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Decent work deficits, working time and transitions across the lifecycle

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Good work – do we need a broader focus?

- The good work agenda – including charters etc. – is predominantly focused on employer behaviours and employment rights.
- There is a risk of overlooking the connections between different institutions and areas of policy in supporting the creation of good work and influencing which groups are able **to access and remain** in good work.
- Relevant domains include education, employment policy, social protection (i.e. the benefits regime), labour laws, labour law enforcement, transport (access to public transport).
- These can also influence how objectively ‘inferior’ work is subjectively experienced.

Working time

- The focus of much of the recent debate has been on working time uncertainty and fragmentation.
- This is reflected in the debate relating to, for example, zero hours contracts, advance notice and compensation for changes in shifts.
- Labour's New Deal for Working People includes commitments to ban zero hours contracts, make flexible working a day one right, ensure all workers get reasonable notice of any change in shifts or working time, with compensation that is proportionate to the notice given for any shifts cancelled or curtailed.
- Will this be enough to problems relating to the extent and intensity of working time be tackled?

Working long hours and work intensity

- Working long hours is often a feature of ostensibly ‘good jobs’
- It is also associated with higher work intensity (e.g. regularly having to meet deadlines, regularly working at high speed).
- Problems such as stress, excessive fatigue and burn-out are well known.

Organisational influences (Adascalitei, Heyes, Mendonca 2022)

- The labour extraction potential of new technology: workers who make frequent use of computers and related technologies in their jobs are likely to work at a higher intensity than those whose jobs do not require frequent use of computers.
- Workers who are unable to exert control over their working time and have little task discretion tend to work at a higher intensity than those who can exert at least some control over their working time arrangements and the execution of tasks.
- High levels of subjective job insecurity are associated with intensified work effort.

Institutions appear to affect work intensity

- Stricter regulation of working time protects core workers from work intensification.
- However, it is associated with increasing intensity for temporary agency workers, suggesting that non-standard employment provides employers with a route to escape regulation.
- Trade union and collective bargaining, with levels of work intensity being lower in countries where automatic extensions of collective bargaining agreements are in place.
- Employment Protection Legislation also appears to influence work intensity.
- Stronger EPL might reduce the disciplining effect brought by the fear of dismissal and make workers feel more confident about resisting attempts to intensify work.
- The largest increases in work effort have taken place in countries that have deregulated their labour markets and decentralized their systems of industrial relations in response to the post 2008 economic crisis (e.g. Portugal, Spain, Greece, Romania).

The problem of underemployment

- Roughly one-quarter of UK workers work part-time.
- Of these, around one-seventh are ‘involuntary part-time’
- These workers are likely to experience lower wellbeing than those who are satisfied with their hours (Heyes et al. 2019).

Pertinent questions include:

- How might employers be induced to transform part-time jobs into full-time employment?
- How might the negative consequences of underemployment be addressed?

Institutions appear to influence how underemployment is experienced

- Time-related and skills-related underemployment have increased in many countries.
- There are consequences for earnings, job satisfaction, career progression and wellbeing.
- But there are national differences in how underemployment is experienced.
- A statistically significant negative association between hours underemployment and well-being is not found in countries such as the Netherlands and Denmark (Heyes and Tomlinson 2021)
- This might reflect the role of income replacement benefits provided to workers who are in involuntary part-time employment, and measures such as vocational education and training that support labour market transitions and help workers to find more adequate employment.
- Skill underutilisation is negatively associated with well-being only when workers also believe their career prospects are poor. Again, this is less likely in countries such as Denmark.

Working time and working carers (Austin and Heyes, 2020)

- Research funded by ESRC (Sustainable Care: Connecting People and Systems, grant ref. ES/P009255/1, 2017-21, principal investigator: Professor Sue Yeandle, University of Sheffield)
- Unpaid carers help or look after a family member or friend who needs care and support as a result of old age, physical illness, disability, mental health problems or addiction.
- Most carers in the UK are of working age and it has been estimated that in 2018-19 almost 4.9 million people (or 1-in-7 workers) were combining paid work and care (Carers UK, 2019).
- A majority are women.
- Carers who remain in work pressure to reduce their working hours.
- The situation for many working carers becomes untenable and they leave employment, resulting in further financial hardship, with implications for pension income later in life. Working carers report fatigue, stress and mental health issues related to the dual demands of employment and caring.

Working time and role conflict for working carers

- A nationally representative survey of working carers in England and Wales (Austin and Heyes 2020)
- Only 11% of working carers said that combining paid employment and their caring role had no effect on their levels of stress or anxiety at work, and 60% reported low mental well-being.
- Among those working in organisations that provided support for working carers, 43% reported high well-being compared with just 30% in organisations providing no support.
- Feelings of role conflict tend to be lower where workers have the ability to determine their hours or have access to flexitime.

Working carers who believe their employer is carer-friendly are *less likely* than other working carers:

- to consider reducing their hours or giving up their job completely
- to find it difficult to concentrate at work
- to have turned down a promotion, or decided against applying for a job, because of their caring responsibilities
- to have taken sick leave to provide care
- to have taken unpaid leave to provide care.

Connecting decent work to transitions over the lifecycle

- A broader focus might involve examining opportunities and constraints for progression within careers.
- Transitional Labour Market (TLM) analysis (Schmid and Gazier, 2002; Schmid et al. 2023) pays particular attention to five key transitions:
 1. school-to-work
 2. job-to-job,
 3. employment-unemployment
 4. employment and unpaid care-work
 5. employment-retirement
- Emphasis is also placed on empowering individuals to make self-determined transitions during the life-course. This includes being able to choose career pathways and having the ability to switch between work situations, whether paid or unpaid (e.g. unpaid care provision).
- This implies that we need to think not only about how good work is created but how experiences of good work are sustained throughout the lifecycle.

Transitions and decent/good work

- From a TLM perspective, increasing the ‘stock’ of decent work by improving standards and outlawing bad practices is important but insufficient.
- **National/local** policy considerations include:
 1. Connecting workers to decent jobs – with implications for education, employment policy (‘work first’ approaches and a lack of tailored support do not sit comfortably with TLM), transport policy (inadequate coverage and reliability of public transport).
 2. Improving protections (including social protections) for workers in ‘diverse employment forms’ – reducing differences with workers in standard jobs without eroding protections for the latter.
 3. Skills/knowledge development opportunities – addressing the disadvantages faced by workers in diverse employment forms, ensuring genuine opportunities for lifelong learning.
 4. More adequate support for working carers – paid leave for longer durations.

Transitions of young workers

- ESRC funded project '**The Transitions of Young Workers in the UK Labour Market: Consequences for Careers, Earnings, Health and Wellbeing**' Grant reference ES/W009536/1, PI Jason Heyes, University of Sheffield.
- The motivating questions for the research are '**how do the labour market transitions of younger workers affect their employment prospects, physical health and mental wellbeing at subsequent stages of their life course?**' and '**how can the likelihood of positive, empowering transitions for younger workers be increased?**'
- The project focuses on post-education transitions made by younger workers, including transitions between jobs, within jobs, and between lower quality and higher quality jobs.
- We are examining differences in the ability of younger workers to progress within the labour market and within their careers, comparing people who differ in respect of gender, race, ethnicity and disability.
- The project is connecting young workers' experiences to where they live in the UK through survey data and through a detailed qualitative investigation of young workers' lived experiences of transitions in two regions in England, including South Yorkshire.
- Focusing on the transitions of the 40-50% of young people who are 'in the middle' (neither NEET nor HE educated) and who have tended to be overlooked in research on transitions.



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Thank you