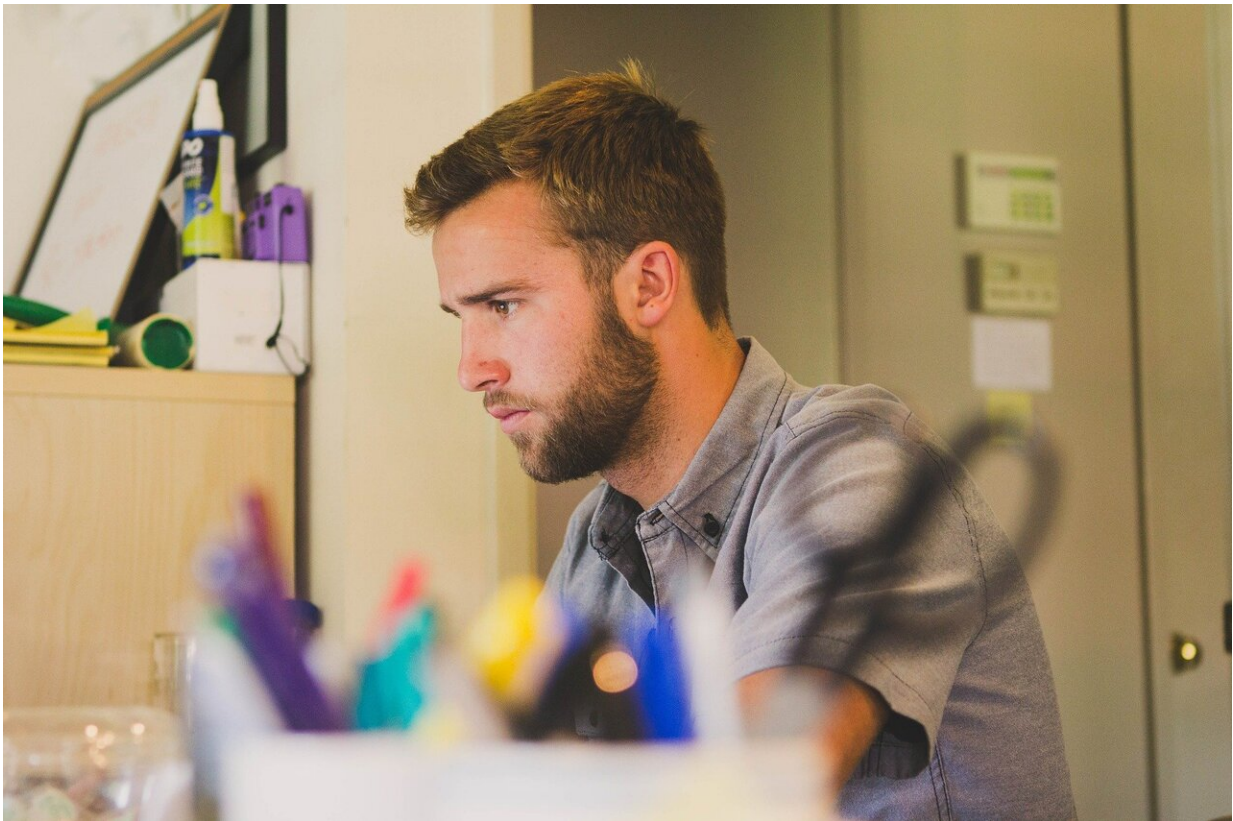


# Workaholism leads to mental and physical health problems

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Workaholism or work addiction risk is a growing public health concern that can lead to many negative mental and physical health outcomes such as depression, anxiety or sleep disorder. Perception of work (job

demands and job control) may become a major cause of employees' work addiction. The international group of researchers including the HSE University scientist explored the link between work addiction risk and health-related outcomes using the framework of Job Demand Control Model. The results were published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*.

Workaholics are people who usually work seven and more hours more than others per week. There are potential reasons for that: financial problems, poor marriage or pressure by their organization or supervisor. What can differentiate a workaholic behavior from similar behavior like work engagement? Workaholism is also known as a behavioral disorder, which means the excessive involvement of the individual in work when an employer doesn't require or expect it.

The scientists aimed to demonstrate the extent to which the [work addiction](#) risk is associated with the perception of work (job demands and job control), and [mental health](#) in four job categories suggested by Karasek's model or Job Demand-Control-Support model (JDCS). The JDCS model assumes four various work environments (four quadrants) in which workers may experience a different level of job demands and job control: passive, low-strain, active, and tense/job-strain. Job control is the extent to which an employee feels control over doing work.

'Passive' jobs (low job control, low job demands) might be satisfying to a [worker](#) as long as the workers reach the set goal. 'Low strain' jobs have high job control and low job demands. Individuals in this category are not particularly at risk of mental health problems, and it corresponds typically to creative [jobs](#) such as architects. 'Active' workers have high job demands and high job control. They are highly skilled professionals with responsibilities, such as heads or directors of companies. Those highly skilled workers have very demanding tasks but they have high levels of decision latitude to solve problems. Finally, workers at risk of

stress-related disorders are those within the 'job strain' group (high demand and low control). For example, healthcare workers from emergency departments are typically in job strain because they cannot control the huge workload.

The study was conducted in France because it is one of the industrial countries with growing numbers of occupations. The authors of the research collected data from 187 out of 1580 (11.8%) French workers who agreed to participate in a cross-sectional study using the WittyFit software online platform. The self-administered questionnaires were the Job Content Questionnaire by Karasek, the Work Addiction Risk Test, the Hospital Anxiety and Depression scale and socio-demographics. The authors of this study divided all the participants based on their occupational groups and investigated the link between work addiction risk and mental and physical health outcomes.

"One of the novelties of this research was to introduce vulnerable occupational groups to organizations or job holders. For example, if we find that work addiction risk can be found more in some occupations and may result in negative outcomes for the health situation then we can give this information to decision makers in this organization or, for example, to the ministry of health. And they could intervene to prevent this problem," explains Morteza Charkhabi, Associate Professor at the Institute of Education at the HSE University.

The results show that high job demands at work are strongly associated with work addiction risk but the job control level does not play the same role. The prevalence of work addiction risk is higher for active and high-strain workers than for passive and low-strain workers. These two groups of workers appeared to be more vulnerable and therefore can suffer more from the negative outcomes of work addiction risk, in terms of depression, sleep disorder, stress and other health issues.

"We found that job demands could be the most important factor that can develop work addiction risk. So this factor should be controlled or should be investigated by the organization's manager, for example, HR staff, psychologists. Also another conclusion could be the job climate like job demands of each job category can influence the rate of work addiction risk. Thus in this study we actually focused on external factors like job demands not internal factors like the personal characteristics," adds Morteza Charkhabi.

The researchers found that people with higher work addiction risk compared to people with low work addiction risk have twice the risk of developing depression. Sleep quality was lower to workers with high risk of work addiction compared to workers with low risk of work addiction. Also women had almost twice the work [addiction](#) risk than men.

**More information:** Frédéric Dutheil et al, Exploring the Link between Work Addiction Risk and Health-Related Outcomes Using Job-Demand-Control Model, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2020). [DOI: 10.3390/ijerph17207594](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17207594)

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