

We're Burned Out

Study: Majority Feel Overworked, Overwhelmed; Dream of a New Job



N E W Y O R K, May 16 2001— More than half of U.S. employees feel overworked or overwhelmed at least some of the time, according to a national study released today, and 70 percent say they often dream of having a different job.

"This study suggests that many American employees are near the breaking point — we hope that this will be the clarion call that brings the issue of overwork to the attention of business leaders and policy-makers throughout the country," said Ellen Galinsky, president of the nonprofit Families and Work Institute, which published the study.

The survey, which consisted of phone interviews of 1,003 U.S. adult workers, said that 28 percent often or very often felt overworked. The same amount reported feeling overwhelmed by their jobs often or very often, and 29 percent said they often or very often felt they had no time to reflect on their work.

Agrees With Earlier Poll

An ABCNEWS.com survey found > [similar results](#) for a similar question posed in late March, when 26 percent of more than 1,000 respondents said they were working too hard.

The Families and Work Institute study showed that how much time workers spent on the job — and why they worked long hours — affected feelings of overwork. About one-quarter of respondents said they worked 50 or more hours a week, while 22 percent said they worked six to seven days a week. A quarter said they don't use all of their vacation time, which seemed to have an effect on how the workers feel: 55 percent of employees who did not take all their vacation report high levels of feeling overworked versus 27 percent of those who do use all of their vacation days.

When employees said they worked long hours due to external factors, such as employer demand, they reported more feelings of overwork, compared to those employees who said they worked long hours for personal or financial reasons.

Women reported feeling more overworked than men, and baby boomers, or workers between 36 and 54, said they felt more overworked than those younger and older. Regardless of gender or age, those who said

they felt overworked were more likely to neglect themselves, lose sleep, and report high levels of stress, and less likely to feel successful in their personal and family relationships.

Health Can Be Affected

Overwork can also affect how employees do their jobs, the study suggests. Seventeen percent who said they felt overworked also said they often made mistakes at work, compared with only 1 percent who said they did not feel overworked. Respondents who felt overworked also said they are more likely to look elsewhere for a new position, feel anger toward their employers and resent co-workers who don't work as hard as they do.

Perhaps most interesting to employers, the study's researchers suggest that overwork can affect a company's bottom line. Overwork can raise the cost of health care because of the physical and emotional toll stress has on workers, the study said. Training new workers when employees quit or are dismissed because they are burned out can also be costly.

"This study shows that the consequences of overwork for workplace safety, job performance and staff retention are clear and direct," said Carlton Yearwood, director of diversity and work-life quality at PricewaterhouseCoopers, which supported the study.

Changing the culture of overwork is within the power of U.S. employers, the study concluded. Researchers suggest such changes as increasing worker flexibility and experimenting with work redesign to reduce wasted or low-value work, interruptions during the work day, or unnecessary demands.

The survey has a margin of error of plus or minus three percentage points. ■