Development in Practice

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/cdip20

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To cite this article: Shoba Arun & Wendy Olsen (2023) Modern slavery and exploitative work regimes: an intersectional approach, Development in Practice, 33:2, 133-144, DOI: 10.1080/09614524.2023.2173725

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2023.2173725

Published online: 25 Apr 2023.

DEVELOPMENT IN PRACTICE
2023, VOL. 33, NO. 2, 133–144
https://doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2023.2173725

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Shoba Arun and Wendy Olsen

ABSTRACT

This Special Issue covers an intersectional approach to extreme labour exploitation. We provide concrete empirical studies and new theoretical frameworks. This overview paper analyses how modern slavery theories might influence policy options. The theories examined in this Special Issue include supply-chain theories, feminist approaches to work, diffusion of innovation theory, intersectional gender-and-development theory, and the social construction of narratives around bonded and forced labour. Evidence is given from the garment industry, farming, and other sectors based on field research and questionnaire surveys dated 2015–2020. Women in paid jobs are widely exposed to extreme exploitation, coerced overtime, having their papers held by the employer, and subject to threats/violence. In care work, the gender worktime difference is large, and evidence is given from India of girl children's work hours being much longer, on average, than boys' hours. Extreme exploitation rests upon gaping social and economic inequalities which deserve policy attention.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 16 August 2022
Accepted 23 January 2023

KEYWORDS
Employment; extreme exploitation; modern slavery; gender; intersectionality; work regimes

Introduction

Exploitative work regimes are contested around their boundaries, such as age boundaries and whether the same norms apply to men and women, and this Special Issue takes an intersectional approach to the more extreme forms of exploitation in work. The extreme exploitation in work regimes in both the Global North and South have attracted attention from policy makers, academics, and development experts. The 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of the United Nations has some goals focused on gender roles and some universal achievements, such as labour-force participation, which, in effect, rely upon gender-specific strategic actions (UN 2015). The SDG agenda focuses upon achieving key development goals and has a universalistic orientation precisely because inequality is so widespread. The articles presented here show extremes of exploitation in the workplace, and this article discusses how they relate to policy outcomes based on interdisciplinary social theories.

Many interventions have been attempted to reduce persistent inequalities in work regimes. In this Special Issue, we consider not only the continuation and the causes of extreme exploitation, with examples, but also strategies to improve matters. This introductory article starts with an overview of existing knowledge and then reviews three key themes underlying extreme exploitation: gender, social norms, and migrant workers. The empirical articles are summarised within these

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three sections. Overall, the intersectional approach to social inequality helps us begin to solve the underlying problems that drive extreme exploitation.

Capitalism and its forms are changing globally including in the Global North, notably with a new algorithmic management of work generated by platform capitalism (Srnicek 2016). Even here, exploitations, exclusions, and vulnerabilities persist. In a new age of automatisation, flexibility, and smart work environments such as the gig economy, there is still job insecurity, isolation, and lack of social safety nets – even, or especially, with the rise of neoliberal rationalities (Popan 2021). Grim statistics have emerged at the global level: globally, 25 million people were subjected to "modern slavery" in the form of practices of forced labour, including human trafficking (ILO 2017). In the years since COVID-19 this may have increased (ElDidi, et al., in this issue, for example, have studied changes in UAE and Qatar affecting those countries' immigrants from South Asia). At a time when work participation in contemporary development processes is vital for development, and for recovery within the post-pandemic world, a key question is how do we reimagine and rework persisting inequalities, and provide an understanding of the wider social and economic value of work, so as to solve the exploitation problem.

Modern slavery and extreme exploitation in 2023

Several papers in the Special Issue ask if initiatives such as the Bangladesh Accord on safety at work or the United Kingdom (UK) Modern Slavery Act have made a difference to the working lives of workers in global supply chains. This section provides some background.

