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The perceived effects of the four-day work week on employee health, well-being, and workability

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Background: The four-day work week (4DWW) has been increasingly discussed as a potential strategy to improve employee health, well-being, and workability. This study aims to explore the impact of this work model on employees' physical and mental health, nutrition, and sports activity, as well as its effects on stress levels and work-life balance.

Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted among 218 employees working in a 4DWW model at Central Heating Company in Vilnius, Lithuania. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire to assess employees' satisfaction, physical activity, stress levels, and overall health perception. Statistical methods (chi-squared and Fisher's exact tests) were used.

Results: 97% workers evaluated 4DWW positively. 42% of employees reported improved general health, with a statistically significant difference based on employees' age ($p = 0,018$). 85% of employees reported satisfaction with work-life balance after transitioning to 4DWW. Mental health improvements were evident among employees, with 70% of respondents experiencing enhanced emotional well-being and 28% reporting reduced stress after transitioning to 4DWW. Moreover, 63% of respondents noticed increased workability, with statistically significant differences based on employees' age ($p < 0,001$) and work tenure ($p = 0,001$). Additionally, 27% reported a decrease in sick days per year. Furthermore, 49% of employees perceived an improvement in their sleep quality, 50% reported exercising more, and 38% spent more time cooking food while working under the 4DWW model.

Conclusions: The transition to a 4DWW appears to have substantial benefits for employees' physical and mental health. These findings support the potential of a shorter work week as a viable approach to improving employee health and workability while maintaining work-life balance. Public health actions could promote flexible hours and 4DWW to reduce stress and improve well-being.

Key messages:

- The 4DWW improves employee health, work-life balance, with 97% reporting positive outcomes and reduced stress.
- Findings support 4DWW as a public health strategy to enhance health and boost workability.