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TAJUK ARTIKEL	TOO MUCH WORK CHANGES THE BRAIN		
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8 Health

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WE ALL know that working long hours is detrimental to our personal well-being.

But scientists now think that it may alter the structure of our brains.

A South Korean study, recently published in the journal *Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, sheds new light on the risks of overwork.

It reveals structural alterations in the brain of people working more than 52 hours a week.

Like many working people, you may have already extended your day at the office long after your colleagues have left, perhaps to answer emails or finish an urgent task.

But at what cost?

This habit, deeply rooted in many professional cultures, is gradually undermining personal well-being.

It feeds chronic stress and weakens mental and physical health, to the point of disrupting the very functioning of the brain.

These are the findings of a team of researchers from Chung-Ang and Yonsei Universities.

Analysing the effects of overwork on the human brain, they conducted a study involving 110 professionals, mostly from the healthcare sector.

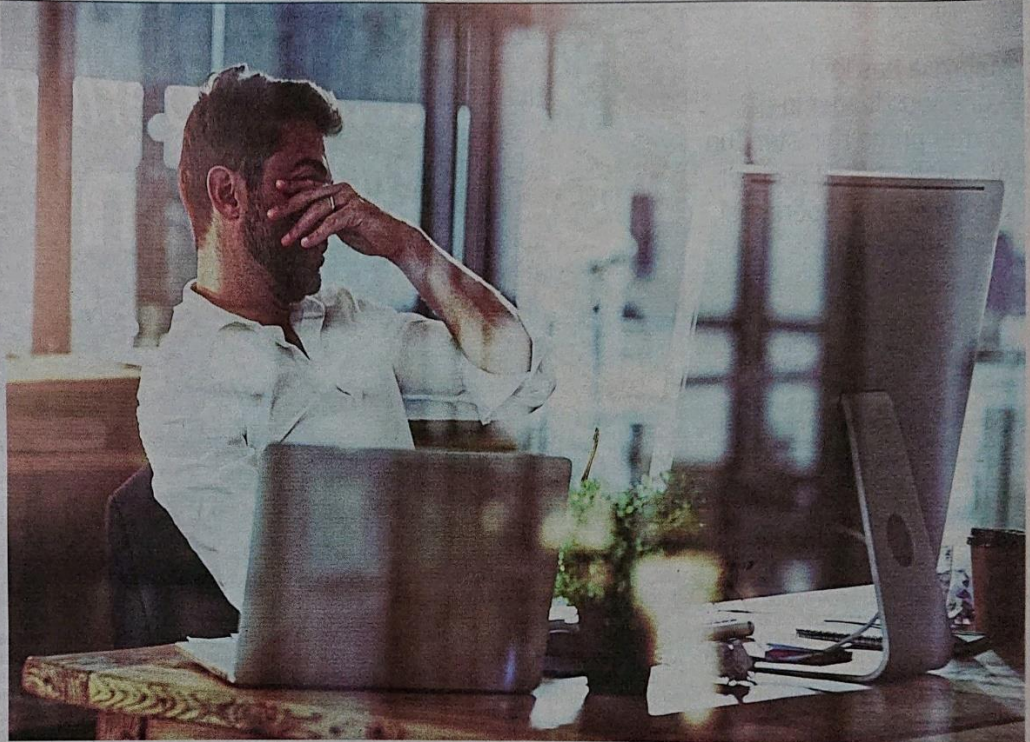
The participants were divided into two groups: the first comprised 32 people working 52 hours or more a week, and the second, 78 people with standard working hours.

Brain imaging revealed clear differences in grey matter volumes, particularly in areas associated with executive function and emotional regulation.

The results are striking: the scientists found a significant increase in grey matter in certain brain regions, as a possible physical effect of burnout.

The middle frontal gyrus, which plays a role in attention, memory and advanced cognitive functions, showed a 19% increase in volume in the most overworked workers.

Other areas were also affected, such as the superior frontal gyrus, involved in planning and decision-making, and the insula, which is essential for self-awareness, emotional management



Scientists find that working long hours produces significant physical changes in the brain, but are still unsure of what that means precisely. — AFP

Too much work changes the brain

Working long hours appears to physically alter our brain structure, a new study finds.

and interpreting social context.

The study authors state in a press release that "the observed changes in brain volume may provide a biological basis for the

cognitive and emotional challenges often reported in overworked individuals".

What exactly does this increase in grey matter volume

mean though?

For now, the answer remains unclear.

"While the results should be interpreted cautiously due to the exploratory nature of this pilot study, they represent a meaningful first step in understanding the relationship between overwork and brain health," the researchers say.

For the time being, it is impossible to determine whether these changes are directly caused by overwork, whether they pre-exist it, or whether they are reversible.

Although the study sample is small – consisting exclusively of South Korean healthcare workers – the results form part of a worrying trend.

In 2021, a joint study by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO)

attributed over 745,000 deaths a year to overwork.

The link between long working hours and cognitive decline is now well documented.

At a time when trials of the four-day week are multiplying, these conclusions serve as a wake-up call.

"The results underscore the importance of addressing overwork as an occupational health concern and highlight the need for workplace policies that mitigate excessive working hours," the researchers warn.

Concrete measures like legislation, public policy and time limits, need to be considered to protect workers in the long term.

The message is clear: if you're feeling tired, distracted or emotionally frazzled, it could be more than just a slump; it could be your brain sounding the alarm. — AFP Relaxnews