HEALTHY WORKPLACES SUMMIT 2025 on 'Safe and healthy work in the digital age'

Parallel Session 1: Psychosocial risks and mental health in the digital world of work

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Psychosocial risks and mental health in digital platform work

Defining digital platform work

- **Definition:**
  - All paid labour provided through, on or mediated by an online platform

- **Main characteristics**:
  - Paid labour is organised or coordinated through a digital labour platform;
  - With the aim to carry out specific tasks or solve specific problems;
  - Using **algorithmic management**, to allocate, monitor and evaluate the work performed and the platform workers' behaviour and performance;
  - Multiple parties are involved: platform, client and worker;
  - Prevalence of **non-standard working arrangements**, and platforms tending to classify workers as self-employed in their terms and conditions;
  - Resulting in the shifting of risks, liabilities and responsibilities, including concerning health and safety, onto digital platform workers.

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OSH risks and challenges of digital platform work

- Similar work activities come with similar OSH challenges and risks
  - The OSH risks that platform workers face and that directly relate to the tasks carried out are like those faced by other workers performing the same tasks
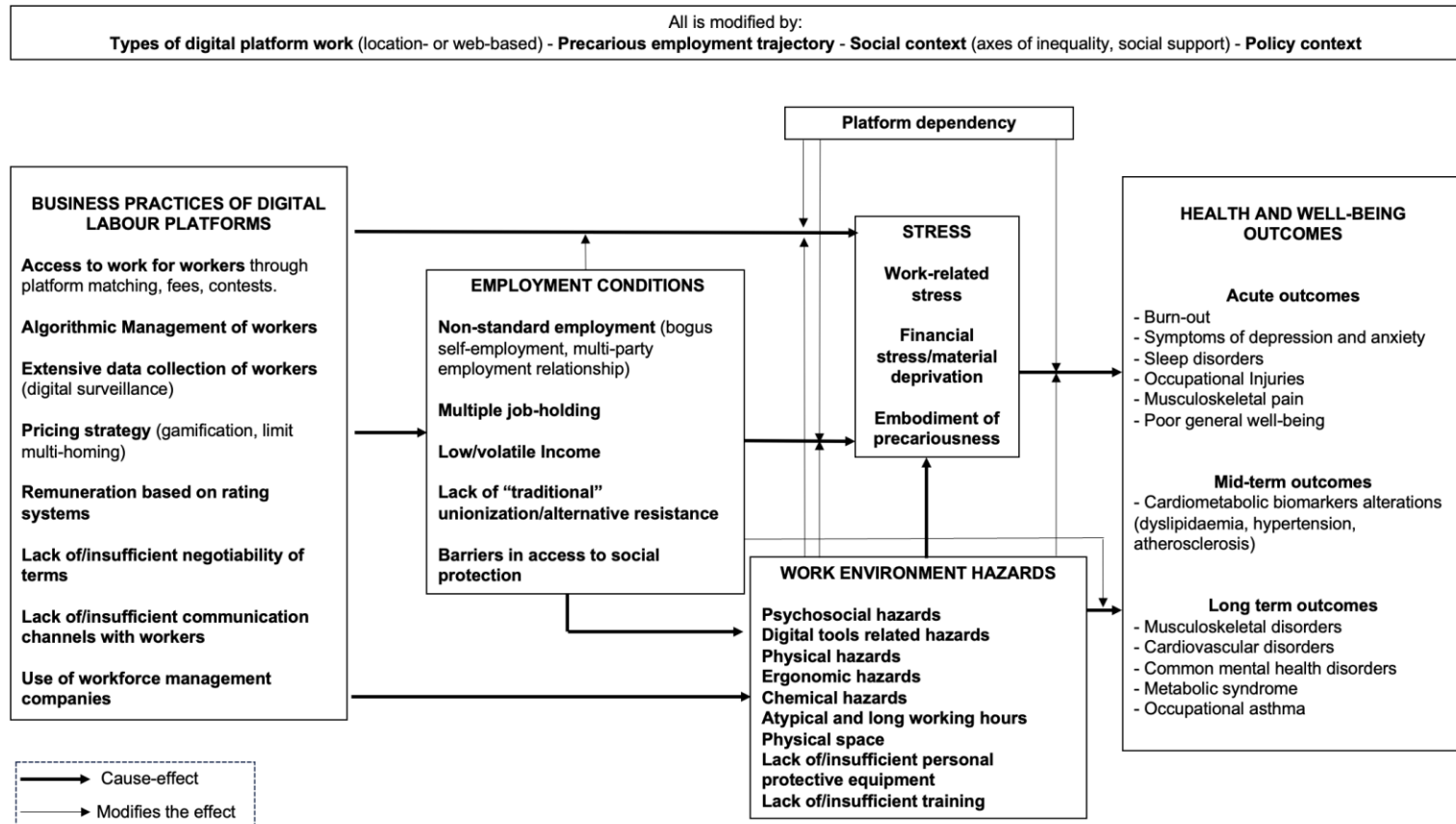
  ⚠
  - Concentration in sectors and occupations with higher risks
  - Includes additional work and new combinations of work

- Nature of and conditions under which digital platform work is done aggravate the risks and complicate prevention and management

➡ **Digital platform workers encounter severe occupational physical and psychological health and safety risks, which are hardly prevented and managed, and some groups already face increased risks**

Factors aggravating OSH risks and challenges in digital platform work

All is modified by:
Types of digital platform work (location- or web-based) - **Precarious employment trajectory** - **Social context** (axes of inequality, social support) - **Policy context**

Platform dependency

BUSINESS PRACTICES OF DIGITAL LABOUR PLATFORMS

Access to work for workers through platform matching, fees, contests.

