3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

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WORKPLACE STRESS: SYSTEMIC EXPLOITATION AND NEUROPSYCHOGICAL IMPACTS

DEFINING WORKPLACE STRESS: A CAUSE FOR CONCERN

Workplace stress: physiological and psychological response to **demands that exceed coping capacity** (WHO, 2003). It manifests in two forms:

1. Acute stress: Short-term pressure (e.g., deadlines).

2. Chronic stress: Sustained activation of stress pathways, => systemic dysfunction.

Mental Health Impacts	Physical Disease Risks
• **Burnout & Depression:** 49% of Hong Kong workers report burnout; 52% experience uncontrollable stress (AXA, 2024)	• Cardiovascular: Prolonged **cortisol elevation** increases hypertension risk (Lukan et al., 2022).
• Cognitive Costs: Chronic stress **impairs memory, focus, and decision-making** (Roos et al., 2018).	• Immunity: **Stress-related inflammation** => autoimmune disorders (Hanafiah Hasin et al., 2023).
• **Internship Insight:** Surveyed colleagues reporting anxiety linked to **"always-on" expectations**.	• Global Burden: **1.7 million UK workers suffer work-related illnesses** (HSE, 2023).

Systemic Implications

Stress => **not** an individual failure
- Exploitative workloads (e.g., unpaid overtime).
- Managerial underestimation of team strain (Fisher, 2020).

Neuropathology of Stress
- Cortisol Dysregulation: Disrupts sleep, metabolism, and emotional regulation (Dunlavey, 2018).
- Stressor Thresholds: Exceeding individual limits accelerates pathology (Goforth, 2011).

STRUCTURAL EXPLOITATION & MARXIST CRITIQUE

How Systemic Implications imply Worker Alienation Formula (Inspired by Braverman, 1974)

When Exploitative workloads + Managerial blind spots = Normalised **Then** Labour − Fair Compensation & Dignity & Control = Alienates Workers = Replaceable stress-bearing units in a capitalist machine

Key Mechanisms of Worker Alienation:

Deskilling & False Consciousness

1. AI tools (e.g., SEO algorithms) **replace creative labor** => reducing autonomy (Tandoc & Thomas, 2014).

2. Managers frame stress as "part of the job" => masking systemic exploitation.

Unpaid Labor & Marginalization

1. Unpaid overtime disproportionately **affects marginalized groups** (e.g., interns, minorities).

2. 58% of leaders underestimate team stress (Fisher, 2020), perpetuating cycles of burnout.

66% of corporate workers feel **pressured to be "always on"** (Tedone, 2022)

Quiet Overworking

Marxist Analysis!

1. Alienation via Exploitative Workloads: Unpaid overtime extracts surplus value under "dedication" myths

2. Alienation via Managerial False Consciousness: Stress framed as individual failing (Fisher, 2020) obscures class-based exploitation

3. Alienation via Technological Control: AI tools dissolve worker autonomy into metrics (Tandoc & Thomas, 2014)

Internship Evidence

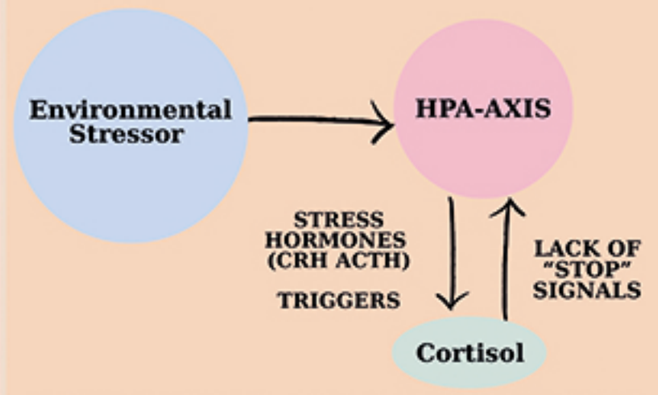
Task: Designed Regional Payroll Guidelines

Evaluated payroll formulae and labor regulations to increase cross-region understanding

Finding: 'standardized' formulas quietly underpaid emerging-market teams for identical work.

NEUROPSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS

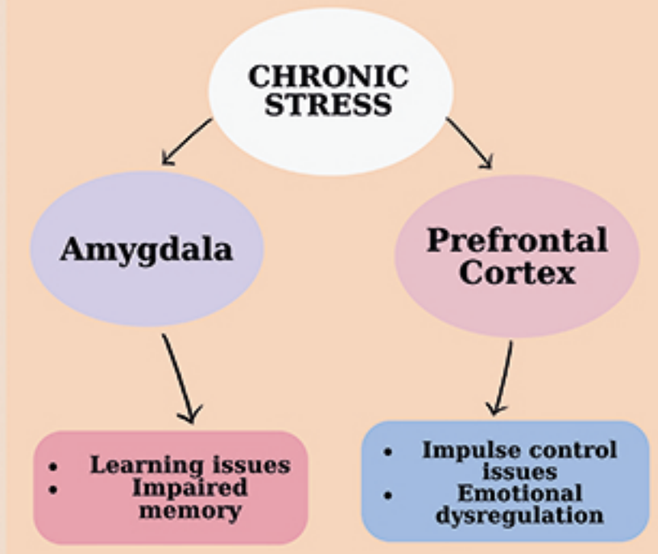
1 CORTISOL OVERPRODUCTION



If **the stressor is not adequately handled/ individuals have to constantly interact with it => increased risk** of **chronic stress** and the **HPA-Axis** may become **dysfunctional**

(Roos et al., 2018; Dunlavey, 2018; Goforth, 2011; Thomas-Odenthal et al., 2024).

2 NEURAL CIRCUITRY IMPAIRMENT



Dysfunctional neural circuity will **negatively affect productivity**, quality of work and most importantly **employee wellbeing (in & out of workplace)**

(McEwen, 2017)

3 A COMMON EXAMPLE OF WORKPLACE STRESS: INTERNSHIP EVIDENCE

1. Stressor: An employee's manager provides her more work each day on top of previous tasks which she struggled to complete

2. Frequently staying overtime, working on projects until late

3. Task: Review Project management logs
- Included 10pm work sessions logged in Slack (3-4x weekly)
- Self-reported 'emotional exhaustion' in EAP intake forms

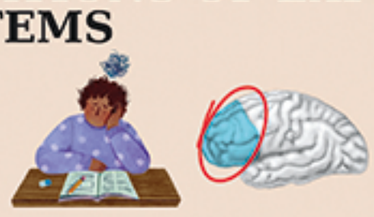
4. Burnt-out, unmotivated and experiencing extreme stress

NEUROPSYCHOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF EXPLOITATIVE WORK SYSTEMS

Internship Evidence

Task: Analyse the Employee Assistance Program and increase its visibility

Findings:
- Teams "frequently working until 10pm" showed **3x higher error rates**
- EAP data revealed overtime workers reported **"emotional numbness"** (dysregulated HPA axis)



Outcome: Chronic cortisol circulation→ Prefrontal cortex impairment (McEwen, 2017) → **Burnout, memory loss, emotional dysregulation**

Trigger: High volume workloads (e.g., manager stacking unfinished tasks) **→ Amygdala activates HPA axis**

SOLUTIONS: INTERVENTIONS THAT DISRUPT THE TOXIC CYCLE

MARXIST MECHANISM	NEUROPSYCH IMPACT	INTERNSHIP SOLUTION
QUIET OVERWORKING	CORTISOL OVERPRODUCTION (ROOS ET AL., 2018)	SLACK OVERTIME ALERTS (PAYROLL DATA)
DESKILLING (AI TOOLS)	LEARNED HELPLESSNESS IN INDIVIDUALS (RYAN, 2013)	FEEDBACK-DRIVEN DESIGN REVIVES AUTONOMY
UNPAID LABOUR	SLEEP DEPRIVATION → AMYGDALA HYPERACTIVITY (YOO ET AL., 2007)	WELLBEING MICROSITE WITH SLEEP GUIDES

Psychosocial Tools:

Promote stressor-limit awareness (Zhao et al., 2023) through **apps that monitor workload vs. capacity** => Prevent HPA-axis dysregulation
- I.e. Slack integrations that flag excessive overtime

Feedback-Driven Design Restores Autonomy

Counteract algorithmic deskilling by institutionalizing creative veto power (Braverman, 1974):
- **Requiring collaborative approval for creative changes** => preventing top-down metric-driven alienation
- **Balancing branding guidelines with worker creativity** => Restored prefrontal cortex engagement in design decisions

Updated Wellbeing Microsite with Culturally Tailored Tools (Internship)
- **Providing region-specific stress resources** that addressed local cultural stigma (e.g., some offices preferred video content over f2f) => reduce excessive cortisol spikes
- **Offering sleep guidance** that revealed connections to systemic overtime issues identified in payroll audits => promotes Amygdala regulation

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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS