

Workaholism: The addiction of this century

August 14 2014, by Walter Wehus



Using the Bergen Work Addiction Scale, researchers from the University of Bergen (UiB) in Norway have measured work addiction among workers in Norway. Credit: Colourbox

In spite of the many positive aspects of work, some people are unable to detach from it – working excessively and compulsively. These are called workaholics.

Postdoctoral Fellow Cecilie Schou Andreassen and colleagues from the Department of Psychosocial Science at the University of Bergen (UiB)

in Norway has been the first to assess workaholism in a nationally representative sample.

According to Schou Andreassen, the "workaholism" concept has been studied by scholars for nearly 45 years. Still, reliable statistics on the prevalence of workaholism is hard to find. The research field primarily relies upon poor measures used in small non-representative samples from the United States.

Measuring work addiction

Schou Andreassen is no stranger to this type of research, having previously developed an instrument to measure [work](#) addiction called the Bergen Work Addiction Scale (BWAS). The BWAS is the first workaholism instrument that is based on core symptoms found in more traditional drug addictions; i.e., salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, conflict, relapse, problems.

Schou Andreassen and her research team have developed seven criteria to measure [work addiction](#):

- 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/or 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/or exercise because of your work.
- You work so much that it has negatively influenced your health.

"If you reply 'often' or 'always' to at least four of these seven criteria,

there is some indication that you may be a workaholic," says Schou Andreassen. "This is the first scale to use core symptoms of addiction found in other more traditional addictions."

Young adults most affected

The study found that 8.3 per cent of all Norwegians are addicted to work. There are, however, no differences between the genders. Both men and women tend to compulsively overwork.

"We did find that younger adults were affected to a greater extent than older workers," says Schou Andreassen. "However, workaholism seems unrelated to gender, education level, marital status or part-time versus full-time employment."

Those with caretaker responsibility for children living at home were more likely to be affected than those without children.

Workaholics scored higher on three personality traits:

- Agreeableness ("Mother Teresa" - typically altruistic, compliant, modest)
- Neuroticism ("Woody Allen" - typically nervous, hostile, impulsive)
- Intellect/imagination ("Columbus" - typically open for new impulses, inventive, action oriented)

Huge practical implications

Schou Andreassen points out that workaholism may have contradictory psychological, physiological, and social outcomes. As a significant group seemingly is affected, focus on this phenomenon is timely, especially

among health professionals and researchers. But employers, politicians, legislators/lawyers, and journalists should also acknowledge the topic as well.

"As workaholism is not a formal diagnosis the development of treatment models and real treatment offers has been lacking. The fact that more than eight per cent of the general work population seems to suffer from workaholism underlines the need for proper treatment and other relevant interventions," says Cecilie Schou Andreassen.

More information: Andreassen, C. S., Griffiths, M. D., Hetland, J., Kravina, L., Jensen, F., & Pallesen, S. The prevalence of workaholism: A survey study in a nationally representative sample of Norwegian employees. *PLOS ONE*. www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0102446

Provided by University of Bergen

Citation: Workaholism: The addiction of this century (2014, August 14) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-08-workaholism-addiction-century.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--