The conditions of the contemporary wage labourer involve the selling of their labour power, often under market conditions, in formal, informal, or household economies. We include in the concept of the labourer someone doing work which is paid, unpaid, or rewarded via exchanges or in-kind payments, as well as self-employment. By and large, these exchanges of work time occur within a complex and unequal socio-economic system. The wage labourer household's main source of income is this exchange of labour, but the level of wages depends on a range of social/external factors including local divisions of labour, the worker's gender, social norms that interact with sectoral characteristics, and thus not just the personal age and skillset of the worker. The intersectional outcome is highly diverse due to social-class differences, migration, and the rapidly growing "mobile" contexts of workers who cross borders.

Work inequalities resting on this intersectional basis are not new. Wage labour since the Industrial Revolution has captured the attention of social theorists, starting from Engels and Marx who charted conditions of the working poor in Industrial England. As labour is often treated as a commodity, for Marxists, wage labour is the foundation of an extractive capitalist system. The capitalists benefit from an exploitative regime of private capitalism akin to "wage slavery" that reduces workers' conditions to that of virtual slaves.

Since Marx wrote in the 1860s, history has brought to light many experiences of marginalised social groups such as working classes and women, impacted by industrial capitalism. For example, Dublin (1975) wrote on the working experiences and living conditions of the Lowell women in mill employment in nineteenth century United States. Albeit these young working women were given new opportunities external to their families and households, such work regimes applied oppressive conditions. The new systems were more "productive", yet observers have questioned the relative weight of the liberating and exploiting aspects of the revised work regimes. What is new here is that the Marxist political economy is not sufficient, in itself, when it lacks aspects of theorising culture and family roles, notably gender roles and practices of patriarchy. Ironically, today, more than ever, coercion and violence along with threats of harm play key roles in forcing workers into unfree relationships.

Development contexts, not separable from the global context, face so-called "wicked problems" like these. Forms of work that manifest as modern slavery, through exploitation or forced labour, should be characterised as a wicked problem since they reflect a socio-political challenge that is in all ways complex, dynamic and challenging to address. Gender aspects of the problem should

not be seen using homogenous terms about "women", nor simple men/women dichotomies, but as a complex cross-cutting series of intersections such as age/gender, age/class, and class/gender; and all these intersecting with ethnicities.

In this context, the last decade saw an impressive range of legislative acts passed related to work, such as the *Modern Slavery Act* and laws barring certain kinds of labour practices and migration practices. These laws are fostered by various nation states which aim to improve work regimes in global, national, and local work contexts, thus improving supply chains, public institutions, farming, and small factories across the globe. As a wicked problem, extreme exploitation will require changes of narratives, not just hand-wringing descriptions of suffering, or management reports that lead to no relevant actions.

The ILO, as a multi-stakeholder global institution, stressed that a fair working environment is a basis for universal and lasting social justice, as set out in its preamble.

> Whereas universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice, and whereas conditions of labour exist involving such injustice, hardship and privation … [, such that] an improvement of those conditions is urgently required; as, for example, by the **regulation** of the hours of work, including the establishment of a **maximum** working day and week, the regulation of the labour supply, the **prevention** of unemployment, the provision of an **adequate** living wage, the **protection** of the worker against sickness, disease and injury … , the protection of **children**, young persons and women, … *The failure of any nation to adopt humane conditions of labour is an* ***obstacle*** *in the way of other nations which desire to improve the conditions in their own countries.* (emphasis added, ILO 2015)

In this Special Issue, the empirical studies by ElDidi et al. (2023), Assan (2023), Ahmed and Arun (2023), and Wu and Kilby (2023) remind us that exploitative labour is still a global problem in spite of actors like the ILO and national governments.

Not only do supply chains influence all the dynamics of production and employment relations, but so do intra-family relations and household economies. The whole of each household is engaged with labour and work, taking a whole-life perspective. Children and dependents, and notably the growing number of elders needing care, are a key part of the involved population when exploitation causes a worsening of marginalised and impoverished livelihoods. The increased focus on raising awareness about conditions for promoting "decent work for all" through international institutions has been notable. This focus includes stakeholders promoting the Sustainable Development Goals and working together with governments and labour organisations. We aim to realise sustainable development and progress for all. At the same time, aspects of forced labour and bondage are found within localities, based on gender norms and other social norms. Phillips, Bhaskaran, and Nathan (2014), for example, showed that in both Brazil and India, gender-specific expectations in the community kept women working long hours without getting overtime bonuses, while men tended more to get the better jobs that are construed as skilled.