Algorithmic Management of workers

Extensive data collection of workers (digital surveillance)

Pricing strategy (gamification, limit multi-homing)

Remuneration based on rating systems

Lack of/insufficient negotiability of terms

Lack of/insufficient communication channels with workers

Use of workforce management companies

EMPLOYMENT CONDITIONS

Non-standard employment (bogus self-employment, multi-party employment relationship)

Multiple job-holding

Low/volatile Income

Lack of "traditional" unionization/alternative resistance

Barriers in access to social protection

STRESS

Work-related stress

Financial stress/material deprivation

Embodiment of precariousness

WORK ENVIRONMENT HAZARDS

Psychosocial hazards
Digital tools related hazards
Physical hazards
Ergonomic hazards
Chemical hazards
Atypical and long working hours
Physical space
Lack of/insufficient personal protective equipment
Lack of/insufficient training

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OUTCOMES

Acute outcomes
- Burn-out
- Symptoms of depression and anxiety
- Sleep disorders
- Occupational Injuries
- Musculoskeletal pain
- Poor general well-being

Mid-term outcomes
- Cardiometabolic biomarkers alterations (dyslipidaemia, hypertension, atherosclerosis)

Long term outcomes
- Musculoskeletal disorders
- Cardiovascular disorders
- Common mental health disorders
- Metabolic syndrome
- Occupational asthma

→ Cause-effect
→ Modifies the effect

Source: Matilla-Santander, N., Lundh, F., Kvart, S., Baron, S.L., Bodin, T., Gevaert, J., Håkansta, C., Hernando, J.C., Muntaner, C. & Kreshpaj, B. (2025). "What Is Known about the Health of Location-Based and Online Web-Based Digital Labour Platform Workers? A Scoping Review of the Literature." BMC Public Health 25(1):2635. doi:10.1186/s12889-025-23916-5.

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Factors aggravating OSH risks and challenges in digital platform work

- **Algorithmic management and digital surveillance**

  - Use of algorithms to allocate, monitor and evaluate work and to monitor and evaluate platform workers' performance and behaviour (e.g. tracking, rating mechanisms, automated decision-making)

  - **OSH impact**: **algorithmic management and digital surveillance cause exhaustion, anxiety and stress:**

    - shifts the power balance in favour of the digital labour platform

    - overall lack of transparency on the functioning of the algorithm

    - undermines platform workers' autonomy, job control and flexibility

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Factors aggravating OSH risks and challenges in digital platform work

- Unclear employment status and contractual arrangements (non-standard forms of work)

  - Workers are often qualified as self-employed freelancers, which may not be in accordance with the factual conditions of work

  - **OSH impact: self-employed generally responsible for their own safety and health:**

    - not covered by EU OSH directives or national legislation

    - not targeted by prevention, monitoring and enforcement services

    - excluded from worker participation and social dialogue

Factors aggravating OSH risks and challenges in digital platform work

- **Professional isolation, work-life conflicts, a lack of social support**
  - Platform work is mainly executed in isolation, by an anonymous and dispersed workforce with a high labour turnover, in unconventional ill-adapted workplaces and with blurred work-life boundaries

  - **OSH impact:**
    - sleeping problems, exhaustion, difficulties in recuperating from work, stress, depression, burnout and loneliness, and an overall dissatisfaction with one's job and personal life
    - limits worker organisation (and collective bargaining), and stands in the way of realising effective worker participation
    - difficulties in identifying and accessing workforce complicates implementation of preventive measures, e.g. campaigns, training or access to OSH services

Factors aggravating OSH risks and challenges in digital platform work

- ## Work transience and boundaryless careers

  - Platform work comes with significant job insecurity and income insecurity, as workers often have no or little control over how much they can work and how much they earn (e.g. feeling of having to be available at all times)

  - Platform work is emotionally demanding (e.g. contacts with clients)

  - **OSH impact:**
    - poor mental health, burnout, depression, anxiety, fatigue

Overall limited awareness and attention for OSH

- Among digital platform workers:
    - Not always aware of their contractual status and its repercussions
    - Often do not fully grasp the (severity) of the OSH risks encountered
    - Some take precautions (e.g. taking breaks); many do not or are not able to because of algorithmic management or platform dependency

- Among digital labour platforms:
    - Some understanding of OSH risks related to digital platform work, but often only a partial picture or risks are underestimated (e.g. accidents only)
    - Very little attention for psychosocial risks, mental health and well-being
    - OSH does not emerge as a priority for digital labour platforms:
        - general OSH policy typically lacking, poor documentation of procedures
        - limited efforts of OSH risk prevention and management, only basic training if offered and not covering mental health
        - limited or no involvement of digital platform workers in OSH matters

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Conclusions from the study

- OSH risks and challenges, incl. **psychosocial risks**, in platform work are **aggravated** due to business practices, employment conditions, and the work environment

- Yet, these risks are **poorly understood**, the overall **awareness** of OSH is **limited**, and psychosocial risks are often overlooked

- **Impact on digital platforms workers**, however, can be severe in the short and long run, especially among most vulnerable groups

- Nature and conditions of digital platform work **complicate OSH risk prevention and management**, incl. on psychosocial risks

- Impact of Platform Work Directive will depend on implementation

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THANK YOU

For more information about the projects, please consult the EU-OSHA website:
- <u>Overview of OSH policies, research and practices in the context of digital platform work, through review of existing data and information, fieldwork research and policy analysis in the EU</u>
- <u>Workforce diversity and digital labour platforms: implications for OSH</u>

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