

## A RESEARCH ON THE ATTITUDES OF EMPLOYEES IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS TOWARDS WORK TIME

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### ABSTRACT

*Working hours is an important topic both for employers and employees in all types of organizations. This paper aims to investigate the attitudes of employees towards work time and also flexible working hours in public institutions. Data were collected via questionnaire from employees (N=249) from different occupations such as policemen, teachers or medical doctors. Results show that although there exist statistically significant differences among groups in terms of occupation, most of the employees are in favour of reducing working hours. Nearly half of the employees prefer shorter workweek despite a pay loss. Furthermore, reducing working hours is generally regarded as a factor improving performance by employees. Lastly, most of the employees want to have flexible work time arrangements. The results were discussed within the framework of the relevant literature.*

**Keywords:** *Work, work time, working hours, flexible working, non-standard work*

## KAMU KURULUŞLARINDA İŞGÖRENLERİN ÇALIŞMA SÜRESİNE YÖNELİK TUTUMLARI ÜZERİNE BİR ARAŞTIRMA

### ÖZET

*Çalışma saatleri, işverenler ve çalışanlar açısından tüm örgüt çeşitlerinde önemli bir konudur. Bu çalışma, kamu kuruluşlarındaki işgörenlerin çalışma süresine ve esnek çalışma saatlerine olan tutumlarını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Veriler anket yoluyla, polisler, öğretmenler ve tıp doktorları gibi farklı meslekteki 249 işgörenden elde edilmiştir. Sonuçlar gösteriyorki; mesleklerdeki gruplar arasında istatistiksel olarak anlamlı farklılıklar olmasına rağmen, çoğu çalışan çalışma saatlerinin azaltılmasından yanadır. Neredeyse katılımcıların yarısı ücretleri düşecek olmasına rağmen, daha kısa iş haftası tercih etmektedirler. Dahası, çalışma saatlerinin düşürülmesi, işgörenlerce performansını artıran bir factor olarak görülmektedir. Sonuç olarak, işgörenlerin çoğu esnek çalışma süresi sözleşmeleri istemektedirler. Sonuçlar konu ile ilişkili literatür çerçevesinde tartışılmıştır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *İş, çalışma süresi, çalışma saatleri, esnek çalışma, standart olmayan iş*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Since the middle of the 19th century, a growing interest in reducing working hours has observed due to public pressure and legislation (Wheatley et al., 2011: 410). Because of these circumstances, average working hours have begun to fall gradually. Even today, discussion about work time has been continuing to occupy the academic agenda and business world intensely.

The entry of increasing numbers of women into the workplace and ever-increasing unemployment numbers were other factors gave impetus to search of new arrangements in work adjustment (Wood and Sevison, 1990: 325). In order to meet the changes in the work force, employers began to search for non-traditional work schedules. Different forms of alternative work scheduling were proposed through this period as means of enhancing the quality of working life, employee productivity and comfort. These proposals were evidenced by experiments with compressing the traditional work-time into fewer hours and/or days, by innovations in part-time employment, and by the introduction of various discretionary work time systems (Pierce and Newstrom, 1980: 117). Flexible working hours have gained a growing popularity and were claimed to contribute to work adjustment and impact positively on employee performance and behaviours.

However, public institutions and organizations were affected from these developments least among other organizations. Public employees in many countries continue to work traditional hours including 8-hour per day and 40-hour per week. Work is usually carried out at the traditional workplace. Turkey is one of those countries implementing 8-hour per day provisions generally applying to most of the public employees. Studies conducted to assess the inclinations of public employees towards work time in Turkey are little or no. In the literature there exist no study that is conducted on working hours in terms of employee perceptions in the public institutions.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the attitudes of employees towards both the work-time and flexible working hours in public institutions in Kayseri, Turkey. It will also be examined whether there exist any significant differences among the groups of employees in terms of occupation, work experience and some demographic variables.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Work time is increasingly changing, driven by economic, technological and cultural influences (Crompton, 1997). The traditional work hours have been replaced by a flexible system, driven in part by feminization of the workforce and the emergence of the 7/24 service sector (Wheatley et al., 2011: 410).

Work scheduling or work arrangements driven by various social or economic factors refer to the manipulations on the components of work time. According to a study these components can be listed as the length, timing and the use of work time (Anttila *et al.*, 2005: 188). Length of work time refers to the total amount of time consumed by an employee throughout a period of time (such as day, week or year) in order to earn a salary. 8-hour per day or 40-hour per week can be considered as examples of the length of work time.