Gender, social norms, cultural norms, and economic exploitation: intersectional linkages of gender norms with work practices

We now turn to gender issues and the problems surrounding integrating the women-focused work sectors into the mainstream. The jobs women and girls do are often considered domestic in terms of being family-based, yet they are nevertheless often also international or cross-regional for the workers involved, as shown by Assan in Ghana (2023), by Shovita et al. for Bangladeshi emigrants (2023), by Samanova (2023), and by Dawood and Seedat-Khan in South Africa (2023).

Gender hierarchies, power structures that disallow autonomy, and marginalised women's limited voice and control at work need probing. The authors in this Special Issue broadly take a "gender and development" approach (GAD, Young 1993; Moser 1993), which we will explain before summarising the various papers. Gender and development approaches are focused upon the diversity of women, the relationships of men and women, and each region's development trajectory being seen as contextually located in cultural norms around gender and family roles (Andersen 1992; Østergaard 1992). The approach is always interdisciplinary, bringing culture to bear upon policy and economy.

The "gender and development theory" (GAD) complements the huge number of academic and practitioner studies of empowerment itself (e.g. Kabeer 1999). The GAD focuses on strategic long-term needs, which are defined as the changes needed to create a better social foundation for women's equality with men, and girls' equality with boys (Moser 1989). It is deemed critical to act upon the drivers of inequality, not just take remedial action after suffering has emerged. Thus GAD authors have stressed "strategic" gender needs over "practical" (immediate, mitigating) gender needs. GAD authors also have distanced themselves from a simplified women-first approach, often called "women in development" or WID.

Both schools say that there is a need for a profound change in gender and class relations. But in WID, class is more rarely mentioned, while in GAD, double and triple burdens of low-class or migrant/minority women workers are stressed. The experiences of women are not all alike, say GAD authors. By contrast, in the WID, there were three key points: 1) In WID, all women were seen as marginalised, thus placing "women" as a homogenous group; 2) In WID, policies to help women as mothers were given priority, whereas in GAD there is attention to all roles women play including leadership and paid work roles; and 3) In WID, there is a focus on lost productivity when women "stay at home", while in GAD the home-based work is seen as both necessary and productive, so that the reproductive sphere becomes a central part of economic and policy theorising. We have stressed some differences here but there is still overlap of the two schools of thought.

A crisis of care arose from the low integration of GAD into policies. To summarise the GAD version, 1) all women are not equally marginalised; 2) Women have rights as workers and people, quite apart from whether they become mothers; and 3) Both having jobs and having respect for doing care-work are critical for all women, according to the GAD viewpoint. The idea of supporting both WID and GAD has appeared numerous times in spite of the differences highlighted above. WID is seen as a win–win position in which women are "prized", and hence valued. There has been strong adherence to Women-in-Development ideas in some international and national institutions. Some country governments would tend to take a WID position instead of taking up GAD issues like strategic needs, cultural change, change in gender roles, class-based issues of low-status women, or prioritising all women having a chance to get a job. Many governments would view male breadwinners as more important than women getting employment.

On another aspect of gender rights, the ILO adopted a global treaty in 2019 affirming the right to freedom from violence and harassment in the workplace (ILO 2019). They implied not only that men and women equally need freedom from violence but that violence against women as gendered violence is illegal and unethical. The ILO provides for an integrated, inclusive, and gender-responsive approach for the prevention and elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work. For the ILO, violence and harassment are explicitly defined to include gender-based violence.

> The term "violence and harassment" in the world of work refers to a range of unacceptable behaviours and practices, … that … are likely to result in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm, and includes gender-based violence and harassment;
>
> (b) the term "gender-based violence and harassment" means violence and harassment directed at persons because of their sex or gender, or affecting persons of a particular sex or gender disproportionately, and includes sexual harassment. (Article 1 of ILO 2019)

Governments that ratify the treaty will be required to develop national laws prohibiting workplace violence and to take preventive measures, such as information campaigns, and to require companies to have workplace policies on violence. This extends to both the formal and informal sectors, and accounts for violence and harassment involving third parties, such as clients, customers, or service providers. Extreme exploitation is still occurring, though. Workplace coercion is a form of violence and a precursor of physical violence.

