



Review Paper

Workaholic Lifestyle and Its Impact on Mental Health

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Abstract	Manuscript Information
<p>This paper aims at shedding light on Workaholism, its definition, symptoms, difference between Workaholism and hard work, features of the mindset of the workaholic and its effect on their life, the effect of the mind- body link on the workaholic's life, and the symptoms of the psychiatric disorders of the workaholics. It ends up with a call to reflect on our lives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ISSN No: 2583-7397 ▪ Received: 19-03-2024 ▪ Accepted: 25-04-2024 ▪ Published: 30-04-2024 ▪ IJCRM:3(2);2024:205-208 ▪ ©2024, All Rights Reserved ▪ Plagiarism Checked: Yes ▪ Peer Review Process: Yes
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INTRODUCTION

People are different; conditions of life are different; mentalities are different; cultures are different; time and place are different for everyone; conditions of pregnancy, birth, and upbringing are different even in the same family. All of this, among others, make life so different from one person to another. Therefore, it is natural to have varied lifestyles. It is also natural that each mode of life leaves its imprint on one's health in all its components: physical, mental, emotional, social, and intellectual.

Out of this varied spectrum of lifestyles, one is gaining ground nowadays. Many people burn their candles from both sides to survive; many perform multi-tasks at the same time; they keep rushing from a deadline to another; and from a to-do list to another; they are always in need of diaries, organizers and alarms

to help them organize their hectic life as if they are in speedy race with time to accomplish the most they have to do. They become addicted to painkillers and tranquilizers. The question then rises: are they suffering from a new kind of addiction that is playing on their nerves? Are they addicted to work? Are they called workaholics or hard workers? Are they praised for this lifestyle or accused of deviating from the norms? Are they normal or abnormal? How does this lifestyle affect their mental health? Answers to these questions and more are uncovered below.

Who Is the Workaholic?

In an article published in Psychology Today, Dr Barbara Killinger, a pioneer and expert in the field of workaholism defines a workaholic as “a work-obsessed individual

who gradually becomes emotionally crippled and addicted to power and control in a compulsive drive to gain approval and public recognition of success” (Killinger, 2012)^[2, 5].

An Important Question to Ask

The concept of Workaholism is a hard sell. There is a big difference between hard work and workaholism. Many people work from morning to night to make ends meet. However, working that long does not necessarily mean that one is a workaholic. One needs to investigate one important issue: what makes anyone put in long hours at work? Is it an external reason or an internal one? In other words, is the person working to satisfy their needs to live, or are they escaping intimate relations with family and friends or searching for satisfying inner psychological hunger? (Robinson, 2007, pp. 6-7)^[6].

Reasons behind Workaholism

Malissa Clark differentiates between four main reasons that push some people to overwork. The first is motivational: unlike other people, workaholics do not work because they like and enjoy their work, but because they ought to be working. The second type of causes is cognitive; this means workaholics cannot unlock themselves from the persistent thought of work at any time. The third one is emotional; they simply feel guilty, anxious and worried if they are not working. Finally, there is the behavioral one: they tend to do more than it is required from them to do (Clark, 2018)^[3].

Differences between Workaholics and Hard Workers

Since it is now the trend for most people to work long hours, it becomes extremely important to draw distinctions between the two categories: workaholics and hard workers. Robinson draws these lines to distinguish between healthy hard workers and the addicted to work or workaholics. Atop the list comes the workaholic’s preference to work alone and attend to the details of the work their ego is attached to; whereas, the hard worker functions at the macro level and sees the whole picture so they work collectively and cooperatively for the general good. Secondly, a workaholic creates a work to do and even looks for it, while the hard worker enjoys their work and carries it efficiently. Thirdly, a workaholic’s mind is obsessed about work and gives it a disproportionate amount of time even during vacations, leisure activities or holidays; meanwhile, a hard worker focuses on their work only in the present moment and enjoys doing it. Fourthly, workaholics consider work as a haven in an unsafe, changeable world; in contrast, a hard worker sees work as a gratifying responsibility. Fifthly, workaholics’ work overlaps to their familial and social life; however, a hard worker knows when and how to switch hats of work and personal life. Sixthly, workaholics look for emotional and neurophysiological benefits of adrenaline boosts to meet cramming deadlines of overwork; whereas, hard workers do not. Seventh, workaholics are preoccupied with work no matter where, when, and with whom they are in contrast to hard workers who know how to switch gears between work and personal life. In short, workaholics’ connection to work is as compelling as an

alcoholic’s to wine or a drug addict to cocaine. (Robinson, 2007, pp.16-19).

Features of the Mindset of the Workaholic and Its Effect on Their Life

In his book “Chained to the Desk”, Professor Brayan Robinson elaborates on the approach that workaholics rely on and distinguishes their attitude towards life, work, and people around them. He says they are driven by rigid thinking and closed mindset that orient their lives and drive them into falling in a vicious circle of incessant work. Robinson explains twelve factors that constitute this framework of thinking and explains that they are wholly found in all workaholics but in different degrees.