Timing of work refers to the time range between which the work will be performed. Working between 8.00 in the morning and 18.00 in the afternoon is an example of the timing of work. Use of work time refers to the tempo of the work time, for example; working either 8-hour per day for 5 days or working 10-hour per day for 4 days to reach 40-hour work length in a week. Empirical studies show that there is a close interrelationship among these three components, and therefore, changes experienced within one component usually would affect the other two (Noon and Blyton, 1997). Therefore, manipulations on these three components should be evaluated simultaneously without disregarding any of three.

The effects of the manipulations on the components of work time can cause different consequences for both employees and employers. For example reducing the length of work time offers positive aspects from the viewpoint of employees, changing the timing of work may lead to working hours which could be considered as inconvenient from the employees' viewpoint (Anttila *et al.*, 2005: 189). On the contrary, changing the timing of work is often regarded as beneficial from the employers' side for they attain a capability to be able to work the company whenever it is necessary (Hewitt, 1993).

Due to economic and social changes in the last quarter of 20th century, standard work arrangements in which work was done full-time and was performed at the employer's place of business began to unravel (Rubin, 1995; Capelli, 1999) and a new 24-hour organization of the workplace has become widespread (Smith *et al.*, 1998). This development accompanied with an adaptation of many different forms of work schedules including flexible working hours, part-time work, temporary help agency and contract company employment, short-term and contingent work. These kinds of non-standard work arrangements have become increasingly prominent through the way of work was organized in recent years. Part-time employment has increased even more than fulltime employment in most of the advanced industrialized countries (Rosenfeld, 1995: 111).

While some researches in literature assert that flexible working hours have a powerful and positive effect on employee attitudes particularly with regard to employee job satisfaction (Fields, 1974; Golembiewski, Nollen and Martin, 1978), some studies argued that flexible working schedules could have a negative impact

on health and well-being of the employees (Jansen *et al.*, 2003: 664; Bacon *et al.* 2005). Pierce and Newstrom (1980) argued that flexible working hours were capable of gratifying the need for greater harmony between the demands placed on time by the work environment and by the individual's personal needs (Pierce and Newstrom, 1980: 128). This would contribute to the employee's satisfaction with the work environment (Magoon and Schnicker, 1976; Mahoney, 1978). Why flexible working hours make difference in terms of employee attitudes and behaviors is that performance increases by means of reducing stress associated with work arrivals (Fields, 1974), providing the employee with the opportunity to balance work with the biological clock (Fleuter, 1975), providing employee an opportunity for greater self-control, discretion and providing for the harmonizing of work and personal life demands (Elbing *et al.*, 1975).

Thus, the debate over the length of the work time has occupied not only the private firms but also the public management in most industrialized countries. There were two main reasons for this interest: The first was the idea that the reducing the working time would increase the number of available jobs in an economy and that thereby unemployment could be reduced or prevented (Sousa-Poza and Henneberger, 2002: 210). Work-sharing policies gained acceptance in search for the distribution of available works more extensively and equally. The second main reason underlying this interest was that equilibrium between the work efficiency and family life quality that have to be established in order to develop a healthy society.

Along with these researches, Japan and Germany have carried out stepwise decreases in standard working hours since 1984 (Hunt, 1998). France decreased standard working hours from 39-hour to 35-hour a week in 2002 (Chang, 2007: 972). It was followed by Italy. In the end of the twentieth century, working time has declined substantially in all industrialized countries (Sousa-Poza and Henneberger, 2002: 210).

However, the employment effects of work sharing on the employment are controversial. While some authors contend that a reduction in working hours leads to an increase in employment (Calmfors, 1985; Hoel and Vale, 1986), some others argue that the employment effect of a reduction in working time is mixed or even quite negative (Booth and Schiantarelli, 1987; Holmlund, 1989; Hart, 1984; Calmfors and Hoel, 1988; Layard, Nickell, and Jackman, 1991). Cetto and Taddei (1993) argued that in order to achieve positive employment effects, working time reduction and reorganization had to be carried out simultaneously. According to Freeman (1998), Contensou and Vranceanu (2000) and Artavilla *et al.* (2005), the effects of work-sharing on unemployment are bound to various factors.

Hunt (1999) asserted that the reductions in working time in Germany have reduced unemployment while Cr`epon and Kramarz (2002) indicated that these reductions in the legal standard workweek in France led to employment losses. Literature on the employment effects of reducing working hours seems to suggest

that work-sharing might have positive employment effects under certain conditions (Artavilla *et al.*, 2005: 650).