We can see that the wording of the anti-harassment policy sounds equally like a WID or GAD approach, and is thus open to support from all sides. In practice, however, most countries have not succeeded in protecting low-income, minority or pregnant women from violence, and often

the intersectional aspects of the problems women face are ignored. The Convention is written with a one-size-fits-all treaty wording, when more concerted action is needed.

In this Special Issue, Dawood and Seedat-Khan argue that modern slavery experts cannot ignore the domestic and gender stereotypes, gender relations, and patriarchal practices which underpin the domestic bonded labourer's situation. Their observations were based on their South African observations over decades. They say bondage of the working woman should not be seen as an individualistic feature of a specific concrete life, but rather is best seen in its wider historical and sociological perspective. Domestic workers in South Africa face multiple dimensions of social exclusion at present – not resolved by the end of the apartheid system.

Kim and Olsen (2023; in this Special Issue), showed that in India, about 5 per cent of girls work such long hours as teenagers that going to school becomes impossible. The long-hours work is also found in their paid work, as well as in farming and in their work in their own domestic scene without pay. More than eight states have over 10 per cent of their six to seventeen year-old girls working in harmful forms of child labour, greater proportions than average for boys in the same age-groups (Kim and Olsen 2023, appendix).

Samanova's fieldwork in rural Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan states of India in 2015/6 (2023; in this Special Issue) focused on recently liberated bonded labourers. Women received bad treatment both from landlords and from husbands, having married as teenagers and usually coming from families which had experienced bondage on both the bride's and groom's sides. The working conditions and poverty of these "scheduled tribe" minority women were abysmal.

Kilby and Wu (2023; in this Special Issue) showed a rapid rise in emigration of women from Bangladesh to Middle Eastern countries like Lebanon and Jordan. During this time there were few support services from the Bangladeshi government to the women, although they bring in vital foreign exchange to Bangladesh. Kilby and Wu used a case-study method to analyse both Nepal and Bangladesh workers' experiences of migration and extreme exploitation.

Overall, GAD approaches are needed for the better well-being of all workers, not only to aid women who do domestic work. Gender theories and cultural norm-change both need to be integrated into modern slavery analysis (Olsen and Morgan 2015). Otherwise, a crisis of care at all age-ranges is continuing.

Solving the social exploitation problem

Discussions re-emerged in the COVID-19 context about forced labour being a global problem with localised instances. Forced labour affects all sectors and businesses by offering cheaper, more vulnerable, and flexible workers as an alternative to the regulated parts of labour markets. In spite of interventions, the COVID-19 pandemic has magnified many of the existing weaknesses and problems. There are two fundamentally divergent ways to approach the situation. The first approach will invoke both political economy and the sociology of work, utilising holistic (macro-social) entities in explaining the situation. We integrate knowledge about cultural norms and how they change, as, for instance, when migrants arrive and are treated in supposedly "appropriate" ways, based on stereotypes and unequal power. This approach will consider social–structural features including social class, gender relations, age-groups in the life course, power, and economic control of assets. We see change as fomented by agents but in a structurally conditioned context. In this branch of explanation, country-level differences are profound and influential.

The alternative approach, found in some works by lawyers and policing experts, sees the law as a framework for improvements that would discourage exploitation and punish exploiters (Brotherton 2019; Bowe 2007, 84 and 160–170; Kara 2009, ch. 8). When focusing on criminalisation, the source of the context becomes hidden and the agents involved are located at the site of a criminal event. Yet multidimensional hyper-precarity (Lewis and Waite 2019) obviously should not be seen as a criminal offense in itself. It has its roots in international cultural and economic relationships, not just local ones. Thus, there is a need to go beyond individualised attribution of "causality" to the

employer–employee instance of bondage or coercion. Marx and the feminist Marxists, such as Rosa Luxembourg, were strongly urging, even in the nineteenth century, that individualist social theory was faulty when aiming to solve wicked social problems such as forced labour.

