Precarious Work & Mental Health Outcomes

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Context

- Non-standard & precarious work was increasing in many EU countries before the pandemic
- So too was mild to moderate mental illness
- Over 38 per cent of EU citizens have depression & anxiety – many of working age
- Only 25 per cent of them receive any treatment
- Direct & indirect costs of mental illness across Europe is over €460bn – or 3.4 per cent of GDP
- But are changes in employment arrangements exacerbating the mental health crisis? Are there different levels of mental health risk? Impact of COVID-19 & jobs recovery?
Precarious work & mental health

- Is any job a ‘good’ job?
- Is there a gradient of ‘precarity’ which exacerbates mental health problems?
- How have workers coped during COVID19?
- What are the post-COVID messages for employers & policymakers?
Is Any Job a ‘Good’ Job?

- Being out of work is bad for income, self-esteem, dignity, social inclusion, relationships and health

- Being in even poor quality work which is boring, routine or represents under-employment is widely regarded as a good way for the workless to remain connected to the labour market and to keep the work ‘habit’ – the ‘jobs first’ policy

- BUT…poor psychosocial job quality is damaging
A Message from HILDA

- Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey
- Analysis (Butterworth et al, 2011) of seven waves of data from 7,155 respondents of working age (44,019 observations) from a national household panel survey.
- Longitudinal regression models evaluated the concurrent and prospective association between employment circumstances (unemployment and employment in jobs varying in psychosocial job quality) and mental health, assessed by the MHI-5

Psychosocial Job Quality (1)

1. My job is more stressful than I ever imagined
7. My job is complex and difficult
8. My job requires learning new skills
9. I use my skills in current job

10. I have freedom to decide how I do work
11. I have a lot of say about what happens
12. I have freedom to decide when I do work

4. I have a secure future in my job
5. Company I work for will be in business in 5yrs
6. I worry about the future of my job

3. I get paid fairly for the things I do in my job

Source: Butterworth et al, 2011
“As hypothesised, we found that those respondents who were unemployed had significantly poorer mental health than those who were employed. However, the mental health of those who were unemployed was comparable or more often superior to those in jobs of the poorest psychosocial quality.”

[These results have now been replicated in the UK]

Source: Butterworth et al, 2011
A gradient in ‘precarity’ & mental health?
Data and methodology*

- Individual-level data » 6th wave EWCS
- Country-level data » Eurostat and the World Bank
- Sample: » EU28 » employees (NB not ‘gig’ workers)
- Aged between 18 – 65 years
- n= 27,000

* Analysis by J Vanderleyden
Typology of employment arrangements

‘Standard Employment Relationship’ (SER) 35%
High levels of employment & income stability, predictable working hours & work schedules, regularity of working time, access to training opportunities & a voice on issues such as safety, & access to consultation on workplace issues

‘Instrumental’ 21%
Despite having moderately high levels of stability & predictability, they had little or no access to workplace consultation or representation

‘Portfolio’ work 12%
Combines high amounts of stability & control with excessive & unpredictable working hours

‘Precarious Unsustainable’ 20%
Employment status was considerably less stable & predictable, they had little access to representation or training, though could have access to additional pay if their hours increased

‘Precarious Intensive’ 12%
Included workers whose jobs had high levels of instability & unpredictability of hours, with little control in the hands of the employee in terms of working schedule, and where extra work often went unpaid
Results – SER 35%
Results – Precarious intensive 12%
Results – Job Type & WHO5 Score

Random intercept model, with fixed predictors (individual level)

Note: controlled for sex, age, occupational class, educational level, size of organisation, economic sector, work intensity, ergonomic demands, job autonomy and cognitive demands
Reflections

- Significant associations between mental wellbeing and employment arrangements in the job typology – even controlling for confounding factors
- The association is not uniform between countries – the effects are not fixed
- Scope to influence & mitigate these effects through policy choices
Eurofound Survey: Working During Covid-19
Contract Type (n=22,000)

- Austria
- Belgium
- Bulgaria
- Croatia
- Czechia
- Denmark
- Estonia
- Finland
- France
- Germany
- Greece
- Hungary
- Ireland
- Italy
- Latvia
- Lithuania
- Netherlands
- Portugal
- Romania
- Slovakia
- Slovenia
- Spain
- Sweden
- Total (EU27)

Legend:
- Red: A temporary employment agency contract
- Green: Contract of limited duration
- Blue: Contract of unlimited duration

Eurofound
Job insecurity across the EU

- Job insecurity fell from 15% in April to 10% in July ‘20, however concerns remain widespread for respondents on fixed and short-term contracts.
- Over 40% of men aged 34–49 years on temporary contracts fear they may lose their job in the next three months.
- Despite an overall increase in people’s working hours, a third of respondents still report working less than before the pandemic.
- Well over half of unemployed respondents did not receive any official financial support since the outbreak of COVID-19, forcing many to rely heavily on informal support.
Implications

- Job quality, job demands, control, task discretion, decision latitude all matter…
- …but so too do choices about labour market regulation, coordination, social dialogue & enforcement…
- …and some forms of non-standard employment can be beneficial for mental wellbeing
- Both policy makers & employers need to take a more informed & nuanced approach to ensure that mental wellbeing is not the first victim of a shift towards greater precariousness
- Especially important if post-COVID-19 job growth is to be characterised by employers shifting ‘risk’ to employees and ‘gig’ workers
Thank You for Your Attention

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