

Work, Employment and Society Annual Conference 2026



**Abstract Book
Poster Presentations**

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Care infrastructures, social reproduction and the crisis of care

When Care Policy Becomes Usable: Policy Salience, Self-Use and Second-Birth Intentions among Employed Mothers in South Korea

Yidan Ning, Chong Hyun Park

(Sungkyunkwan University)

South Korea has expanded family-friendly policies in response to persistently low fertility, yet the link between policy provision and childbearing remains weak. A key reason may be that policy availability within employment systems does not automatically translate into support that workers can recognise as usable or mobilise in everyday care arrangements. Existing debates have focused mainly on the formal provision of parental leave, childcare services, and reduced working hours, while paying less attention to how such measures are converted into practical reproductive support. This paper examines whether the relevance of care infrastructure for second-birth intention lies less in policy availability itself than in its perceived usability and prior use, drawing on a capability-oriented distinction between provision and conversion.

Using data from the 2024 National Family and Fertility Survey, the study analyses employed mothers with one child and estimates a sequential hierarchical logistic regression model predicting second-birth intention. Four blocks are introduced: demographic controls; policy salience (whether parental leave usability and childcare-service availability are identified as important conditions for childbirth); employment and work conditions (working hours, income, employment type, workplace sector, and work-life conflict); and prior policy self-use at first birth.

The results show a clear contrast between formal conditions and policy conversion. Employment and work conditions do not significantly improve model fit as a block. By contrast, policy salience is positively associated with second-birth intention: mothers who identify parental leave usability as an important condition show about 2.2 times higher odds of intending a second birth, and those who identify childcare-service availability as important show about 2.0 times higher odds. In addition, mothers who previously used a family-friendly policy at first birth show nearly 2.8 times higher odds of second-birth intention. Although fewer than one in ten respondents identify either policy item as an important childbearing condition, these perceptions are strongly associated with reproductive intention where they are present.

The findings suggest that care infrastructure matters not only through formal provision, but through whether workers encounter it as genuinely usable and actionable support under concrete employment conditions. The paper contributes to debates on care infrastructure, social reproduction, and the crisis of care by showing that the policy-fertility link is shaped less by the formal presence of work-family measures than by their conversion into lived and usable reproductive support.

Intersectional inequalities, precarity and labour market stratification

The Hidden Cost of Menstruation-related Absenteeism in the UK and Productivity Gap in a Permanent Polycrisis

Afnan Gohar

(University of Lancashire Alumna)

The UK exists in a constant state of polycrisis defined by the 'snowball' effects of post COVID-19 recovery, the Russia-Ukraine conflict, energy crisis, rising inflation (Lloyd and Blakemore, 2023), and the escalating geopolitical tensions between the US and Middle East. These crises have pushed UK's inflation levels to rise from 2.1% to 2.7% (British Chambers of Commerce, 2026), placing unexpected pressures on nationwide productivity.

There is an invisible force within the UK's labour market behind these aforementioned macro-economic shifts: the neglected reality of working women's reproductive health. The NHS Confederation (2024) reports that absenteeism related to severe menstrual pain, endometriosis, and other menstrual-related issues costs the UK economy an estimated £11 billion annually, a systemic implementation gap persists between this socio-economic evidence and national policy.

Drawing on the author's research, recently cited (Gohar, 2025) by the Women and Equalities Committee's inquiry into menstrual health (2026), this paper examines the disconnect between empirical data and statutory workplace reform. By presenting these findings, this research offers insights for the UK's labour market policy by reframing menstrual health from a purely clinical concern to a significant, yet silent, productivity issue.

A qualitative approach is used to critique the persistent use of linear productivity models that assume a static, non-cyclical, male-centric ("androcentric") prototype (Bailey et al., 2019). As a result, current flexible work policies systemically exclude women and female-fronted occupations (Jacobi et al., 2025).

Findings of this study show that employees favour formal menstrual policies, in both a 'menstrual leave' or flexible form, giving them the right to adjust work environments without the stigma of medical disclosure. It is argued that the absence of a national framework for menstrual flexibility represents a critical gap in national economic strategy. The research reframes menstrual health issues as an economic competitiveness issue, challenging the androcentric foundations of workplace productivity models.

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Open Stream

Mobile Labour Regimes: Technology, Control and Migrant Labour in European Trucking

Davide Marchi

(University of Milano-Bicocca)

Over the last decades, the occupation of long-haul truck driving has undergone significant transformations. Digital technologies and advanced driver assistance systems (ADAS) have reshaped driving practices, while digital fleet management systems enable companies to monitor and coordinate drivers' activities in real time (Levy, 2023; Levy & Barocas, 2018; Gong et al., 2025). At the same time, the sector has experienced important changes in workforce composition, with an increasing recruitment of migrant workers from Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa (Benedetti et al., 2025; van Gardingen & Atema, 2023). This paper asks how technological change interacts with the growing internationalisation

of the workforce in the European road transport sector. More specifically, it investigates how digital technologies reshape the organisation of work, the autonomy of drivers and the living and working conditions of workers in long-haul trucking.