There is also a need to go beyond relying on transparency and disclosure statements by businesses. These describe a situation but may do little to change it. It is often assumed that making a public statement about the supply chain will bring unpleasant facts to light. Yet corporate reports can hide facts through falsified records and the buying-in of inputs (i.e. fourth-tier contracting).

In this Special Issue, the falsification of records is highlighted as a key discussion point at the manager–worker interface in Bangladeshi garment work (Ahmed and Arun 2023). As usual, it is working-class women who are threatened, hit, and punished by male supervisors. Women had to carry out forced overtime hours, and it was shown through detailed field studies that business disclosure practices in the Bangladesh garment sites had failed to reduce exploitation.

Asking businesses to solve the problems that led to child labour, too, at a site of modern slave working is likely to hit the dual snags of **corporate defensiveness** and fundamental non-acceptance of the **workers' voice**. We suggest that women workers face more problems being "heard" than men, but this distinction is rooted in class and ethnic differentials.

In this Special Issue, Shovita Adhikari's article (2023, in this Special Issue) shows that the Nepal anti-trafficking legislation is not working. By providing detailed case material based on 60 semi-structured interviews, Adhikari shows how and why the social basis of unfair and exploitative practices is not changed. They argue that perhaps, in the future, better policy diffusion could prevent child trafficking, since progressive policies are being attempted in Nepal.

To conclude, the corporate audits and "corporate social responsibility" reports can give evidence about the practices of forced labour, but they create little to no obligation to change those practices. More should be done to track work practices, including creating worker voice tools. Otherwise, the internal business stakeholders who conduct these "social audits" and write reports have a conflict of interest if they are expected to change the situation in workers' favour. For example, the employer may not want to spend funds on better health care within the factory, but rather would send workers home if found to be ill. Also, employers may not want to reduce overtime because the priority is to hit production targets and fill orders on time. Therefore, employers keep using methods like piecework to coerce unwilling workers to do involuntary overtime. It is then presented as if it were voluntary in a narrative of workers' choice.

This Special Issue deepens our understanding of the complex business ecosystems in which supply chains operate (see also Arun, Brahic, and Taylor 2020). There are social class structures separating workers from middle-class officials and upper-class employers and owners, deeply divided by norms of language and housing, and rarely visiting each other or knowing each others' seasonal celebrations at a personal level. In addition to class, there are ethnic groups, religious orientations, and heritage groups which both reflect group histories and are seen as the basis for stereotyping and "what each group deserves". We found employers' cultural norms and stereotypes to be part of habitual behaviour which reflects and perpetuates inequality (Dawood and Seedat-Khan 2023; in this Special Issue). By questioning these deep ecosystems, a human rights discourse helps to raise awareness that workers' needs are valid and their voices are typically going unheard.

The broad interdisciplinary basis for looking at bondage and extreme exploitation which we have sketched out here has its roots also in overviews such as Phillips, Bhaskaran, and Nathan (2014) and LeBaron (2014).

Child trafficking policies, and support for immigrant workers, both face challenges during the implementation phase, as shown in the case studies from Bangladesh and Nepal described by Wu and Kilby (2023; in this issue) and by Assan (2023) for workers in Ghana (also in this issue). We have argued that the victimhood of individuals is not the only focus of modern slavery research. Whether we consider history and political economy as the contextual basis for extreme exploitation, or the gender and patriarchy norms, a balanced approach will quickly highlight that fundamental

change is needed, and not just criminalisation. The multi-disciplinary integrating tendency is clearly set out by Phillips, Bhaskaran, and Nathan (2014) and LeBaron (2014), while some of the problems of focusing mainly on the legal and policing systems are highlighted for the UK in Craig et al. (2019).

