

Road death of UK pensioner the result of tragic circumstances

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Last week, Arthur Yate, a 69-year-old widower, wept as he was jailed for the killing of 80-year-old pedestrian Ian Whitworth. It is thought that Yate fell asleep at the wheel of his car.

This was a tragic event for both the family of the victim, and Arthur Yate, with the trial revealing the terrible state of affairs facing many people in Britain. When hit by Yate, Whitworth was walking over a pedestrian crossing. Yate admitted causing death by careless driving and failing to stop after an accident. He was jailed for eight months and banned from driving for 15 years and eight months.

It is telling that the judge, Bernadette Baxter, in passing sentence, made the following remarks: “This is a truly tragic case, a thoroughly decent, hardworking, devoted, family man has been taken and a thoroughly decent, hardworking, devoted, family man is facing imprisonment for his criminal carelessness.”

She told Yate, “It’s clear you just didn’t see him, whether that was because you had nodded off or were in a world of your own because of grief and worried about your debts or fatigue, we will just never know.”

The death of Whitworth is tragic, no one can deny that, but the events leading to Yate taking the wheel on that fateful night also have a tragic underpinning. By all accounts when Yate drove that night he was exhausted, and clearly worn out. Even prosecutor Rob Hall said, “The defendant was suffering significant fatigue and this could be the root cause of the collision. Since his wife died he didn’t get restful sleep and cat napped.”

According to evidence presented, Yate had been working a continual week of night shifts at a supermarket in a losing battle to try and pay off £50,000 in debts he owed.

The jury heard how Yate had accrued substantial business debts following the death of his disabled wife

Betty, who had died of an infection aged 67 in 2015. The debts piled up following his wife’s decision to pursue a card-making business in the months before she died.

Yate was determined to pay these debts off, and this had led him to work every available hour possible—during the day and night. He ended up working night shifts at a supermarket, stacking shelves, and had been running errands in the day.

His normal hours of work were from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. the following day, and he would usually work three shifts a week. However, he would regularly work the equivalent of six nights a week. On top of this, he would often run errands for friends and family in the day.

His daughter had noticed the fatigue he was experiencing, and would observe him drifting into a glassy-eyed state and nodding off. She had been concerned about the hours he was working and suggested he cut back on his hours, considering his age.

The week before the fatal collision, Yate had been sleeping at a house nearby in Gorton, a district in Manchester. He had not been able to sleep properly in the day, as he was disturbed by work being carried out by builders.

Prior to driving into Whitworth, Yate had been awake for more than 24 hours. The night before the crash, he had worked his usual 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. shift and had then been waiting for the builders to arrive, helped to clear the property, and then ran errands.

His defence lawyer Adrian Farrow said in mitigation that Yate, “was suffering cumulative fatigue borne over two years or more of him having little or no sleep and working tremendously hard.”

Yate, a man in his late sixties, whose wife had only recently passed away, had been working terribly long

hours that no one—least of all someone his age—should have been working. He was forced into this because he was burdened with insurmountable debts he could not repay.

Evidence suggests that to carry on trying to work while fatigued not only puts the individual's health at risk in the long term, but also increases risks of injury and accidents at work, and on the way home from work.

Research by the Trades Union Congress found that the main cause of fatigue is a lack of sleep. This can be from a lack of sleep from the night before, or the cumulative impact of insufficient, regular sleep over a longer period of time.

Many studies and research show conclusively that working long days or weeks means that workers carry over their fatigue from day to day.

The TUC found that a person who is either acutely or chronically fatigued is likely to find it hard to concentrate, make clear decisions or take in and act on information, react more slowly (for example to hazards), and occasionally fall asleep at work—momentarily, or for several minutes.

The research found, “This means that people with fatigue are not only likely to be performing badly, they can pose a danger to themselves or others. Over time they risk damaging their health.”

It is estimated that 20 percent of all road accidents are thought to result from fatigue. Lorries are involved in tens of thousands of accidents nationwide every year. Falling asleep at the wheel is a major cause of these crashes.

A 2016 study published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, the official scientific journal of the National Academy of Science, warned that workers are more at risk of fatal accident on their drive home from a night shift.

A study carried out earlier this year by TotallyMoney.com, a price comparison web site, found that British workers put in a record amount of overtime—often working on average 68 days a year more than they are contracted to—usually for no additional pay.

Of those who took part in the study, 60 percent of workers said that they don't have a good work-life balance, and only a third said that they leave work on time. According to the TUC, it is estimated that the

value of the unpaid overtime to employers was £33.6 billion.

Like millions of others in Britain, Yate was living under the daily pressure of enormous debts. Total household borrowing now tops £200 billion, accumulated through overdrafts, credit cards, car loans, and unsecured consumer credit.

Peter Tutton, from the StepChange debt charity, which helps people trying to manage their debts, said recently, “There is a bunch of people hanging on by their fingernails and a little shock to their finances pushes them over the edge.” The charity estimates that 9 million people are “teetering on the edge,” with 2.9 million experiencing severe hardship.

As a result, many workers in the UK are having to work longer hours in a desperate attempt to make ends meet, while at the same time accruing more debts that they cannot hope to repay.



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