On the top of the list comes “**perfectionist thinking**” that leads workaholics to a sense of failure, self-defeat and self-inadequacy. They usually hold the responsibility of tasks and missions more than they can do. In addition, if things are not perfect, they do not feel happy. This makes them exert maximum efforts to produce what can be described as perfect.

They are also trapped in “**all-or-nothing**” thinking that keeps them in the extreme sides of continuum so that they never attempt a compromise or in-between situations. There are no spaces for shades of grey in their life. It is either work or family, for instance. They believe they have to be fully available in either one and to be everything to either one.

A third frustrating mode of thinking that governs them is known as “**telescopic thinking**” which focuses on their shortcomings and turns a blind eye to their flawless achievements and success. This kind of berating thinking is a childhood residue. Their parents would always compare them to those on the top no matter how close from them they were; the result is a critical inner voice that always considers their success a failure.

A fourth constituent of this rigid framework of thinking that characterizes workaholics is “**blurred -boundary thinking**”. They are not able to figure out when or where to draw the line between yes and no, a situation that ends up in sacrificing their needs by obeying the demands of others. The eventual result will be self-neglect and burnout.

“**People-pleasing thinking**” is another characteristic of the workaholic mindset. They tend to make others pleased and satisfied by agreeing and complying with them to feel inner contentment. However, this exaggeration in compliance with everyone drives them into losing one’s identity, and thus self-respect. They will always need others to tell them what to do because they gauge their actions with respect to others’ opinions. In this way, their personalities become unpredictable and they change with the wind.

In addition, workaholics’ “**pessimistic thinking**” also discounts the approval they get so that they feel worthless, pitiful and dissatisfied. They always let the pessimistic tone dominate over their lives. They always see the world through a dark lens that covers any bright achievement they do or compliment they get. Workaholics tend to believe that their defects are prominent and whatever they do is not good enough and that it will fail at the

end. This idea haunts them so badly that they end up ruining their own success by themselves, even accidentally. Their pessimism takes its emotional toll on their relationships with family, co-workers and friends due to both physical and emotional crippling.

As a result of this kind of mindset, another factor appears to be a dominant part in this rigid mentality; it is **“helpless thinking”** which makes them tend to believe that they have to work under high pressure, but it is simply not their fault at all; the blame lies on external factors like family, work conditions or maybe even the economy.

Consequently, another feature of their outlook flows to the surface: it is **“self-victimized thinking”**. In their eyes, they are sacrificing themselves for the sake of others. The more this feeling overwhelms them, the more bitter, resentful, and cynical they feel, all of which will perpetuate their entrapment within the high-pressured lifestyle.

Another element that draws the contours of the workaholics’ personalities is represented by **“resistance thinking”** which makes them see life as a continuous struggle. They structure their lives by cramming too many things to accomplish, which allows no free spaces to hold their breath. They confine themselves into a lifestyle that lacks spontaneity and flexibility. For this reason, they get frustrated, for example, being stuck in a traffic jam, waiting in turn, or coping with slow-moving people. In this way, they lose a lot of their emotional energy getting furious at their status quo rather than adapting to it.

Furthermore, **“wishful thinking”** forms the cornerstone that keeps the life of the workaholics in an endless state of movement. It focuses their attention on the empty side of the cup they have, making them wish to have more of what they do not possess, whether it is people or things. All this is initiated from the desire to be completer and more pleased. However, it defines happiness in terms of deficiency and displeasure. This endless feeling of dissatisfaction keeps the flame of work addiction glowing within them in the hope of filling in the gaps in their lives.

Moreover, **“serious thinking”** paints the life of workaholics with a stern outlook. To them, life is about serious ideas, work and achievement where there is no place for fun, laughter or play. They consider people who waste time away in humorous and carefree activities foolish, stupid and frivolous. In their eyes, life is about getting missions accomplished, which makes them look at relaxation scornfully. All this may be the result of a strict childhood in which they had to grow up like little adults with a lot of responsibilities and tasks to do.

Finally, **“externalized thinking”** embodies most of what has been mentioned about workaholics’ intellectual framework since they focus on substantial evidence that displays their efforts. The product they show to others is more important to them than their inner feelings during the process of its formulation. Their worth and feelings are determined by the quantity and quality of what they produce and what people say about them and how others see them, not by their inner feelings, opinions and human qualities. (Robinson, 2007, pp.121-126)^[6]. this makes them extremely exhausted just to meet others’ expectations.

The Effect of the Mind- Body Link on the Workaholic’s Life

Scientific research proves there is a reversible mind-body link between mental health and physical health, and that is definitely determined by the lifestyle a person adopts. Studies show both happiness and misery come from our mode of thinking. Stress psychologist Hans Selye explained long ago how the body produces its own poisons under the effect of stress and negative emotions. Physical harm takes place as a result. This is because the cells of workaholics are constantly prying on their thoughts, dark moods, rage and disappointments, which makes them the victims of their own thoughts. Stressed workaholics’ negative thinking creates negative emotions that lead to the secretion of biochemical enzymes such as cortisol, adrenaline and other stress hormones that destroy the immune system. Anger, hostility, hurry, high stress and negative feelings cause the release of epinephrine and adrenaline that are responsible for causing heart attack and cancer, among other physical diseases. Thus, the workaholic’s despair, anxiety, and depression may end up shortening their life. Positive emotions, on the other hand, are linked to the secretion of endorphins that kill pain and help create happiness and enjoy life. Therefore, workaholic’s negative emotions can kill them; whereas, joy and laughter can heal and sustain them. (Robinson, 2007, pp. 126-127).

Narcissism and Self-Esteem: Up or Down?

Driven by insecurities, workaholics sometimes go to the extremes desperately to prove their value. They do this even at the expense of others; for example, they claim superiority over others to cover their inner inferiority. They resort to work to raise their self-esteem and ego-enhancement. They claim that they are the only ones who can solve problems at work, whereas others consider them as narrow-minded, lacking in vision, and difficult to work with (Robinson, 2007, pp. 115-117).

Barbara Killinger points out that these kinds of narcissistic attributes are implanted in the child’s personality by his parents. These seeds are planted during childhood by parents who keep telling their child that they are special, superior and exceptional. Consequently, much will be expected from the child and their accomplishments would be highly rewarded. Narcissistic workaholics believe that their opinions are always true and the best; however, others receive them as conceited, superior and insensible due to the fact that these narcissistic workaholics lack compassion and sensitivity, and agreeing with others is not an option. Killinger considers narcissism the real evil behind workaholicism. Envy is intrinsic in their competitive nature, and projection of blame and detachment may give these self-serving individuals the signal to be unfaithful to their spouses to feed their drooping egos. (Killinger, 2012)^[5]

Symptoms of the Psychiatric Disorders of the Workaholics

Workaholicism has been the subject of scientific research worldwide. Many factors were studied starting from the causes, background, character traits, and effects on physical health, mental health and personal relationships. Here are some briefings of few varied studies, which help understand the profile of the workaholic.

A large-scale study was conducted by Andreaseen *et al.*, 2016,^[1] to assess symptoms of psychiatric disorders and workaholism among 16,426 workers in Norway. Results showed positive and significant correlations between workaholism and symptoms of the following psychiatric disorders: ADHD, OCD, anxiety and depression. In details, results indicate the following correlations: in attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD): 32.7% of workaholics met ADHD criteria, compared to 12.7% of non-workaholics; whereas; in obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD): 25.6% of workaholics met OCD criteria, compared to 8.7% of non-workaholics. As for anxiety, the highest rate appears: 33.8% of workaholics met anxiety criteria, compared to 11.9% of non-workaholics. Finally, with respect to depression, results indicate that 8.9% of workaholics met depression criteria, compared to 2.6% of non-workaholics.

In a study conducted by Builik and Bartczak in Poland, the researchers intended to examine the relationship between workaholism and mental health among 126 Polish academic workers. They found that employees with higher levels of workaholism had inferior state of health. This means workaholism led to more somatic symptoms, higher levels of anxiety, insomnia, social dysfunction and symptoms of depression. Emotional arousal and perfectionism were the clearest signals of the state of general health and were mostly responsible for harmful effects on mental health (Builik & Bartczak, *et al*, 2012).

In a similar study carried out in Japan, results showed workaholism had a negative impact on both physical and mental health; the subjects of the study were managers and non-managers who showed more psychological distress and physical complaints (Fojimoto, 1992).

In addition, a group of researchers focused on studying the relationship between personality traits and workaholism in a sample of 470 subjects composed of full-time workers in a university in Czech Republic and a group of students in the same university. The results showed that the higher the neurotic tendencies are, the greater the tendencies to be workaholic. The same applies to perfectionism. However, conscientiousness is poorly related with Workaholism Soukova *et al.*, 2014,^[4,7]

CONCLUSION

In short, it has become clear that it is not a badge of honor to be called a workaholic. One has to attend to his health, balance his time, and differentiate between hard work and addiction to work according to the criteria mentioned above. In the 21st century, there is a primary focus on including therapeutic factors in one's lifestyle. Dr Walsh mentions that "there is considerable research and clinical evidence that support the therapeutic value of the following factors in one's lifestyle: exercise, nutrition and diet, time in nature, recreation, relaxation, and stress management, religious and spiritual involvement, and contribution and service to others." (Walsh, 2011)^[8]. However, the main question remains problematic: would the competitive, rapid nature of the 21st century allow the healing power of these factors to print their therapeutic effects on the charisma of a person trying to cope

with this highly demanding era? Or is it really making it worse? Definitely, reconsidering one's priorities and aims can act as a lighthouse in man's journey in life.

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