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Long hours hazardous to health

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Today's contents

The Article	2
Warm-ups	3
Before Reading / Listening	4
While Reading / Listening	5
After Reading	6
Discussion	7
Speaking	8
Listening Gap Fill	9
Homework	10
Answers	11

19 August, 2005

THE ARTICLE

Long hours hazardous to health

BNE: Working long hours makes workers more susceptible to injury and illness, regardless of how hazardous or menial the job is. This is the conclusion of a comprehensive new study in the journal *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*. Researchers analyzed data from 110,000 job records, probing into employment histories, work schedules, compulsory overtime and sick leave. They discovered that more than half of the 5,139 work related injuries analyzed were in jobs that required overtime or had demanding schedules. The authors of the report deduced that employees who worked overtime were 61 per cent more likely to sustain a work related injury or illness than employees who did not.

Industry type and sector proved inconsequential in determining where workers were most at risk. No single industry was inherently riskier than another. The research team found that the prime catalyst for accidents was fatigue and stress induced by overworking. A 12-hour day increased the risk of injury or illness by 37 per cent, while a 60-hour week led to a 23 per cent increase. They discounted lengthy commutes from having a bearing on the risk. The report recommended governments follow initiatives currently espoused by the European Union of a legal maximum number of working hours. This is likely to be vehemently opposed by employers concerned about profit margins.

Report: *The Impact of Overtime and Long Work Hours on Occupational Injuries and Illnesses: New Evidence from the United States* - Allard E Dembe, J. Bianca Erickson, Rachel G Delbos, and Steven M Banks.

WARM-UPS

1. WORKING HOURS: In pairs / groups, talk about how much time you spend working and / or studying. Do you think it's too much or manageable? What is your idea of the perfect working / studying week? What do you think about working overtime?

2. OVER~: In pairs / groups, talk about whether and how often you overdo these things:

- Overwork
- Overeat
- Oversleep
- Overanalyze things
- Overdress
- Overcook food
- Over drink
- Overspend
- Overreact
- Overindulge

3. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

Working / long hours / injury / illness / hazardous jobs / sick leave / overtime / risk / fatigue / stress / commuting / working hours / profit margins

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

4. OVERTIME: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the word "overtime". Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

5. OPINIONS: How far do you agree with the following opinions on working hours and overtime?

- a. Overtime should be banned.
- b. Overtime will always be an integral part of working. It will never disappear.
- c. Governments should impose a maximum of 40 hours a week on all workers.
- d. Multinational companies should be banned from buying goods from developing countries where workers do more than 40 hours a week.
- e. Corporate profits are much more important than employee health.
- f. Working overtime is a natural show of loyalty to a company.
- g. Without overtime, many companies would collapse.
- h. Workers should not complain. They should be grateful they have a job.

6. QUICK DEBATE: Students A are union officials and think there should be a legal maximum number of working hours. Students B are employers and think there should be no legal maximum. Change partners often.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- | | |
|---|-------|
| a. Working long hours puts your health at risk. | T / F |
| b. Doctors are most at risk from suffering work from related illnesses. | T / F |
| c. More than half of work related illness is due to overworking. | T / F |
| d. Working overtime increases the likelihood of injury six-fold. | T / F |
| e. White-collar industries were most hazardous. | T / F |
| f. The catalyst for accidents was fatigue induced by overworking. | T / F |
| g. Lengthy commutes added to the likelihood of being ill. | T / F |
| h. Employers welcome a shorter working week. | T / F |

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------|
| a. susceptible | looking into |
| b. menial | advocated |
| c. probing | negligible |
| d. demanding | endure |
| e. sustain | significance |
| f. inconsequential | vulnerable |
| g. inherently | heartily |
| h. bearing | taxing |
| i. espoused | fundamentally |
| j. vehemently | humdrum |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| a. makes workers more susceptible | schedules |
| b. the conclusion of a comprehensive | opposed by employers |
| c. probing | a work related injury |
| d. demanding | inherently riskier than another |
| e. sustain | new study |
| f. Industry type and sector proved | induced by overworking |
| g. No single industry was | inconsequential |
| h. fatigue and stress | to injury |
| i. initiatives currently espoused | into employment histories |
| j. vehemently | by the European Union |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

WORD ORDER: Put the underlined words back into the correct order.

Long hours hazardous to health

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Industry type and proved determining in sector inconsequential where workers were most at risk. No single industry was inherently riskier than another. The research team found that accidents for the prime catalyst was fatigue and stress induced by overworking. A 12-hour day increased the risk of injury or illness by 37 per cent, while a 60-hour week led to a 23 per cent increase. They commutes from lengthy discounted having a bearing on the risk. The report recommended governments follow the espoused initiatives by currently European Union of a legal maximum number of working hours. This is likely to employers by opposed be vehemently concerned about profit margins.

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words 'ill' and 'injury'.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. WORD ORDER: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers.

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT "WORKING OVERTIME" SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about working or studying too much.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- susceptible
- comprehensive
- probing
- sick leave
- demanding
- sustain
- sector
- catalyst
- induced
- commutes
- bearing
- vehemently

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. What were your initial thoughts on this headline?
- b. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- c. What are your feelings about working overtime?
- d. Do you think there should be a maximum working week?
- e. What do you think of studies like the one in the article?
- f. Have you ever suffered a work related injury?
- g. Is your job or study schedule demanding?
- h. Do you agree with the study's conclusion that no single industry is riskier than any other?
- i. What do you think is the most hazardous occupation in the world?
- j. Why do you think people choose to work in that occupation?

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. Have you ever done a dangerous job?
- d. Have your employers always considered the safety and health of workers?
- e. Have you ever worked for any really bad employers?
- f. What do you think about working a 60-hour week?
- g. The report discounts lengthy commuting times as a contributing factor to stress and fatigue. Would you agree with this?
- h. Do you think there should be a legal maximum number of working hours all over the world?
- i. Have you ever been vehemently opposed to something?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What question would you like to ask about this topic?
- b. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- c. Was there a question you didn't like?
- d. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- e. What did you like talking about?
- f. Do you want to know how anyone else answered the questions?
- g. Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING

SAFER WORKING: You are head of the new government council on safer conditions in the workplace. In pairs / groups, you must think of two dangers to workers of the points in the left column and decide on the regulations required to combat these dangers.

	POSSIBLE DANGERS	REGULATIONS
Overtime		
Computers		
Office chairs		
Noise		
Deadlines		
Canteen		
Other		

Change partners and compare your dangers and regulations. Offer each other feedback.

With your original partner(s), take turns to role play a conversation between the government council head and the CEO of a company who is trying to cut costs.

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

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HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information on working conditions in different countries. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson.

3. LETTER: Write a letter to the boss of a company you work for / have worked for. Tell him / her what he / she needs (needed) to do to make working conditions at the company much better. Read your letters to your classmates in your next lesson. Did you all have similar suggestions?

4. DIARY / JOURNAL: Imagine you work in a very hazardous job. Write your diary / journal entry for one day in your job. Describe the dangers involved and the risks you take every day. Read your entry to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all write about similar things?

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

- a. T b. F c. T d. F e. F f. T g. F h. F

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------|
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| c. probing | looking into |
| d. demanding | taxing |
| e. sustain | endure |
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PHRASE MATCH:

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WORD ORDER:

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