Mobile exploitation beyond borders

Internal and international migration also contributes to exploitativeness of the job relationship. The role of cross-district migration was stressed for young workers in Ghana by Assan (2023; in this Special Issue). At a more general level, Wu and Kilby (2023) stress several aspects of spatial mobility that underpin extreme exploitation (in this Special Issue).

Assan (2023; in this Special Issue) used mixed-methods primary research to study young workers' forms and mechanisms of exploitation. He showed that cross-district migration weakened negotiating power of the workers. Ethnographic detail of the labour middlemen ("Connection Men") and other key figures revealed strong gender-stereotypical content in Ghana. Women migrants were forced to provide sexual services by the threat of removing their housing or beating them, at the migrants' site. Internal cross-regional migrants tended to replace local people in informal-sector job roles during the period from 2013 to 2017. As often found elsewhere, ethnic divisions were created on the basis of immigrant/local status and language and cultural difference.

In discussions on the social forces behind exploitative work regimes, we find links to low pay in sectors where vulnerable workers are found. Of these, migrant workers as a social category has received much prominence due to tendencies of exploitation and adverse incorporation in the labour market. Moving beyond a push–pull thesis of migration, Castles and Miller (1998) describe the "global age of migration", characterised by both acceleration and diversity of migration. We see the rise of many global actors, including the state, with changes to immigration policies, and the private sector, through the vast networks of global supply chains; these, aided by other actors such as the rise of recruitment agents and cheap travel and communications, have seen immense movement, leading to an increasing porosity of borders. Further, the growing labour surplus in development contexts, while indeed a mismatch within a national Global South context, functions to be a perfect "fit" for matching labour shortages in the Global North (Kawar 2004). Collectively, these processes have increased people's capabilities and aspirations to migrate (De Haas 2009). While a good majority of economic migrants from the Global South to the north are predominantly in skilled, high-paying professions, including care and IT work (see Arun 2018), there are groups of migrant workers in low pay and invisible sectors, exposed to work situations in which there is a higher risk of abuse.

We review the issues, then summarise the Special Issue papers in this area. Theorists have exposed the three "d"s of the segmented labour market (difficult, dangerous, and dirty jobs) where there is preponderance of migrant workers, particularly due to its association with low pay and strenuous working conditions, and more so for the undocumented or those with illegal status, combining risk of unemployment, underemployment, and poverty (see Standing 2011; and Ahmed and Arun 2023 in this Special Issue).

For example, more women from low-income contexts move across countries and regions, particularly globally from South to South locations. They move in search of work and income to support their families and are often exposed to a high risk of abusive, exploitative work conditions (Kawar 2004). With an overall change in the "character" of migration in nature, scale, and composition, there have been calls to focus on changes to policy and legislation, including robust labour protection both in the host and destination regions. In particular, with overall feminisation of international migration, women migrants who predominantly work in unskilled roles, such as maids, care assistants, or cleaners, face multiple vulnerabilities in relation to exploitation, abuse, and discrimination (Kawar 2004). In the UK, for example, migrant women have no legal recourse to public funds or social protection, due to operation of "silos" of gender relations and migrant status and this situation leaves them exposed to exploitation and abuse (Lewis and Waite 2019).

In this Special Issue, migrant precarity is highlighted by Wu and Kilby (2023), who discuss examples from Bangladesh and Nepal. Using key informant interviews, they show that workers from South Asia in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar face difficulties due to document-holding entrapment, low bargaining power, extortion by migrant agents, and sexual and gender-based violence.

El-Didi et al. (2023; in this Special Issue), looked at how short-term, low-skilled women migrant workers in the South Asia to West Asian corridor are vulnerable to forced labour and trafficking. Their review showed that abusive practices, physical violence, holding back the passport, and controlling maids' phone use (just to give a few examples) were common at the employer sites. In the paper by Assan (2023; in this Special Issue), the migrants' positions were also precarious and were worsened by the lack of local social capital in their place of work.

These precious case studies have used a mixture of methods to discover suffering and extreme exploitation. Migration and the routine abuse of migrant labour has been a key theme, while, within that, the intersectional marginalities are still vivid (women, girls, and youths being worst hit).

