

Workers on non-standard hours more exposed to risks

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About

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The use of working hours outside the standard '9 to 5' working pattern increased between 2000 and 2002 in the Netherlands, but has stabilised since then. About three quarters of Dutch employees at least occasionally work overtime. Shift work, evening or night work, and weekend work are most often recorded in the catering sector and in transport and communications. Employees working non-standard hours generally report unfavourable working conditions.

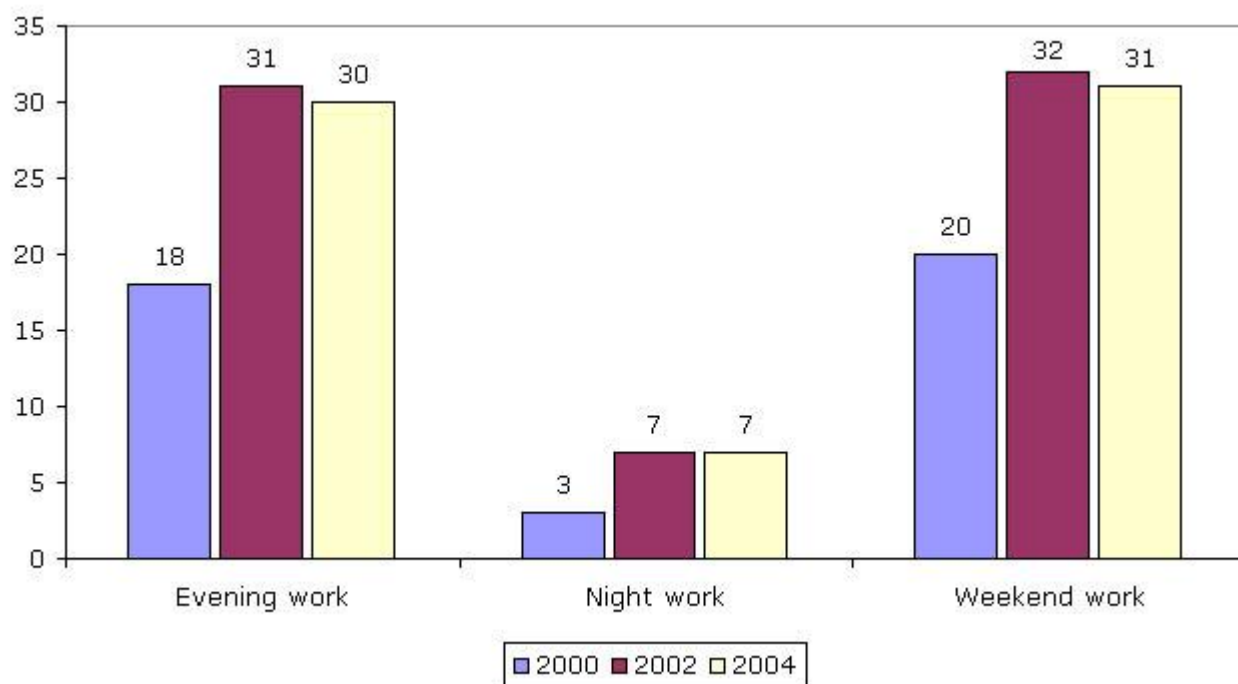
The Dutch Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (Ministerie van Sociale Zaken en Werkgelegenheid, [SZW](#)) invited the Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research (Nederlandse Organisatie voor toegepast-natuurwetenschappelijk onderzoek, [TNO](#)) to examine the prevalence of non-standard working hours in the Netherlands and its associations with occupational risk factors and employee health and well-being. For this purpose, TNO was to conduct secondary analyses on the Netherlands Working Conditions Survey (Nationale Enquête Arbeidsomstandigheden, [NEA](#)) and on the TNO Working Situation Survey (TNO Arbeidssituatie Survey, [TAS](#)). NEA data were collected among 10,000 participants in 2003 and from about 24,000 participants in 2005 and 2006, while the TAS was conducted among about 4,000 participants in 2000, 2002 and 2004.

