

Why well-paid jobs can also lead to overwork and bad health

1 Warmer

a. Discuss the three photos.



- What jobs do these people do?
- Who do you think:
 - works most hours per week
 - earns the most money
 - has health problems and stress because of their job

2 Key words

a. Write the words from the box next to the definitions below.

Check your answers and your understanding the words by using the same word to complete the example sentence immediately after each definition.

Then read the complete article to see how each of the key words is used in context.

abide by	associates	burnout	consequences	entrenched	exempt
exhaustion	irrespective	occupational	shift	think-tank	white-collar

1. the results or effects of something _____

Have you considered the long-term _____ that introducing that model might have on the company's reputation?

2. a group of people who work together to produce new ideas on a particular subject

A British _____ stated that the continued use of animal testing in the cosmetic industry will result in the loss of younger customers.

3. Junior or less experienced lawyers at a law firm _____

Although they have less experience than other lawyers, _____ are essential to a law firm's function, as they usually take on a high number of cases and have many responsibilities.

4. a period of work time in a factory, hospital, or other place where some people work during the day and some work at night _____

I tried working on the night _____ for a while to earn extra money, but I just couldn't cope with it while the kids were still at home.

5. allowed to ignore something such as a rule, obligation, or payment _____

Enterprises with foreign investment in the development area shall be _____ from local income tax.

6. despite a particular fact, situation, or quality _____

We consider all qualified job applicants equally, _____ of sex or age.

7. follow a rule, decision, or instruction _____

Regardless of whether he is right or wrong, the CEO expected the employees to _____ his decisions and not ask any questions.

8. relating to or caused by your job _____

Loss of concentration, a complete lack of ability to focus, was found to be the chief _____ hazard of working on the stock exchange trading floor.

9. the mental and physical condition of having no energy left or becoming ill after a period of very hard work _____

Unfortunately, _____ is becoming increasingly common in the teaching profession.

10. a feeling of being extremely tired and without energy (not necessarily related to work)

Weak with _____, the climbers were finally lifted to safety.

11. existing for a long time and difficult to change _____

Sexism is deeply _____ in our society.

12. workers who work in offices rather than doing physical work are called this

*The manufacturer plans to make a further two hundred employees in _____
jobs redundant in the next quarter.*

Don't roll your eyes when lawyers complain about overwork

LISTENING TO THE CONCERNS OF PEOPLE AT THE TOP CAN INFORM THE DEBATE OVER HOW TO IMPROVE JOBS AT THE BOTTOM

BY SARAH O'CONNOR

- 1 When Ruwan Subasinghe was a trainee lawyer in one of London's big firms, he was so overworked that, on one occasion, he didn't leave the office for three days. When he and his colleagues slept under their desks, they were told to place their phones on their chests, so the vibrations would wake them if anyone called.
- 2 Are you reaching for your tiny violin? Like many people, my instinct has been to roll my eyes a little at the complaints that have emerged in recent years from tired lawyers and miserable junior bankers. I spend much of my professional life listening to overworked HGV drivers, Deliveroo couriers, healthcare staff, factory workers and office cleaners, which has left me somewhat unsympathetic to highly paid people who could do something else if they chose.
- 3 But sympathy isn't really the point. Burnt-out lawyers, bankers and consultants are highlighting problems that exist across the pay distribution with serious consequences. And paying attention to the concerns of people at the top can help inform the debate over how to improve jobs at the bottom as well.
- 4 For much of the past two centuries, long working hours were more common for the poor than the rich. Not any more. In the UK, for example, the tenth of men with the highest hourly pay now work seven hours a week more on average than the tenth of men on the lowest hourly pay, according to the Resolution Foundation think-tank. For women, the gap is 10 hours.
- 5 There are good reasons for long hours in sectors such as law, where associates at top firms are generally expected to bill between 1,900 and 2,200 hours a year, according to an FT Big Read on the topic. Clients expect service around the clock, issues can blow up suddenly, and detailed work doesn't always lend itself to baton-passing between colleagues in a shift system. There is also simple arithmetic: if you pay an associate an annual salary, but charge their time to clients in six-minute blocks, it makes sense to extract as many hours from the associate as possible. Yes, many drop out along the way, but a law firm is a pyramid with fewer spots at the top anyway.
- 6 Plenty of people opt into this system in exchange for high salaries and a shot at partnership. The problem is, it's making them sick. In a survey last year of 1,700 legal professionals in the UK and Ireland by LawCare, a mental health charity, 69 percent said they had experienced mental ill-health in the previous year. More than a third were sleeping six hours or less a night.
- 7 It's not just mental health that suffers when you overwork. Last year, a study by the World Health Organization concluded that working 55 or more hours a week is associated with an estimated 35 percent higher risk of a stroke and a 17 percent higher risk of dying from ischemic heart disease, compared to working 35-40 hours a week. Your body breaks when you work too much, regardless of whether you're paid £10 or £200 an hour.
- 8 Subasinghe, who left his law firm and is now legal director at the International Transport Workers' Federation, says it doesn't make sense to disregard overworked lawyers simply because they are better paid than truckers. "For me, high paying professions shouldn't be exempt from these sorts of discussions," he tells me. "We should expect any workplace irrespective of pay to abide by national laws and prevailing national standards [and] for me the biggest concern is occupational safety and health."
- 9 Burnout in the law profession combined with growing demand is now causing staffing problems, even though salaries have risen further. It is a reminder for other sectors facing labour shortages that higher wages can't fix everything. The shortage of HGV drivers, for example, has prompted many to conclude that employers must simply pay them more. Poor pay has been part of the problem, but drivers don't just want more money, they want less exhaustion and more opportunity for a family life.

