

## **“Let’s Strike and Increase Student Stress”**

Podcast Transcript

By Berkan Altun

When we often times think about union strikes, we associate them with negative meanings toward the employer not providing adequate resources or benefits for the employees. In addition, we always consider how those engaging in strikes will be affected directly, but we often times do not consider how others outside the strike are impacted. The podcast seeks to explain strike effects on student’s stress levels and mental health.

- Hello everybody, welcome to the very 1st episode of “Berk’s talks”
- today we have a very special topic that is I think very important because being a University of Toronto 4th year student, stress is something that I struggle with and I think a lot of student’s struggle with
- but more importantly it can lead to mental health problems
- That being said though, I also think that there are healthy levels of stress and levels of stress that are not so healthy.
- In relation to this, we are going to talk about how strikes affect stress levels, school commitment, and school involvement
- Now, I want to turn attention to the legal side of strikes
  - Like I mentioned before, strikes can have meaningful endings because of increased workplace safety, better wages, and benefits
  - Which strikers should take part in because under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, they have a right to express their opinions
  - but, there are laws that intervene.
  - For example, to engage in a legal strike, the Labour Relations Act of 1995 outlines that a collective agreement must have expired between the employer and the union, and a strike must be held where more than 50% of members vote in favour of striking.
- After some research, I found in Chitnis and Tiggler that many students experience a loss in commitment, involvement, and success in school after a strike
- for example, the loss in commitment may be because of the program (for example math, or computer science) being too hard for the student so when they actually go in, they are motivated, then because of the strike and the long time off from school they start to not be as committed to the program and what they want to do but rather they want to start over again which is not possible, so they drag through the school year hoping to finish and can start fresh next year
- Also, when students do come back, they face a lot of deadlines and missed classes that they have to catch up on.
- this can be detrimental to the learning experience
- WHAT HAPPENS NEXT you may ask?

- the loss of involvement which is the idea that students after coming back from a strike have to dedicate most of their time catching up on school work due to like the lost time
- many students may spend that time during the strike working rather than school material and when they come back they're forced with a lot of content that they have to review and relearn by the end of the term
- and WHAT DID I FIND NEXT?, WELL
- the loss of success in school was founded by Chitnis and Tiggler that it results in students losing all the momentum that they had in the beginning of the semester due to having a long strike affecting their memory and what they have learned so they have to come back and review and often times when they do review it may be too much to take in at once
- which also relates back to how their program might be too hard
- If their program is very technical and sort of scaffold learning (for example, math or computer science) then a student coming and having to review all of that just becomes too much for them so they are not able to absorb it all at once
- these topics after the strike are very important because the strike influences high stress levels that can lead to mental health problems and at least to a lot of students dropping out of school
- so actually I brought friends in to discuss their experiences with strikes who are a part of the life sciences program here at UTM
- I thought that their experiences would help us understand more about strikes and student experiences.
- [INSERT INTERVIEW]
- some people may have positive associations with strikes such as having their right to exercise free speech due to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in a professional and legal manner which may result in better employment, higher pay, and better working conditions but often times strikes in schools when they carry on for too long affect student's education
- To give an example, there are rumours about CUPE 3902 unit 1 TA's striking.
  - The TA's agreement had expired on the 31<sup>st</sup> of 2017 and they had held a vote which over 1500 members voted 89.4% in favour
- That being said, we have come to an end in the podcast unfortunately, but I wanted to conclude by saying that even though it is lawful for individuals working in post-secondary institutions to go on strike, it is the students that face the consequences when strikes carry on for long periods of time.
- Thank you, I hope to see you next week where we will talk about why Prof Ellen Berrey is the best instructor at UTM.