

THE EFFECTS OF WORKING HOURS ON WORKERS' WORK-LIFE INTEGRATION IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

Long work hours cultures are said to be pervasive and as such work is claimed to be ruining workers' lives instead of ruling (Warhurst *et al.*, 2008). The amount of time that people spend at work will have a strong influence on work-life integration. The more time spent at work the less time available for participation in non-working life. Long working hours reduce the opportunities for socially productive leisure by restricting time available 'for being an effective marriage partner, parent and citizen' (Golden & Figart, 2000: 26). Research indicates that it is the low control over work hours which leads to greater work-life conflict (Pisarski *et al.*, 2002). There is evidence indicating that work-life conflict arising from long or socially undesirable working hours, particularly in the evening or on weekends, has negative effects on health (Cowling, 2005; Bohle & Tilley, 1989). However, the extent to which longer working hours and managerial control over workers' working hours affect the way workers' manage their work/non-work life has yet to be empirically investigated in the Malaysian context. Hence, this paper aims to investigate to what extent the working hours can affect public sector workers' work-life integration in the context of Malaysia. Based on qualitative case studies in three public sector organisations with 71 in-depth interviews, findings show that the reactive nature of certain jobs required workers to work altruistically for the public good and also required workers to work long hours. Although the working time demand varied from one occupation to another, the long working hours culture in the study demonstrated that the nature of certain job types requires high work commitment. However, the high work demands in certain jobs in the organisational cases were not accommodated by adequate resources e.g. work-life arrangements. As such, the relationship between work demands and management's desire to control working time, and the absence of necessary work-life provisions (i.e. on-site crèches) was seen to create conflict.

Keywords: Working hours, work-life integration, work-life conflict, public sector, Malaysia