers suggest that one of the ways that workers can relieve some of the pressure is by having greater freedom to make more autonomous choices regarding how and when they complete their tasks, also known as "discretion."

The researchers added, "The more an employee has such freedom, the more they can work in ways that are relatively more convenient, and therefore more productive. Organisational leaders should give as much of this freedom as possible to their employees, as well as be more aware of the longer-term limitations of pushing staff to their extremes."

**More information:** Implications of work effort and discretion for employee well-being and career-related outcomes: an integrative assessment: [openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/20071](https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/20071)

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