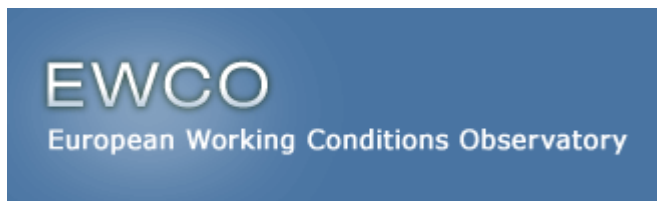


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Negative impact of job demands on work–life balance of police officers

Work demands may interfere with a person's ability to function in the non-work domain. This phenomenon of 'work-home interference' has been found to lead to depression and fatigue among Dutch police officers; moreover, such health problems accumulate if this work situation is sustained over a one-year period. In order to foster employee well-being, workers should be supported in balancing their work and non-work lives.

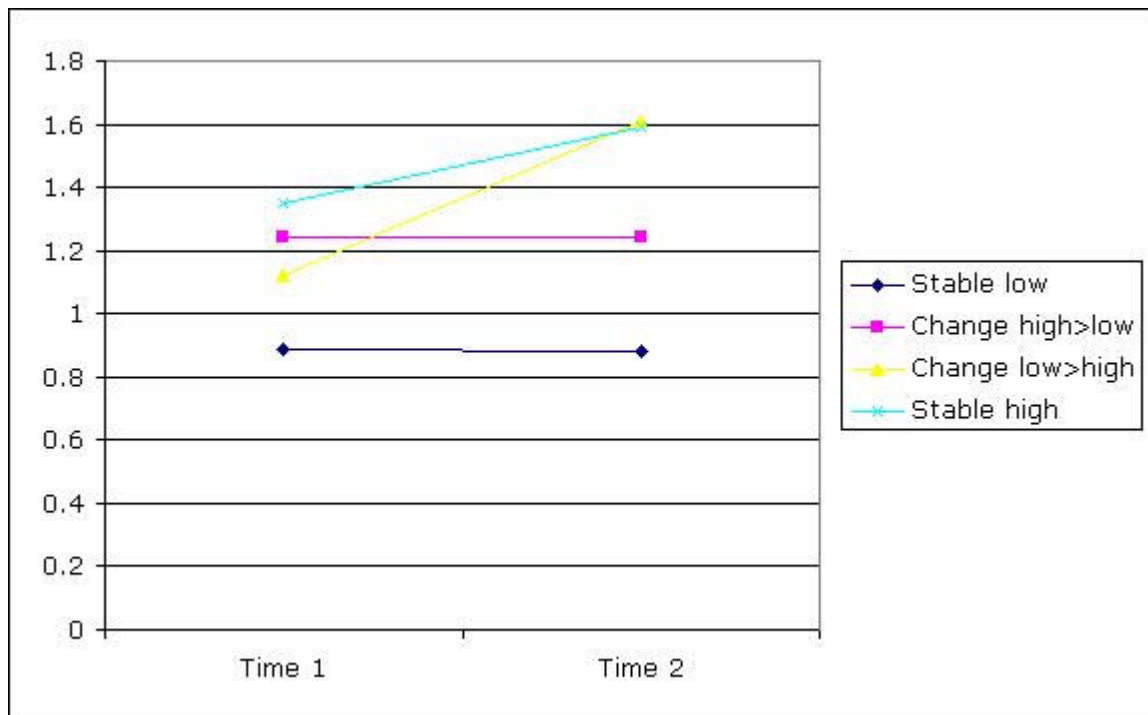
Nowadays, for many employees, successfully combining work and non-work has become a major challenge that sometimes creates problems or conflicts. The process whereby work demands negatively affect one's functioning in the home domain is defined as 'work-home interference'. This situation is assumed to be associated with health complaints since prolonged mental and/or physical preoccupation with work during non-work time limits the opportunities to recover from the effort expended at work. A sustained lack of recovery will eventually manifest itself in health complaints. The reverse process – that is, health complaints leading to work-home interference – may also emerge, because it is possible that employees suffering from health complaints are more susceptible to experiencing a negative influence of work on their private life.

Research has investigated the links between work-home interference and employee health. In particular, the question is raised whether work-home interference acts as a precursor of health complaints or whether the opposite process applies. A study was conducted among 730 full-time police officers who – within a one-year time span – completed two questionnaires that addressed the issues of work-home interference, depressive complaints and fatigue (Van Hooff et al, 2005).

Risk for fatigue and depressive complaints

The results show that, within a one-year time frame, work-home interference acts as a precursor of fatigue and depressive complaints (Figure 1). The opposite process of depressive complaints and fatigue leading to work-home interference was not found within the data.

