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Blue snoozers: Van Gogh's *The Siesta* shows workers taking their regular afternoon rest.

Is overwork a vice? Many people spend huge amounts of time at the office and then have to deal with work emails at home.

What's happening?

It is 9.30 at night and Amira has just left the office.

Then she gets an email from her boss. There is a problem at work. She must sort it out before tomorrow morning, or else!

Find out more

A recent survey found that junior **lawyers** at one company started work on average at 9.14am and finished at 11.28pm. That adds up to over 70 hours a week — even though the **legal** limit in the UK is 48.

Yet some people take **pride** in working **extreme** hours. Professor Sally Maitlis of **Oxford University** argues² that this dates back to a 16th Century idea. The idea was that if you worked hard, it showed you were a good **Christian**.

Then Britain went through the **Industrial Revolution**, which took the idea further.

In the 1980s Britain opened up to big American companies. With them came the idea that making a lot of money was the most important thing in life, and working extremely long hours was the way to achieve that.

In his book *The End of Burnout*, Jonathan Malesic talks of this obsession with work as a kind of **demon**. People need rest too, experts say. And many people are not getting it.

Is overwork a **vice**?

Some say

Yes! When we work too much, we forget the things that really matter, such as going outdoors and spending time with our family. Work should be a means to a good life — not your whole life.

Others think

No! Many people love their jobs and find great meaning in them. If you have a skill or talent, you should use it. The real vice is laziness.

Some people say

“There can be no joy in living without joy in work.”

Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274), Italian theologian

What do you think?

Six steps to discovery

1. **Connect**

How do you feel about this story? - Do you know someone who works too hard?

2. **Wonder**

What questions do you have? - For example: Why do lawyers have to work such long hours?

3. **Investigate**

What are the facts? - Pick out one thing we know for certain and one thing we cannot say for sure from this story.

4. **Construct**

What is your point of view? - You are offered a job that pays a lot of money but means hardly ever seeing your friends. Think about what you would say.

5. **Express**

What do others believe? - What job involves the hardest work? Talk about it with your classmates.

6. **Reflect**

What might happen next? - Imagine you are told that you have to go to school seven days a week. Write a letter to your head teacher saying why this is a bad idea.

Glossary

Lawyers - People whose job it is to give advice about the law or speak for someone in court.

Legal - Something that is legal is allowed by the law.

Pride - Feeling of satisfaction or honour about your own achievements.

Extreme - Very great, or beyond what is expected.

Oxford University - A famous, ancient university in England. There is evidence of teaching as early as 1096, making it the oldest university in the English-speaking world.

Christian - A believer in Christianity, a religion based on the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Industrial Revolution - A period of sudden, rapid industrialisation that transforms a country from an agricultural to an industrial economy.

Demon - The devil or an evil spirit.

Vice - Immoral or unjustifiable behaviour.