According to Golden (1998), work scheduling is not just for job sharing, but one important goal of work-time arrangements is to ensure that individuals, families, communities and countries should attain a sufficient, broadly distributed stock of both free time and consumption goods necessary for ever-evolving social reproduction (Golden 1998: 524). Thus, work adjustment is defined by Pierce and Newstrom (1980) as the correspondence between: (1) abilities of the individual and ability requirements of the job, and (2) the needs of the individual and the satisfaction of those needs by the work environment (Pierce and Newstrom, 1980: 120). The work–life balance debate revolves around how feasible it is for employees to find working hours that fit in with their lifestyle and family commitments (Bryan, 2007: 735).

In neo-classical microeconomic theory, the actual amount of time an individual spends in the labour market corresponds to one's desired working time (Sousa-Poza and Henneberger, 2002: 213). This means that individuals have discretion to choose freely their work-time. This sometimes enables employee to exercise a daily decision with regard to starting and quitting time as well as break, lunch times and even their durations.

An attitude is mental state of readiness, learned and organized through experience, exerting a specific influence on a person's response to people, objects with which is related (Güney, 2004:427).

The theory proposes that cognition, affect and behavior determine attitudes and that attitudes, in turn, determine cognition, person's perception, opinions and beliefs. (Özkalp ve Kirel, 2001: 119).

The research regarding work attitudes have indicated that there is an increasing desire to work shorter hours by the employees (Atkinson, 2000). The reduced working time was regarded as a greater benefit than the loss of pay as a disadvantage.

This means that despite the disadvantage of a loss of pay, some employees preferred reduced working hours.

High compatibility between work and non-work hours affects employees' attitudes and well-being positively (Frost and Jamal, 1979) while a mismatch between desired and actual work hours were found that decreasing job satisfaction (Clark 2005; Green and Tsitsianis 2005).

## EMPIRICAL STUDY

### *Aim and Scope*

This paper aims the following two objectives:

1. To examine the attitudes of employees in public institutions towards reducing working hours.

2. To find out if employees in public institutions prefer having flexible working hours.

Additionally, whether these attitudes change according to the some demographic variables will be investigated.

### *Sample*

Sample of the research consists of 249 employees from nine different public institutions (police, health, civil registry, land registry, finance office, directorate of education, directorate of agriculture, directorate of religious affairs and district governorate) in Talas, Kayseri, Turkey (See Table 1).

**Table 1. Sample**

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Sample Size</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
Health Department	Medical Doctor	23	9,2
Police Department	Police officer	54	21,7
Finance Office	Financier	10	4,0
Directorate of Education	Teacher	21	8,4
Directorate of Agriculture	Engineer	18	7,3
Directorate of Religious Affairs	Clerical staff	97	39,0
District Governorate	Civil servant	5	2,0
Civil Registry	Civil servant	8	3,2
Land Registry	Civil servant	13	5,2
<b>Total</b>		<b>249</b>	<b>100</b>

The largest occupational group involved in this research is clerical staff with a percentage of 39,0 %. It is followed by police officers (21,7 %), medical doctors (9,2 %), teachers (8,4 %) and other occupations. Most of the participants are married (88,0 %), male (81,9 %) and their age range is between 40-49 ages. 42,2 % of all the participants has work experience between 10 to 19 years.

**Method**

The data were collected via a questionnaire which included 28 questions on working hours, delving into the dispositions of employees regarding working days a week, working hours a week, working hours a day, break hours, flexible working hours and payments in conjunction with the work time. A 5-point Likert type scale was used in the survey (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Frequency distribution test, t-tests and One Way ANOVA test were used to analyze the data in SPSS.

**Findings**

In this study first, it is investigated whether employees of public institutions are in favor of reducing working hours or not and to what extent. The majority of the respondents (57,4 %) pointed out that they were in favor of reducing working hours while 33,8 % were not ( $X=3.35$ ;  $SD=1.43$ ).

This research also demonstrated that there exist some significant differences among different groups of employees (See Table 2). According to the occupations of participants it is found that there were substantial differences in the attitudes of employees towards reducing working hours. Employees of policing services were more willing to have less working hours than the employees from other occupations. On the other hand, clerical staff was appeared to be the occupational group who were not in favor of shorter working hours ( $X=2.96$ ,  $SD=1.37$ ). In order to be able to conduct this analysis, three group of occupations were excluded which were representing the least number of employees in the sample. In terms of other demographic variables than occupations, no significant differences were observed on the attitudes of employees regarding reducing working hours.