Thus, in addition to legal instruments that focus on migrant workers in the workplace within national social protection measures, grassroot measures such as capacity building of migrant organisations through data collection, training and education and reintegration programs could be helpful. Finally, building the capacity of immigrant communities to work alongside other local groups tackling poverty and disadvantage may help. It is key to develop and contribute towards local workers' leadership in finding solutions rather than waiting for the law to take effect. Sometimes, resorting to criminalising measures drives exploitation underground or into invisible forms, as we see in this collection of articles.

Policy interventions to reduce social exploitation

Overall we noted quite a large number of stakeholders in the spheres that affect and interlink with extreme exploitation of workers. Strengthening alliances among the stakeholders and developing long-term policy interventions in workplaces would be a reasonable local, regional, and global policy regime. It needs to begin with a sense of the structural inequalities that create the continuum of exploitation. Ahmed and Arun (2023), in this Special Issue, show this not as an *a priori* or normative assertion, but as worked-out conclusions from an empirical study of garment-worker audit processes in Bangladesh. Workers and adults who are potential workers are key stakeholders. Therefore, our **concept of multiple stakeholders is a worker-centred approach** yet also sees government and non-government actors as a key part of campaigns to structurally transform the capabilities of workers and avoid extreme exploitation.

We will now unpack this with reference to what has been said earlier. Addressing exploitation at work is challenging yet essential. This includes reducing the poverty of workers' residential areas and deep asset inequality while also recognising migrants' and low-income worker's human rights and voice. Strategic alliances and shared vision can be developed, but the voice of capital must be downplayed or moderated by the voices of intermediaries and workers' representatives. Strengthening the resistance to exploitation among workers, managers, auditors, and employers both within and beyond the workplace is needed. In part, this requires changes of attitudes and mindsets. The aim of labour policy is not to provide cheap and flexible labour for the use of capital. In particular, the "development" of a sector such as garments or domestic work does not have its main purpose in merely cheap labour, but in gaining paid work with decent wages and safety and health for all. To achieve all this, new alliances that are both pragmatic and practical can address the root causes of old and new forms of exploitation. This is a multi-stakeholder approach.

Typically, at the ILO level, the three key stakeholder groups are government, employers, and workers, but in local and regional discussions, the voices of key non-governmental organisations must also be included because of their specialist knowledge of how extreme exploitation relationships are grounded in social norms and cultural patterns. Policy experts can work by creating a

primary involvement of workplace decision makers along with supply-chain analysts, grassroot organisations and policy influencers. The aim is to disrupt conventional hierarchies in work regimes, then re-build worker contracting systems for multiple-scale improvements in the working and living conditions of those employed.

In this endeavour, piecework and fourth-tier contracting must be questioned, and those involved must be given a loud voice to say what forms of coercion, bondedness, forced ill-health, and servitude they are concerned about. To achieve voice in many of the situations, multilingual service providers and anonymous help-lines may be useful. The temporality of mobile or migrant workers, often bound up with nation-state based conceptualisations of worker categories, citizenship, and welfare, and its gendered and social ramifications, needs to be taken seriously into consideration by those who mould labour protection policies.

Some regions may need distinctive new migrant interventions at physical borders, such as desks at the airports and rail-heads, offices or phone-lines on roads near country borders, and help-desks in refugee camp situations. Discussing cultural notions about childhood, building on frameworks based on the sociology of children is also a good starting step. For this, training about child-centred human rights in schools from childhood upward can reinforce the idea that extreme exploitation is anti-social.

In this Special Issue, patriarchy and gender norms entrenched men's control over resources in rural Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh (researched by Samanova 2023). She found that male workers had control over cash flows, debt/dowry burdens, and the unpaid, unmeasured bonded labour of the wives of the male bonded labourers. This is not an outdated system, but an active and thriving system of exploitation which has feedback loops making it difficult to change narratives about the power and capabilities of women in that region of India.

