

Excessive working time causes depression

A new study has concluded that working long hours - regardless of job stress or satisfaction - increases the risk of depression. Researchers at the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health and University College London followed nearly 2,000 middle-aged British civil servants for almost six years. The researchers examined the civil servants' working hours, whether or not they were depressed or had risk factors for depression to begin with, and whether they had any major depressive episodes over time. In workers with no psychological illness, the rate of a major depressive episode was 2.43 times higher for those who worked more than 11 hours per day compared with employees who worked 7 to 8 hours a day. This association held true even after researchers accounted for other depression risk factors, including socio-demographic factors, smoking, alcohol use, having chronic physical disease, job strain and work-related social support.



'Although occasionally working overtime may have benefits for the individual and society, it is important to recognise that working excessive hours is also associated with an increased risk of major depression,' said study author Marianna Virtanen, an epidemiologist at the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health. TUC working hours expert Paul Sellers, writing in the union body's Touchstone blog, said the research forms part of a large scale study that has been running for more than 20 years, 'making it one of the most reliable sources for studying working time and health.' He added 'earlier research from the same source found a worrying 60 per cent increase in the risk of contracting heart disease amongst those working overtime.' He criticised both the government and the business lobby group CBI for their continued opposition to a strengthening the Working Time Directive. He said: 'There is obviously a serious risk here and yet the state and business leaders oppose taking action to protect people - simply scandalous!'