

New scale for measuring addiction to work

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Spending more than 50 hours a week at work can determine addiction. Credit: SINC

Researchers from the Jaume I University have proven the usefulness of DUWAS, a new scale for measuring addiction to work, a disorder that affects around 12% of all working people in Spain. The experts say that 8% of the working population in Spain devotes more than 12 hours per day to their job.

"[Addiction](#) to work is a kind of psychosocial problem that is characterised by two primary features - working excessively and working compulsively", Mario Del Líbano, lead author of the paper and a researcher at the Faculty of Human and Social Sciences of the Jaume I University in Castellón de la Plana, tells SINC.

The results, published in the Spanish journal *Psicothema*, not only

confirm the bifactorial structure of workaholism, in other words its two dimensions, but also relate the results with psychosocial wellbeing (perceived health and happiness), in order to highlight the negative features of addiction to work in Spain.

"People are only workaholics if, on top of working excessively, they work compulsively in order to reduce anxiety and the feelings of guilt that they get when they're not working", Del Líbano explains.

"This study helps to evaluate addiction along with other phenomena that affect the psychosocial health of workers, without the time taken to fill in the questionnaire having any impact on their motivation", he adds.

The new scale, called DUWAS (Dutch Work Addiction Scale), has been validated as a result of the criticisms about its validity and reliability made by two evaluation tools that have been most used to date - the WorkBAT (Workaholism Battery) and the WART (Work Addiction Risk Test).

The cut-off point - 50 hours per week

Data on the worldwide prevalence of addiction to work vary from one study to another. It is placed at around 20% in countries such as Japan, while in Spain the figures are between 11.3% and 12%, according to research carried out in 2004 by Sánchez Pardo, Navarro Botella and Valderrama Zurián, and Del Líbano's group in 2006, respectively.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) says that 8% of the working population devotes more than 12 hours per day to their profession in order to escape from personal problems. According to the experts, spending more than 50 hours per week working could be a determining factor in addiction.

Addiction to work is characterised by extreme activity in and devotion to work (with people even working outside working hours, at weekends and on holidays), compulsion to work (inability to delegate), disproportionate involvement with work (people relating their self esteem to their work), and focusing on work to the detriment of their daily lives (poor interpersonal communication).

Some risk factors that can lead to such addiction include financial, family and social pressures; fear of losing one's job; competition in the labour market; the need to achieve a desired level of success; fear of overbearing, demanding or threatening bosses; high levels of personal work efficiency; and lack of personal affection, with the person trying to make up for this with their work.

In addition, workaholic people can also end up taking illegal substances to help them work harder, enabling them to increase their workplace performance and overcome tiredness and the need for sleep.

More information: Del Líbano, Mario; Llorens, Susana; Salanova, Marisa; Schaufeli, Wilmar. "Validity of a brief workaholism scale". *Psicothema* 22(1): 143-150, Feb 2010.

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