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10 It would be difficult and costly to reform the entrenched long-hours culture in sectors such as law, but there would also be gains, and not just for people's health. Firms would be able to access more talented people (especially women) who can't or won't work 70-hour weeks. Clients might benefit too, since it's hard to believe the quality of white-collar work does not suffer when people are so tired.

11 It's time to stop the eye-rolling when overworked lawyers and bankers object to their working conditions and call on their industries to change. They might not need sympathy, but they do deserve support.

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Sarah O'Connor January 10 2022.

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3 Understanding the article

a. Are these sentences True or False according to the information in the article? Tick (✓) the sentences that are true and correct or rewrite any that are false.

1. A lawyer explained how, as a trainee, his employer expected him to be on call and available for clients for up to 72 hours non-stop.
2. The author used to be sympathetic to the work-related problems of highly-paid professionals, but recently she has changed her mind.
3. In contrast to the past two hundred years or so, well-paid men now work more hours than men in lower-paid jobs.
4. On average, women in well-paid jobs work fewer hours than men in well-paid jobs as they have other responsibilities.
5. Overworked high earners are more likely to suffer from mental rather than physical health problems.
6. Subasinghe left the legal profession and now works as an HGV truck driver where the pay is less, but the hours are shorter.
7. The author says that better pay is not the solution to the problem caused by a lack of truck drivers.
8. Changing long-standing cultures within certain high-paying industries that lead to companies expecting workers to put in overly long hours, would help not only with staffing shortages but also improve the quality of the work carried out and benefit the clients too.

4 Business language

a. Find multi-word expressions and phrases in the article that match the meanings below. The section numbers are given to help you.

1. facial movements that show you are annoyed or impatient (headline)

2. at all hours of the day (section 5) _____
3. begin suddenly (section 5) _____
4. be suitable for a particular purpose (section 5) _____
5. the action of handing something such as a task or a responsibility to someone else (section 5)

6. an attempt to do or achieve something (section 6) _____

b. Use them to complete these sentences, changing the form where needed.

1. A political row has _____ over the minister's remarks that he made on breakfast TV this morning.
2. The CEO was accused of unfairly _____ to his young personal assistant.
3. When he asked the same question for the third time, I saw how she _____.
4. She'd never chaired a meeting before, but she was more than willing to have _____ it.
5. Rescuers and volunteers worked _____ to free miners who had become trapped underground as a result of the explosion.
6. The software does not _____ easily to the current requirements of the emergency services.

c. Now use these phrases in sentences of your own.

5 Business language

a. With a partner, briefly discuss the differences in meanings of these similar words and then share and compare your answers with the rest of the class.

salary	wages	fee	income	earnings
take home pay	hourly pay	bonus	commission	

b. Which of these words do you remember reading in the article? Go back through the article to check your answers. What contexts were they used in in the article?

6 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

- How is your current income related to the number of hours you work and the effort you put into your job? What happens if you work more or fewer hours than are written in your contract?
- Talk about a job you once had that involved long or unusual working hours. How did you feel while you were doing this job?
- Should the government introduce a law stating a legal maximum number of working hours that applies to all jobs and professions regardless of the rate of pay? Why, why not?

7 Wider business theme – legal working hours and conditions

a. **Work in pairs. Choose two jobs from a specific sector or industry. Research and compare the laws and guidelines linked to these jobs. For example, find out as much as you can about:**

- The legal maximum working hours, and how these are recorded.
- The stipulated number and length of breaks.
- Union (or other) support.
- Common (mental) health issues associated with this type of work.
- Minimum pay, average income, etc.