Prevalence of non-standard working hours

Non-standard working hours are defined as working hours outside the standard '9 to 5' pattern and/or outside contractual working hours. In this study, evening, night and weekend work, as well as overtime work, are incorporated as indicators of non-standard working hours. As the figure shows, the proportion of employees working during the evening, night and weekend increased between 2000 and 2004 in the Netherlands. Although the average number of overtime hours also increased – from 3.9

hours in 2003 to 5.4 hours in 2006 – the share of employees working overtime declined slightly in recent years, from 75% in 2003 to 73% in 2006.

Employees who normally work during the evening, night or weekend as part of their employment contract, by year (%)



Note: No trend data are reported for shift work, as this issue is only addressed in the NEA 2005 and 2006.

Source: TAS, 2000, 2002, 2004

Employee profile

The prevalence of non-standard working hours clearly differs among sectors and occupational groups. Employees in the hotels and restaurants sector most often report shift work, evening or night work and weekend work, at 25%, 76% and 84% respectively. Such working hours are also relatively common in the transport and communications sector, where the proportions amount to 25%, 63% and 67% respectively. Employees in the latter sector also work the highest number of overtime hours, at an average of eight hours a week. It should be noted that these percentages derived from the NEA. In this questionnaire, employees indicate whether they regularly work during non-standard hours or whether this occurs only on an occasional ad hoc basis. The specific issue of shift work was only addressed in the 2005 and 2006 questionnaires, which means no trend data are reported for this type of non-standard working hours. The TAS, on the other hand, asks if an employee is specifically contracted to

work during non-standard hours. Therefore, percentages are generally higher in the NEA than in the TAS.

Working during the evening or night is more common among men, at 57%, than among women, at 46%. In general, men also work more overtime hours, reaching a total of 6.33 extra hours a week compared with 3.36 additional hours for women. Younger employees are more likely than workers in other age groups to engage in: shift work, which is reported by 23% of young people; evening or night work, cited by 61%; and weekend work, recorded by 72%. The proportions for these working hours arrangements for all age groups amount to 15%, 52% and 54% respectively.

Exposure to occupational risks

The table below reveals that employees working during non-standard hours – and particularly those who work shifts – generally report less favourable working conditions than employees who work during standard hours. These differences persist even after the potential influences of sex, age, educational level and occupation are controlled for. With regard to the physical work environment, employees who work during non-standard hours report a relatively high physical load and high exposure to dangerous work and dirty work; those working shifts also experience high exposure to noise.

Furthermore, psychosocial working conditions are generally less positive for workers doing non-standard working hours, compared with other workers. The former group report relatively high work pressure, low job control (apart from the case of overtime work), high levels of emotionally demanding work and high exposure to harassment by colleagues or customers.

Employees exposed to occupational risks (%) This table outlines the percentages of employees exposed to a range of occupational risks, according to their working time schedule.					
	OVERTIME WORK	SHIFT WORK	EVENING/ NIGHT WORK	WEEKEND WORK	STANDARD WORKING HOURS
PHYSICAL LOAD	18	35	21	21	14
NOISE	10	19	11	11	12
DANGEROUS WORK	26	48	31	31	20
DIRTY WORK	34	56	39	40	32

WORK PRESSURE	37	35	38	37	19
LACK OF AUTONOMY	21	41	25	26	21
EMOTIONALLY DEMANDING WORK	9	16	11	11	4
HARASSMENT BY SUPERVISOR/ COLLEAGUES	21	25	23	22	17
HARASSMENT BY CUSTOMERS	29	46	35	34	16

Source: TAS, 2000, 2002, 2004

Conclusions

On the basis of this study, it can be concluded that working during non-standard hours is not uncommon in the Netherlands. Overtime work is widespread, as about three quarters of Dutch employees at least occasionally work extra time. The prevalence of non-standard working hours varies between sectors and demographic groups. Finally, those working non-standard hours, particularly shift work, generally experience adverse working conditions.

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