Figure 1: Development of fatigue over time among police officers



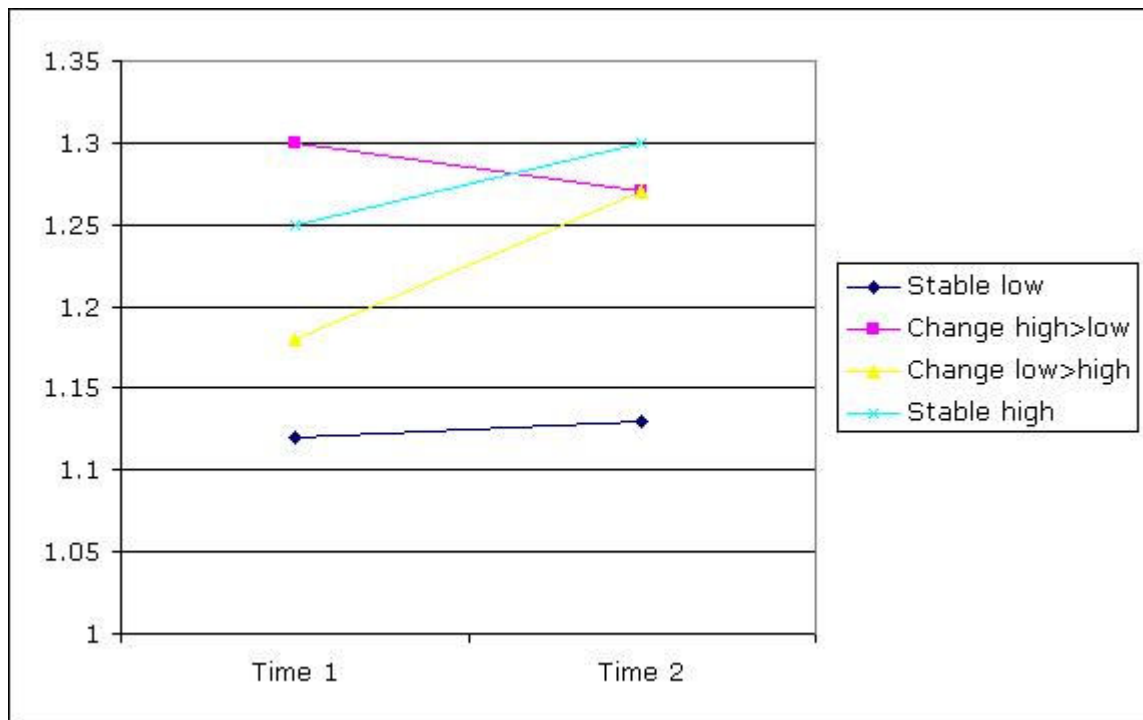
Source: Police database

Development of fatigue over time in four subgroups of police officers

Figure 1 shows that employees with relatively low levels of work–home interference at both measurement points ('stable low') also report relatively low levels of fatigue at both points in time. Compared with this group, workers who went through a change from high levels of work–home interference at the first point in time to low levels of work–home interference one year later ('change high>low') reported higher levels of fatigue, but these fatigue levels did not decrease over time. The third group of workers, that is, those who reported low levels of work–home interference at time 1 and high levels of work–home interference at time 2 ('change low>high'), also showed an increase in fatigue levels during the one-year study period. Finally, workers experiencing high levels of work–home interference at both measurement points ('stable high') not only reported relatively high levels of fatigue at each wave of the study, but also an increase in fatigue over time.

A comparable pattern of results may be seen in Figure 2, which presents the data of the subgroup analysis for depressive complaints. Stable high levels as well as increasing levels of work–home interference are likewise found to lead to high depressive complaints.

Figure 2: Development of depressive complaints over time among police officers



Source: Police database

Development of depressive complaints over time in four subgroups of police officers

Preventing work–home interference

The study identified work–home interference as a serious risk for the occurrence and increase of fatigue and depressive complaints among police officers. Such health impairment is obviously undesirable from an employee perspective, but also from an organisational point of view, as relationships between these health complaints and sickness and absenteeism have been well established (see, for example, De Croon, Sluiter and Frings-Dresen, 2003, 2003a; Mohren et al, 2003). This underlines the importance of a company policy aiming to prevent work–home interference. In order to promote a balance between work and private life, companies can avail of several measures such as the following (Dijkers et al, 2004):

- offering flexible working time arrangements, for example, flexible start and finishing times, or compressed work schedules;
- offering care facilities, such as subsidised parental leave and subsidised childcare facilities;
- creating a company culture in which employees who experience work–home interference feel entitled to use the facilities that are available.

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