Therefore, questions must be addressed to people in positions of relative social power who may help to improve the social context itself. New conversations are needed. The intersection of crime, work, and society needs special mention within policy changes. Synthesising all the special-issue papers, we conclude that laws which criminalise the employer's part in the relationship are likely to create secrecy and generate hidden sub-sectors. Criminalising modern slavery also tends to create stigma and it discourages the middle layers, such as intermediaries and auditors, from coming out publicly about their observations. The criminalising approach individualises the problem as if a single firm were responsible for child labour in football stitching. Yet the child workers and the sporting-good employers can move sites and re-start their illicit activity after a "raid". Who is taking action to make employers dislike using the cheapest and most powerless forms of labour? Who is training non-schooled children to have a high enough level of self-respect to voice their own concerns and walk off site if they are abused? It is difficult for children to report crimes to the police when that implies they will lose their job and face punishment.

We urge that key actors such as governments, NGOs, and businesses take an intersectional approach by addressing these questions:

How can a joined-up approach at the global level address work-based exploitation right across regions, genders, sectors, classes, and ethnic groups?

How can those benefit/ing from such forms of exploitation be included in suggesting and then bringing about changes to unequal power structures?

How can global processes such as migration-handling processes and global production networks integrate shared, transparent mechanisms to generate new processes of positive change? (e.g. airport Welcome Office and rail-station Safe-Line phone number, both with extensive advertisements)

What kind of policy levers can work at individual, institutional, social, and global levels to prevent exploitative work regimes?

What does the business community consider the levers that individual employers have to tackle structural inequalities in society, if any?

Also, it is fundamentally important to create new drivers for systematic change, which we call structural change, at all levels: households, organisations, labour markets, and policy. Governments and

organisations can tackle multiple, overlapping areas of social and economic inequality, including class and racial inequality and gender unfairness. These imbalances are forming an overarching context of disempowerment that leads toward work inequalities. We should aim to build upon a growing body of research on exploitative work regimes and anti-slavery institutions and discourses. We can perhaps draw on the paradigms, such as the feminist-inflected idea of autonomy, as relational (Mackenzie 2021).

A relational autonomy is one which is socially embedded and shaped by cultural norms and the wider social hierarchy. There is no other form of personal, private autonomy: the privileges of upper-level workers exist in part due to the patience and acceptance of many other people. The autonomy of a piece-worker or contract garment-stitching outworker would involve the support of husband, children, employer, and intermediary. Improvements in her autonomy would require not only that her attitudes change, but also that those others' values become more respectful. Women workers need rest, leisure, learning, training, health, and safety at all times. In workplaces, such as fisheries and restaurants, this implies that worker relational autonomy must be understood as profoundly important and not be conditional on good market conditions.

The employers feel constrained by factors such as competing synthetic carpet products or the Post-COVID-19 failure of tourist resort industries; but workers would point out that there is huge dismissal of women based on their gender, the ruining of many migrant livelihoods due to low social status, and problems of multilinguistic and racial relations. The lens of relational autonomy can take into consideration multifactorial processes such as social relationships and socio-historical circumstances that affect capacities. The concept of a crisis becomes changed into a concept of unacceptable structures. Examples are that the role of worker, mother, woman (child/youth) is shaped by the interface of household and work roles, and gendered and racialised norms. Many workers also lack peers and friendships, due to disrupted lives and long working hours. We need shared learning, both from the Global South and the North about the future of work, where the gap between the formal and informal sectors gets blurred, as do the boundaries between the social and economic as well as the (migrant) mobile and the local. Here a worker-centred focus can help shape and measure changes in the altered work practices to serve workers better (Ahmed and Arun 2023; in this Special Issue). We can deploy a locally contextualised and mixed methods approach – i.e. action research or intervention via a staged series of changes. The initiatives can be simultaneously comparative and self-aware of differences across regions, sectors, and social groups. We now see an almost unfettered expansion of global capital in the post-COVID global context, which also has notable economic uncertainties. In this context, such shared learning from the Global South and North can shed light on the liberating and exploiting impacts of agents in the revised work regimes.

Acknowledgement

The Special Issue is based on a stream in the Development Studies Association Conference 2021, which had the title "Modern slavery and exploitative work regimes in the Global South and the North and work: Multiple and differential intersections".

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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