

HOURS OF WORK

1. Employment of Women: Health of Munition Workers Memoranda No 4 1916

'It has been stated by some managers and foremen that the last few hours of a twelve-hour shift yield little output.'

'In one factory visited at night the manager stated that fatigue prevented many of the women from making the effort to go from their work to the mess room though in itself the room was attractive. In another, visited also at night, several women were lying, during the meal hour, beside their piles of heaped up work; while others, later, were asleep by their machines, facts which bear additional witness to the relative failure of these hours.'

2. Chief Inspector of Factories and Workshops: Annual Report 1919

'From an industrial point of view one of the most remarkable effects of the war is the general reduction in the hours of work, which now rarely exceed an aggregate of 48 a week.'

3. 1833-1983 150 Years of health and safety inspection: 1983

Munitions working all hours 1940

'The lessons of the 1914-1918 war were thrown to the winds and the Chief Inspector reported, more in sorrow than in anger, that it was impossible to convince the Service and Supply Departments that excessive hours did not necessarily mean more production and indeed would almost certainly mean a progressive decline in quality.'

4. Health effects of shift work and extended hours of work: JM Harrington: 2001

'The main physiological consequence of such shift schedules is disruption of circadian rhythm which can have a deleterious effect on performance, sleep patterns, accident rates, mental health, and cardiovascular mortality. Reproductive outcome effects may be linked to disruption of menstrual cycles. Individual issues such as sex, age, and personality are also important.'

5. Managing Shiftwork: Health and Safety Executive HSG 256: 2006

'Research has shown that there can be undesirable consequences for those working shifts outside standard daytime hours, particularly those covering the night or with early morning starts. For example, shift work may result in:

- disruption of the internal body clock;
- fatigue;
- sleeping difficulties;
- disturbed appetite and digestion;
- reliance on sedatives and/or stimulants;
- social and domestic problems,

which in turn can affect performance, increase the likelihood of errors and accidents at work and might have a negative effect on health.’

6. IARC Monographs Programme finds cancer hazards associated with shiftwork, painting and firefighting: Press Release No 180: 5th December 2007

‘After a thorough review and discussion of the published scientific evidence, an expert Working Group convened by the IARC Monographs programme has concluded that Shiftwork that involves circadian disruption is probably carcinogenic to humans (Group 2A).’

7. Shift-work, Rest and Sleep: Minimising the Risks: BMA Scotland 2010

‘There is now sufficient evidence to conclude that shift work, particularly out-of-hours shift work, may be harmful to the worker, even in the short term and may have a detrimental impact on patient safety.’

8. The Impact of the Working Time Regulations on the UK labour market: A review of evidence: BIS: December 2014

‘Survey evidence demonstrates that the majority of workers currently working above 48 hours would not want to reduce their hours if it meant less money.

‘Firms may also lack information on the health and safety effects of requiring their workers to work long hours. Workers that are better rested may be more productive and less likely to suffer personal injury at work or endanger the health and safety of colleagues due to workplace accidents. They are also less likely to suffer illness and have to miss work through ill health.’

9. Building Productivity in the UK: ACAS: June 2015

- ‘Since the onset of the 2007-2008 financial crisis labour productivity in the United Kingdom overall has been exceptionally weak.
- Despite some modest improvements in 2013, UK whole economy output per hour remains around 16 per cent below the level implied by its pre-crisis trend.
- In 2013, UK productivity was an estimated 17 per cent lower than the G7 average.’

‘On average private sector employees are producing no more per hour worked than six years ago. If normal rates of productivity growth had pertained we would be producing at least 15 per cent more. That’s a huge loss. Recent figures suggest we have lost all the gains we made in 15 years prior to the crisis in catching up with countries like the US, Germany and France.’

Paul Johnson, Director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies: 2015

‘Take the automotive industry or the aerospace sector, where high levels of union membership and high levels of employee involvement go alongside incredibly high levels of productivity.’

‘Take something like shift working or rostering. If these are not carefully handled, it can be difficult for employees to manage their work-life commitments which can in turn result in tensions at the workplace and disruptions in operational efficiency.’

Reflections

Hours of work has always been a contentious issue. As indicated by the work done in the munitions factories, the Government of the day recognised that excessive hours caused fatigue. However this was not the only issue that was affecting worker’s ability to be

efficient. Changes in a range of working conditions all helped to improve both productivity and quality – ie less dud explosives. Yet the connection between long hours, Shiftwork and poor productivity was recognised.

In the second and third quote it is shown that when the Second World War came, industrialists and Government quickly forgot the lessons of the First World War. They had to be re-learnt. The main difficulty is that workers are generally blackmailed into long hours at the expense of their health. Generally every extra hour of work brings a bit more pay. If you are paid by the hour, then the desire to increase the weekly pay may result in health being sacrificed.

As our knowledge of the detrimental effect of Shiftwork and long hours increased, the effects became increasingly documented. In Professor Harrington's study, he identified a number of health effects. In the HSE's guide '*Managing Shiftwork*' they set out clearly the health impacts.

Indeed by 2007 the International Agency for Research on Cancer had enough scientific evidence available to assess shiftwork as a cause of occupational cancer. Indeed in 2010 the HSE had data from 2005 analysed and found that:

'The estimate of nearly 2,000 breast cancer registrations due to shiftwork in our study is 54 per cent of all female occupationally-related cancer registrations.'
HSE Research Report 800: The burden of occupational cancer in Great Britain: 2010

While there is no mention of this in the HSE guidance on shiftwork, they think more research needs to be done. How many workers will die courtesy of the shift patterns or long hours they work remains to be seen.

While historically we have seen that inefficient management practices over the working hours have contributed to poor productivity, one questions whether the lessons of the past will ever be learnt. As the ACAS report shows the UK productivity record is poor when compared to other G7 nations.

It has been shown that the greater the worker involvement in health, safety and organisational developments, the greater the health, safety and business performance. While hours of work cannot be dealt with simply, we must ensure that managers develop workplace organisation that is effective and efficient.

Workers need to be involved with the development of working hours. If this is done genuinely by employers, it could help contribute to a much needed improvement in productivity. There's plenty of guidance on obtaining working conditions that are efficient: we just need employers to apply the known solutions.

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