

When Do Academics Work?



For academics across the world, 'working hours' vary greatly, and in China many tend to work after hours, shows a recent study published in the Christmas edition of the *BMJ*.

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There is anecdotal evidence that research and publishing demand academics and medical students work longer hours, but little empirical research has been done to prove this. So, Professor Adrian Barnett of Queensland University of Technology and colleagues (2019) analysed 49,464 manuscripts and 76,678 peer review online submissions to *The BMJ* and *The BMJ Open* to see on what days (weekends, national holidays) and hours of day (early mornings, late nights) those were made. The study included works submitted from 1 January 2012 to 5 April 2019 (2651 days), excluding resubmissions.

The results show consistent differences between countries. Thus, researchers in China most often worked at weekends and at midnight (the latter is also true for Japan, Brazil and Spain), whereas in countries with family friendly working conditions and strong academic unions (eg Scandinavian countries) work after hours or during weekends was less likely to be happening.

The submissions usually peaked in the end of the working day (3–5pm), with a small local peak falling on midday, which, according to the authors "may correspond to people working during lunch."

Generally, the country of residence proved to be the strongest predictor of whether work out of hours was a common phenomenon. This, according to the authors, suggests that "a 'culture of overwork' is a literal thing, not just a figure of speech."

The authors conclude that today academic writing can happen anywhere, anytime thanks to digital technology. This, however, may lead to work invading leisure time and, ultimately, to contributing to burnout.

Among the study's limitation were the focus on the time of submission of papers, but not the time spend on the actual writing, the possibility of submitting papers while being in another time zone, absence of data on age and sex of authors, and the possible difference in submission patterns for journals other than *The BMJ* and *The BMJ Open*.

References

Barnett A et al. (2019) Working 9 to 5, not the way to make an academic living: observational analysis of manuscript and peer review submissions over time. *BMJ*, 367:l6460. Available from <https://www.bmj.com/content/367/bmj.l6460>

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