

Long abstract – Open Section

Exhausted: The consequences of non-standard work on the mental health of female migrant workers

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The article proposes a quanti-qualitative analysis of the impact of non-standard work on the mental health of female migrant workers in Italy, framing itself within the debate on social determinants of health and migrant health issues. The research hypothesis that will be tested in the course of the essay is that the non-standard nature of working conditions and schedules of jobs typically undertaken by foreign-born women has a negative impact on their mental health. The analysis is developed on the basis of a multi-method research conducted in Padua between 2018 and 2020, which involved first a survey on a sample of Moldavian women workers who were employed in different jobs and then the realization of semi-structured interviews with Moldavian women workers employed in domestic work.

The literature on the relationship between work and health has paid particular attention to the implications of precarious and flexible occupations on workers' health, while few studies have delved into the health issues of a category of workers largely engaging in so-called 'bad' - non-standard, poorly-paid and strenuous - jobs, namely migrant people. Within this strand of studies, the present article contributes to knowledge regarding the effects of non-standard jobs on migrant workers' health. The article also helps to fill another gap in the literature concerning women's occupational health, which has been under-researched due to a deeply-rooted gender bias. Women have been historically excluded from occupational health studies for numerous reasons ranging from the housewife stereotype to the unfounded conviction that female occupations were typically less harmful. Even today many occupational health studies continue to ignore gender considerations, despite the fact that a growing body of literature has shown that women and men can have different experiences of work exposures and health. There is an even more severe paucity of studies on the implications of work on the health of women of migrant origin, although the well-established literature on migrants' health has shown that gender and occupation are among the most important variables to consider among the social determinants of their health. Migrant men and women are largely employed in occupations that are detrimental to their health, either due to the risk of occupational accidents and diseases, or because they are employed under non-standard contracts and work to schedules that have negative effects on health. Adding to the few studies that have looked at the relationship between mental health and work, this article examines the implications of various non-standard jobs for migrant women's mental health.

Our results confirm the high concentration of migrant women engaging in non-standard jobs that particularly involve non-standard working schedules. This first result makes a significant contribution to the intersectional literature on occupational health, as it points to particular health risks for female migrant workers - a social group located at neglected points of intersection. Second, our article contributes to deepening the intra-categorical intersectional analysis within the occupational categories considered here, as we found higher levels of mental ill-health in care-

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related jobs than in other occupational categories. Our analysis shows that it is not the job itself that causes malaise, but rather the women's working conditions aggravated by their migrant status, which had led to a marked downward mobility and heavy moral obligations towards the family left behind.

To sum up, we argue that to clarify the relationship between the working conditions and poor mental health of female migrant workers we need to consider both the direct, work-related causes of ill-health - such as non-standard working schedules - and the indirect causes, which include the stress generated by non-standard, deskilling jobs, when finding work was the main reason for migrating.

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