**Table 2. Differences Among Occupations - Reducing Working Hours**

	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>F.</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Medical Doctor	23	3,09	1,34		
Police officer	54	4,13	1,18		
Civil Servant	13	3,77	1,30		
Teacher	21	3,24	1,57		
Engineer	18	3,22	1,35		
Clerical Staff	97	2,97	1,37		
Total	226	3,35	1,41		
				<b>5,703</b>	<b>,000</b>

Additionally, the question of “*Would you rather work shorter hours than at present despite a pay-loss?*” was addressed to the participants (See Table 3). Nearly half of the respondents preferred shorter work week at the cost of a pay loss. Civil servants showed the greatest preference for reducing working hours ( $X=5.00$ ;  $SD=1.48$ ) even when this associated with a reduction in their payments while teachers stand at a position the most unwilling among all other occupations to work less accompanying a pay loss ( $X= 1.43$ ;  $SD=1.46$ ).

**Table 3. Differences Among Occupations – Less hours despite less pay**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F.	Sig.
Medical Doctor	23	1,74	1,48		
Police officer	54	3,05	1,49		
Civil Servant	13	5,00	1,00		
Teacher	21	1,43	1,46		
Engineer	18	1,94	1,50		
Clerical Staff	97	2,32	1,50		
Total	249	2,53	1,50		
<b>Between Groups</b>				<b>4,323</b>	<b>,000</b>

Some significant differences were also found among groups in terms of work experience regarding reducing working hours despite a pay loss (See Table 4). Surprisingly, those who want to work for shorter hours despite a pay loss were the ones with the least work experience. Those have 30 years and over work experience showed the weakest stance towards reducing working hours despite a pay loss.

**Table 4. Differences among groups in terms of work experience – Shorter hours despite a pay loss**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F.	Sig.
0-9	60	3,16	1,48		
10-19	105	2,14	1,49		
20-29	73	2,67	1,50		
30 and over	7	0,71	1,37		
Total	245	2,51	1,50		
<b>Between Groups</b>				<b>3,532</b>	<b>,016</b>

The participants were asked about weekly working hours. It was revealed that 38,6 % was working more than 40h per week. Those working 40h and less a week were 60,7 % of the total respondents cumulatively (See Table 5).



**Table 5. Frequency Distribution- Weekly working hours**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	<40 h	64	25,7	26,2	26,2
	40 h	84	33,7	34,4	60,7
	>40 h	96	38,6	39,3	100,0
	Total	244	98,0	100,0	
Missing	System	5	2,0		
<b>Total</b>		<b>249</b>	<b>100,0</b>		

Workweek was examined in terms of occupations either. It was revealed that 64 % of clerical staff was working less than 40-hour per week while police officers were mostly working more than 40-hour per week (94,4 %). It was also seen that 95,2 % of the teachers were not working more than 40-hour per week.

According to the differences of the employees' attitudes towards reducing working hours among groups in terms of hours worked per week, meaningful differences were discovered among groups (See Table 6). It was seen that while the general tendency towards reducing working hours was apparent in all three groups ( $X=3.36$ ;  $SD=1.44$ ), those working more than 40-hour in a week showed the strongest stance among other groups ( $X=3.68$ ;  $SD=1.44$ ).

**Table 6. Differences among groups in terms of weekly working hours – Reducing working hours**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F.	Sig.
<40 h	64	3,05	1,40		
40 h	84	3,23	1,40		
>40 h	96	3,68	1,44		
Total	244	3,36	1,44		
<b>Between Groups</b>				<b>4,316</b>	<b>,014</b>

Public employees' perceptions of the relation between the reducing working hours and productivity is also examined. Participants are asked if reducing working hours would lead productivity in public institutions. Participants were mostly in favor of ( $X=3.60$ ;  $SD=1.32$ ) reducing working hours will lead productivity.

Lastly, the attitudes of public institutions employees towards flexible working time were examined. Various kinds of questions about flexible work

arrangements were directed to the respondents. It was revealed that participants mostly preferred different kinds of flexible work arrangements (See Table 7). The strongest stance towards flexible work was observed on the preference of having one hour off in a day to be used by the employees whenever needed during the work day ( $X=3.61$ ;  $SD=1.23$ ). There is no significant difference among the occupational groups was detected.

