



# Overworked in America?

## How work hours, immigrant status, and interpersonal justice affect perceived work overload

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Received July 2008  
Revised January 2009,  
April 2009  
Accepted June 2009

### Abstract

**Purpose** – Though a number of demographics (e.g. sex, age) have been associated with work overload, scholars have yet to consider the potential impact of immigrant status. This is important because immigrants constitute a significant proportion of the workforce, and evidence suggests many employers believe they are easier to exploit. This paper aims to examine work hours, interpersonal justice, and immigrant status as predictors of work overload.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The hypotheses were tested using a large, national random telephone survey of employees in the United States ( $n = 2,757$ ).

**Findings** – As expected, employees who worked more hours tended to perceive more work overload. Importantly, however, this effect interacted with interpersonal justice differently for immigrant and native-born employees. Justice attenuated the effect of work hours for the former but seemed to exacerbate it somewhat for the latter. Of note, the interactive effect was more than five times larger for immigrants than for natives.

**Practical implications** – The study shows that supervisors might require their employees to work longer hours without necessarily being perceived as abusive (i.e. overloading them). Doing so, however, requires treating employees justly in the form of respect, courtesy, and dignity. Though this form of just treatment is important for all employees, its effects are especially pronounced for immigrants.

**Originality/value** – The relationship between the number of hours worked and perceptions of work overload is examined for immigrant and non-immigrant workers in the USA.

**Keywords** Immigrants, Hours of work, Interpersonal relations, Disadvantaged groups, United States of America

**Paper type** Research paper

Nearly 20 years ago, Schor (1991) wrote the highly influential book, *The Overworked American* wherein she chronicled the increase in hours logged by employees in the USA. Since that time, estimates suggest that the proportion of laborers working excessive hours



A previous version of this paper was presented at the 24th annual conference of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology in New Orleans, LA. The authors thank Joerg Dietz and two anonymous reviewers for comments that helped improve prior drafts of this paper.