

New method to measure work addiction

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This is Cecilie Schou Andreassen. Credit: Ole Kristian Olsen

Researchers from Norway and the United Kingdom have developed a new instrument to measure work addiction: The Bergen Work Addiction Scale. The new instrument is based on core elements of addiction that are recognised as diagnostic criteria for several addictions.

Some people seem to be driven to work excessively and compulsively. These are denoted as work addicts – or workaholics.

In the wake of globalisation, new technology and blurred boundaries

between work and private life, we are witnessing an increase in work addiction, Doctor Cecilie Schou Andreassen from the Faculty of Psychology at the University of Bergen (UiB) says.

Andreassen leads the team that has developed the new instrument, which is the first of its kind worldwide. With her background as a clinical psychologist specialist and her work as a consultant for the private sector, she is familiar with the real-life implications of work addiction.

A number of studies show that work addiction has been associated with insomnia, health problems, burnout and stress as well as creating conflict between work and family life, Andreassen says.

The Bergen Work Addiction Scale is presented in an article in the renowned *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*.

By testing themselves with the scale, people can find out their degree of work addiction: non-addicted, mildly addicted or workaholic, Andreassen explains.

12,135 Norwegian employees from 25 different industries participated in the development of the Bergen Work Addiction Scale. The scale was administered to two cross-occupational samples. The scale reflects the seven core elements of addiction: Salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, relapse and problems.

The results show the scale as reliably differentiating between workaholics and non-workaholics.

Scandinavian Journal of Psychology The scale may add value to work addiction research and practice, particularly when it comes to facilitating treatment and estimating prevalence of work addiction in the general population worldwide, according to Andreassen.

About the scale: Seven basic criteria

The Bergen Work Addiction Scale uses seven basic criteria to identify work addiction, where all items are scored on the following scale: (1) Never, (2) Rarely, (3) Sometimes, (4) Often, and (5) Always:

- You think of how you can free up more time to work.
- You spend much more time working than initially intended.
- You work in order to reduce feelings of guilt, anxiety, helplessness and depression.
- You have been told by others to cut down on work without listening to them.
- You become stressed if you are prohibited from working.
- You deprioritize hobbies, leisure activities, and exercise because of your work.
- You work so much that it has negatively influenced your health.

Andreassen's study shows that scoring of "often" or "always" on at least four of the seven items may suggest that you are a workaholic.

More information: Andreassen, C. S., Griffiths, M. D., Hetland, J. & Pallesen, S. (2012). Development of a work addiction scale.

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