**Table 7. Employee attitudes towards flexible working**

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
I would rather prefer working on days whenever I want (including weekends)	3,22	1,28
I want to determine the starting and quitting time of 8 hours work a day	3,16	1,31
I want to decide the break time myself	3,25	1,29
I want to have one hour off in a day that I can use whenever needed during the day	3,61	1,23
I want to work 4 days a week and have 3 days off	3,18	1,37
I want to be able to do some paper work at home rather than in the office	2,85	1,38

## **DISCUSSION**

This study is conducted through surveying technique on public institution employees composed of nine different professions. The results are indicated that employees mostly preferred to work less than they actually do ( $X=3.35$ ;  $SD=1.43$ ). This result is supported by previous research, which has indicated that there was an increasing desire to work shorter hours by the employees (Atkinson, 2000).

Significant differences were detected among occupational groups. The attitude towards reducing working hours was most apparent for police officers while clerical staff stand on the opposite side. Since the police officers who works more than 40-hour in a week (94,4 %), this could be regarded as one of the most conspicuous cause of this tendency. In parallel with this explanation, clerical staffs' weak tendency against reducing working hours might be reasoned with their working schedule presenting generally less than 40-hour in a week (69, 6 %).

Nearly half of the employees preferred shorter workweek at the cost of a pay loss. Civil servants were the foremost group preferring reducing working hours, even when this associated with a reduction in their payments while teachers were not in favour of work less accompanying a pay loss. This finding will also be explained

by the difference of the work arrangements between these two groups. Civil servants have to work a standard of 40-hour in a week in order to earn a salary while this necessity is much lower for the teachers such as nearly 20-hour in a week. The hours worked accessing this minimum level is reflected to the teachers' salaries as a surplus. Therefore, the reason why teachers do not want to lessen their working hours is supposed to be bound to the relationship between the hours worked and the earnings.

Significant differences were identified among groups in terms of work experience regarding reducing working hours despite a pay loss. Those having 30 years and over of work experience showed the weakest stance towards reducing working hours despite a pay loss. However, their attitudes towards reducing working hours were not significantly different from that of the other groups of work experience. Therefore, this disposition is thought to be caused by not to be in favor of reducing working hours but a preference of not to lose the amount of money they are already paid.

More than one third of the total respondents were working more than 40-hour in a week. Those working 40-hour and less in a week were 60,7% of the total respondents cumulatively. Looking at the differences of the employees' attitudes towards reducing working hours among groups in terms of actual hours worked in a week, meaningful differences were seen among groups. It was revealed that while the general tendency towards reducing working hours was apparent in all three groups ( $X=3.36$ ;  $SD=1.44$ ), those working more than 40-hour in a week showed the strongest stance among other groups ( $X=3.68$ ;  $SD=1.44$ ). This may show that the willingness towards reducing working hours increases in parallel with the actual hours worked weekly.

Whether reducing working hours would lead productivity or not was directed to the participants. It was appeared that most of the employees were of the opinion that reducing working hours will lead productivity.

In the second part of the questionnaire, employee attitudes towards flexible working hours were examined.

While a general tendency towards flexible work arrangements was observed, the strongest stance towards flexible work was examined on the preference of having one hour off in a day to be used by the employees whenever needed during in a work day ( $X=3,61$ ;  $SD=1,23$ ). The second strongest attitude was witnessed on the work arrangement in which employees determine their break time themselves ( $X=3.25$ ;  $SD=1.29$ ). These two preferences are in parallel with the neo-classical microeconomic theory considering employees having the discretion over their work time (Sousa-Poza and Henneberger, 2002: 213).

## CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to explore employee perceptions and attitudes regarding work time in public institutions. It was revealed that reducing working hours was welcomed by the employees generally. The employees regarded reducing working hours as a factor improving productivity. Significant differences were identified among the occupational groups towards reducing working hours. Those who were more willing to have shorter working hours were employees of policing services.

The other important finding of this study was that the willingness of employees towards various kinds of flexible work schedules was preferable by all the employees from different occupations. However, the kinds of flexible work arrangement desired by the employees were diverse. Thus, those supporting flexible work scheduling did not stand at the same point. While some employees preferred having one hour off in a day to be used whenever needed during a work day, others wanted to determine their break time by themselves.

The most conspicuous factor affecting the attitudes of employees towards work arrangements appeared as occupation. Demographic factors were not deemed to be as significant determinant as much as occupation in deciding the disposition towards work arrangements.

According to the results nearly half of the respondents were working more than 40-hour per week. Therefore, reductions in work time to provide a maximum 40-hour per week and making different kind of flexible work arrangements are thought to be welcomed by the employees in public institutions.

This research is an initial attempt at exploring reactions and understanding of employees towards work time in public institution in Turkey. There are limitations of the research. Since the number of participants is quite modest these findings can not be generalize for all the public institutions in Turkey. However, to go beyond these findings and get a full understanding of the concept further researches should be conducted.

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