

Balancing act: Workload and well-being

The ongoing debate regarding optimal working hours in corporate offices is yet to conclude. Standardised working hours are not fixed in most countries. Various corporate icons have suggested a 70 or 90-hour weekly work schedule. However, the medical implications of such prolonged working hours need to be seriously considered.

Illness can curtail the career of an efficient worker. The company's growth is desired by all but health issues of the common worker should not be ignored. The perspectives of the employer and employees are different. The work schedule of a common worker cannot be

working hours extend beyond 48 or 55 hours weekly as reported by various organisations. Long working hours are not always associated with increased productivity.

An important Indian study does not recommend more than 8 to 9 hours of work daily. There should be a 30-minute lunch break and two tea breaks each of 15 minutes to avoid exhaustion and fatigue.

Overwork disrupts the work-life balance.

Some people glorify overwork to the point of burnout. In Japan sudden death from overwork has been reported. It is called "karoshi". It was first reported in 1969. The usual



to music, watch cricket or just stare at the beauty of nature. No doubt it is a personal choice but there must be adequate free time. Long working hours can severely compromise the quality of life.

Occupational health problems: Studies indicate that those working more than 55 hours a week have a 13 per cent increased risk of heart attack and 33 per cent higher risk of stroke.

The incidence of insomnia has also increased. Sleeping less than 6 to 7 hours is termed short sleep. Decreased hours of sleep and fatigue have a long-term detrimental effect. The chances of occupational injuries are higher.

Employees having long working hours can develop mental health issues. Depression, anxiety and stress are not uncommon. Headache and mood swings have also

been reported. There is an increased intake of fast food which leads to obesity. Physical inactivity is also a problem. Employees are more prone to costly mistakes. Various chronic illness leads to absenteeism.

During a survey, 76 per cent of employees stated that overwork hurt their personal relations. Many thought about quitting jobs. Long working hours are associated with decreasing attention to detail thereby compromising the quality of work.

Occupational health problems are measured by five conditions:

Physiological health: The functions of the body which can be affected are evaluated.

Mental health: The extent of stress, anxiety and depression are assessed.

Health behaviours: This relates to a healthy diet and regular exercise. Smoking and alcohol intake are not recommended.

Related health: This evaluates sleep, fatigue and occupational injury. It has the strongest association with long working hours.

Non-specified health: Measures other health parameters.

Optimal working hours and an annual health check-up can avoid many occupational medical problems. However, the

vision and will of the management are final in this regard.

Way forward: Growth is essential for all organisations and all stakeholders should participate in it. The quality and the quantity of work need to be balanced. The accountability and responsibility of work should not be avoided. Every employee must justify their utility in the organisation.

The work schedule should be such that there is adequate time for the family and social life. Professional work should not interfere with personal life. During the pandemic, working from home was found to be a viable alternative. However, it is not an option for many professions.

Using social media for personal reasons is common during working hours. This compromises the quality of professional services. No policy has been initiated prohibiting using social media for personal purposes during working hours. The option of flexible working hours is usually not available in most offices. Employees cannot choose between 40 hours or 70 hours of work weekly and get paid accordingly.

Capacity and capability differ among individuals. If flexible working hours are permitted many occupational health problems can be avoided.

HEALING POTION

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compared with the employer or CEO.

Overwork is a situation when working hours start to adversely affect the health and safety of the workers. Long

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causes were heart attack and stroke.

However, the quality of work is much more important than the duration. The actual output of work helps the growth of the organisation. The working hours need to be intense and there should be no waste of time, like using social media for personal reasons.

Every individual needs rest and time to reflect. Beyond working hours one can listen