

Australians work too hard: expert

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(Medical Xpress) -- Overwork is significantly impacting the mental health and wellbeing of Australians, a Flinders University labour studies expert warns.

Professor Sue Richardson (pictured), a Principal Research Fellow at the Flinders-based National Institute of Labour Studies, said overwork was an issue that must be taken “much more seriously”.

“We hear a lot about unemployment and underemployment but we don’t hear nearly enough about overemployment,” Professor Richardson said.

“There’s a strong language about how hard [work](#) and long hours are

somehow morally superior but I think that conversation needs to be reconsidered,” she said.

“Instead of making it seem like it’s a macho commitment to the job we need to work on the language and the way we present it to reduce the pressures to work longer hours.”

Her comments come amid the findings of a four-year research project, funded through a \$1.3 million National Health and Medical Research Council grant, which have revealed the impact of overwork on the mental health of Australia’s workforce.

Professor Richardson said a quarter of the 8,000 employees surveyed in the annual Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey were working more hours than they wanted and, as a result, displayed “significantly” lower levels of mental health.

“We do have overtime but the issue arises when people don’t get paid for the extra hours they put in, and since longer hours are producing more stressed workers and reducing mental health, it suggests the labour market isn’t working well.

“Employers need to think very carefully about what they’re asking of their workers and whether it’s manageable in the time available.”

The research was part of a wider study, conducted in partnership with researchers from Flinders Southgate Institute and the University of Melbourne, to determine whether casual, contract and part-time employment were harmful for mental health.

Despite a growth in flexible work arrangements, with about 40 per cent of the Australian workforce employed in casual and part-time positions, Professor Richardson said the high level of protection for these workers

in Australia meant there were no [mental health](#) ramifications.

In fact, she said many workers were choosing more flexible terms of employment to escape the burden of overwork and inflexible work hours.

“Australia also has a unique industrial relations regime which insists people on casual terms get paid more per hour than their full-time equivalents, and other employee benefits are the same whether you work full-time or part-time,” she said.

“Quite a few workers actually like casual work, partly because of the pay provisions and partly because it gives them greater control over their hours of work – for many [workers](#) it suits them to work part-time if they’ve got important other demands in life because they avoid the pressure.”

Provided by Flinders University

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