

CAREER

Nine-hour workdays and an overworked youth

NUZHAT HASSAN CHOWDHURY

The standard working hours in Bangladesh gradually changed from eight hours a day to nine without many questions being raised. However, how did this change impact the employees of the organisations that decided to implement it?

The state of the job market in Bangladesh hasn't been in ideal for a job seeker in recent years, mostly due to a sheer number of candidates and not enough openings giving rise to fierce competition. Desperate graduates are often forced to ignore undesirable policies and working conditions just to get their foot through the door or progress in their careers. These unfavourable policies often include nine-hour workdays, putting a strain on workers' productivity, social life, and health.

According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), about 50 percent of Bangladeshi workers' working hours exceed the legal limit. If we factor in the time for commute in a city as densely populated and congested as Dhaka, the city dwellers are left with very little time to themselves, resulting in dissatisfaction and poor work-life balance.

"I work from 8 AM to 6 PM. My company has a toxic work culture, we even have to work on weekends if we are unable to finish our assigned tasks. We must work really hard, and sometimes it gets to a point where it is too much to handle. I work remotely and would be depressed if I had to go to the office because I would have to spend another two hours or so in traffic," says Farhan Ifthekar*, a software engineer at a software development company.

Lack of time also means many do not have the luxury to pursue their hobbies, get a good night's sleep, or even take the steps required to become more qualified professionals by enrolling in skill-enhancing courses or engaging in self-studying.

Another closely related issue is experiencing burnout due to long working hours and not enough recreation to recover. Burnout causes a lack of motivation, which can result in employees dreading work and slowing down. Longer hours do not necessarily mean higher productivity. Exhausted workers could end up making mistakes that take even longer to rectify, making lengthy shifts counterproductive.

"I am constantly burned out because I'm assigned projects meant for senior employees and am offered no help. Thus, I sometimes work extra hours to meet deadlines," Farhan adds.

Although some people prefer to work remotely to lessen the burden of extended working hours and commute, others still prefer to show up to the office as there are fewer distractions and the environment is ideal for optimum productivity. However, there is a trade-off between an ideal work setting and adequate downtime once you get home.

Samiha Islam*, an associate officer at an insurance company, echoes these sentiments. "I prefer an offline job as it helps me focus and do my work more conveniently. However, there have been times when I was bombarded with a lot of work, and it took longer to leave the office. I'm often completely drained by the time I reach home," she admits.



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The impact of overworking on health cannot be ignored. Not only does it make one more prone to physical distress such as back pain and deteriorating eyesight from sitting in front of a computer for hours, but it can also impact people's mental health. Especially in Dhaka, a city where there's not much to do and not many open spaces like parks and playgrounds, people are more prone to becoming depressed and anxious. When employees are experiencing mental or physical discomfort, they often struggle to produce desired results.

"I used work ten to eleven hours a day at my previous workplace. I developed back pain due to sitting at my desk for long hours and am currently in rehabilitation for it. My current employer recently increased working hours which has made it difficult for me to balance work and my social life. I used to play basketball often, which worked as a stress relief for me. However, now I don't

have the time or energy for it," says Ayman Chowdhury*, a senior executive at an e-commerce organisation.

With time and development, people are expected to enjoy a better standard of living that allows them to prioritise their well-being, pursue meaningful leisure activities, and foster fulfilling relationships. However, the youth of our country seem to be heading in the opposite direction. We cannot genuinely expect a happier, healthier, and more productive youth until the concerns regarding overworking are addressed. For now, we can only hope that one day, the vision of a more content workforce does not seem as elusive as it does today.

*Names have been changed for privacy upon request

Nuzhat Hassan Chowdhury is an English instructor and writer.