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High Levels of Frustration Disrupt Daily Work of Computer Users

A groundbreaking study reveals the severity of frustration and its sources for users of information and computer technologies. The time lost for computer users amounted to 47% to 53% of the total time at work. The main reasons for lost time were problems with web browsing, email, word processing, and operating systems. The reasons for the problems included crashes, poor error messages, and slow responses. Secondary problems included dropped connections, pop-up ads, and hard to find features.

The study, *"Determining Causes and Severity of End-User Frustration",* was conducted at the University of Maryland College Park and Towson University asked 111 student users to do their normal work. When a frustrating experience occurred users filled out a brief report form on what happened and how much time was lost.

The students worked for an average of 2.5 hours and reported 373 frustrating experiences. They reported high levels of frustration, with 74% of participants choosing 6-9 on a 9 point scale.

One of the study leaders, Professor Ben Shneiderman of the University of Maryland College Park points out that "These data are disturbing. More time is wasted in front of computers than in highway traffic. Designers can and should be doing better." He calls on suppliers of information technology to increase their efforts in usability testing and to develop more accurate ways to assess the total user experience.

Improved training would help and more research funding could bring breakthroughs in product design as well as online assistance. Dr. Shneiderman encourages greater public attention that will result in increased industry and government efforts. Research and development could dramatically improve user interfaces and software reliability. "There's lots of work to be done. Let's get to work" he declared.

Reference:
Ceaparu, Irina, Lazar, Jonathan, Bessiere, Katie, Robinson, John, and Shneiderman, Ben
Determining causes and severity of end-user frustration
International Journal of Human-Computer Interaction 17, 3 (2004), 333-356.

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