

# When internships go wrong

Many keep quiet for fear of getting a bad review of their performance

By AMELIA TAN and JOANNA LEE

UNIVERSITY student "CK" is interning at an advertising agency and has fallen ill several times because he has to work until the wee hours almost every other day with little sleep.

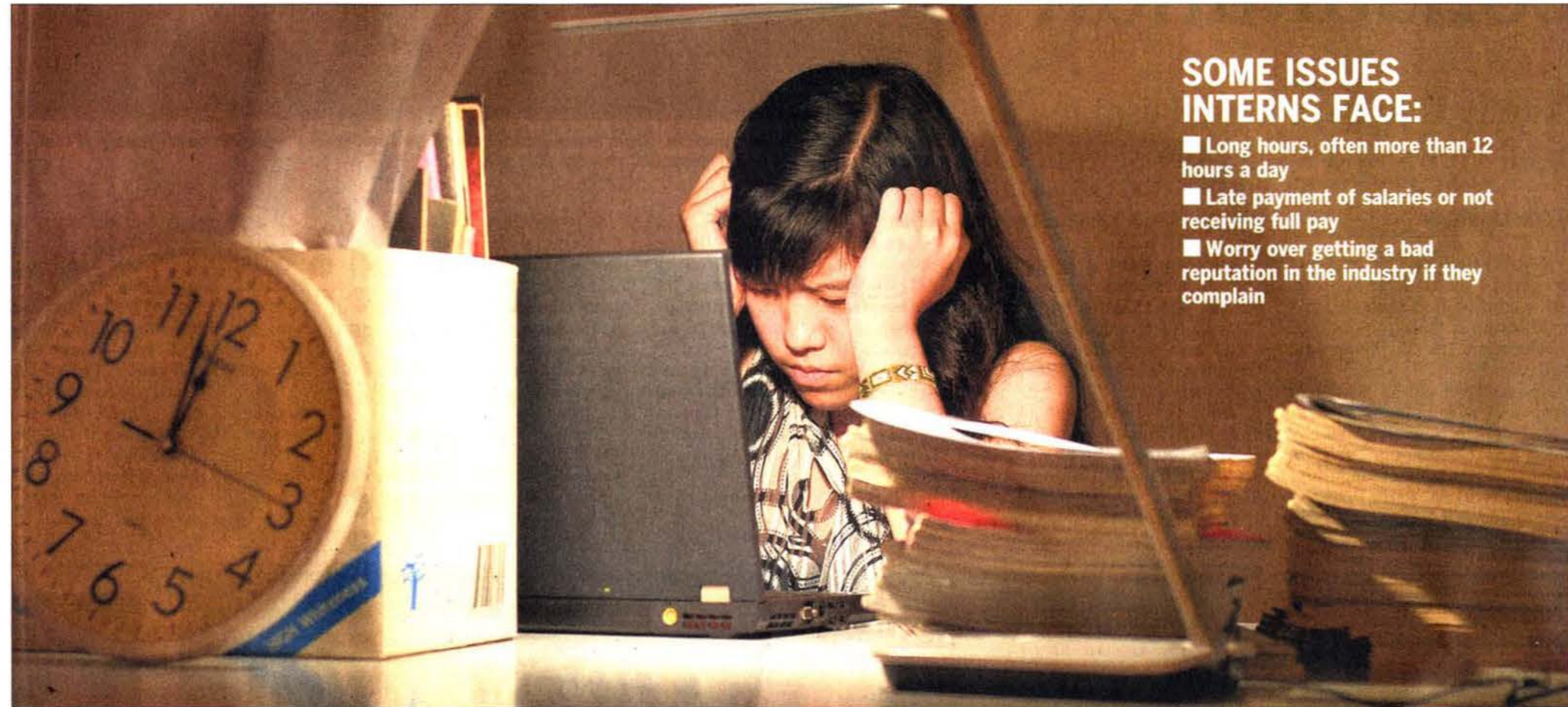
He was burnt out by the second month of his stint but did not tell his boss as he feared angering him and failing the six-month internship programme arranged by his university.

CK must pass the internship programme in order to graduate. "I am very tired. But I tell myself this is temporary and I am just counting down to the end of my internship at the end of June," said the 24-year-old who asked not to give his full name.

The treatment of interns is under the spotlight after a YouTube video apparently showed an employee being hit repeatedly on his head by his supervisor at software company Encore eServices.

The 29-year-old worker first worked at the firm as an intern for six months, then became a full-time employee for 2 1/2 years.

The video was filmed by a Singapore Institute of Management (SIM) student who was working as an intern there. He asked to terminate his internship after the incident.



## SOME ISSUES INTERNS FACE:

- Long hours, often more than 12 hours a day
- Late payment of salaries or not receiving full pay
- Worry over getting a bad reputation in the industry if they complain

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About 10 interns interviewed by The Straits Times said they face issues including long hours – often more than 12 hours a day, late payment of salaries or not receiving their full pay.

However they said physical and verbal abuse is rare.

Universities told The Straits Times they have not received major complaints about internships from their students. The National University of Singapore said it selects and evaluates companies and

students before matching them for internships. Before embarking on their internships, Singapore Management University students are given a list of contact details of staff to get in touch with if they face any issues.

However interns say their schools are unaware of the unhappiness they face in workplaces, as the interns will often keep silent to avoid getting a bad review of their work performance. Some said they were worried that

complaining would give them a bad reputation and affect their chances of landing a good job.

Ms LF Ng, 19, a fresh poly graduate, said her lecturer did nothing after she complained that the animation company she interned at for three months last year did not pay her on time.

Human resource experts agreed that some interns may find it hard to speak up because they feel companies are "doing them a favour by offering them a job".

Singapore Human Resource Institute executive director David Ang said schools should work closely with firms to design internships that are fruitful for both students and companies.

He said he has heard of logistics companies getting interns to move goods around for a substantial part of their programmes.

Some companies, such as law firms, also get interns to spend most of their time photocopying. Mr Ang said: "Interns can be do-

ing this kind of work for part of their time at the company. But they should also have other duties which allow them to gain a deeper understanding of the company and its work."

Meanwhile, Chinese evening daily Lianhe Wanbao reported yesterday that the 29-year-old former employee of Encore has been offered jobs by four companies.

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