The paper contributes to debates on the relationship between technology and labour by connecting research on digital workplace surveillance with the literature on labour regimes. Building on the concept of dormitory labour regimes (Smith, 2003; Pun & Smith, 2010), the paper introduces the idea of “dormitories on wheels” to describe a labour regime in which the truck functions simultaneously as workplace and living space. This perspective highlights how technological coordination and spatial arrangements combine to structure labour control in transnational transport networks.

The analysis draws on academic and grey literature on the road transport sector, available statistical data, and empirical material collected within an ongoing qualitative research project. The empirical component combines ethnographic observation with thirty in-depth interviews with actors involved in the sector, including truck drivers, union officials, employers, and representatives of sectoral associations.

Preliminary findings suggest that technological innovations do not simply lead to deskilling but rather to forms of reskilling, as the skill requirements of the occupation are transformed. At the same time, these technologies facilitate new forms of labour control and workforce segmentation. Digital coordination systems reduce drivers’ autonomy while enabling firms to manage geographically dispersed labour forces. At the same time, drivers are often channelled into work arrangements that require long periods spent living in trucks, effectively transforming vehicles into mobile dormitories. These dynamics contribute to the emergence of a labour regime that combines digital surveillance, spatial isolation and migrant labour recruitment.

Mapping Emergent Professional Identity in Early Career Formation: Identity Circles as a Visual Analytic Method

Catherine Mobley

(Clemson University)

Research on professional identity development is well established, but has focused disproportionately on biomedical and applied professional fields. Across disciplines, this work has relied primarily on interviews and surveys, methods that offer rich accounts of meaning-making but are limited in visualising how identities are organised, prioritised, and negotiated across disciplinary and social locations. This poster presents identity circles as a visual analytic method for examining emergent professional identities and early career orientations among undergraduate students, positioning the approach as both a methodological and analytical contribution to the sociology of work and occupations.

Identity circles are a visual elicitation technique in which participants map salient aspects of self, including disciplinary affiliation, professional aspirations, social identities, and personal commitments, around a central sense of identity. The spatial arrangement of these elements provides nuanced insight into which identities are central, marginalised, or held in tension. As an analytic tool, identity circles complement interview data by capturing hierarchies, boundaries, and relational dynamics that are difficult to surface through narrative alone, enabling systematic comparison across cases.

The poster draws on illustrative undergraduate identity circles collected as part of a multi-year research programme on student identity development. The cases, purposively selected as analytic exemplars, span engineering, bioscience, and sociology, and include students from different social locations that shape recognition and access within disciplinary and professional spaces. The cases are used comparatively to examine how disciplinary contexts and social position structure students’ imagined occupational futures and orientations to work. Three comparative dimensions are well-suited to visual analysis: (1) the relative centrality of disciplinary and professional identities within students’ overall identity configurations; (2) how forms of expertise, legitimacy, and authority associated with different disciplines are positioned within those configurations; and (3) the ways social location intersects with disciplinary context to shape belonging, recognition, and future orientation. Across cases, identity circles reveal patterned contrasts in how students imagine themselves as students and emerging workers, including moments of ambivalence, partial identification, and boundary crossing that are frequently obscured in interview-only analyses.

By centering identity formation at an early, pre-employment stage, the poster contributes to sociological understandings of how expectations about work, career pathways, and professional possibility are formed. These identity configurations illuminate how disciplinary norms, social location, and institutional contexts shape confidence, coherence, and perceived opportunity. The narratives offer insight into how inequalities and stratification are reproduced or contested prior to employment. Identity circles thus make visible how students assemble understandings of future work, expertise, and belonging upstream of labour-market entry.

Theoretically, the poster advances work on emergent professional identity by conceptualising identity formation as relational, uneven, and organised across multiple domains of self. Methodologically, it demonstrates the value of identity circles as a comparative visual method that enhances theory building around work identities and disciplinary boundaries. Visual methods such as identity circles offer a powerful addition to sociological research on work and employment, particularly in fields characterised by diffuse, contested, or non-linear career pathways in periods of labour-market uncertainty.

Worker subjectivities, experience, and agency

A Life Course Perspective to Sustainable Employment for People Living with HIV in the UK

Wezi Thammi

(Newcastle University)

This paper examines how people living with HIV navigate employment across the life course, focusing on the structural, psychosocial, and institutional factors that shape sustainable employment in the UK. Despite biomedical advances transforming HIV into a manageable chronic condition, stigma, discrimination, and labour market inequalities persist, raising important sociological questions about work, disability, and inclusion. This study addresses problems of how individuals living with HIV experience employment disruption, negotiate workplace environments, and re-engage with work following periods of ill health or absence.

The research is theoretically grounded in a life-course perspective to sustainable employment, foregrounding temporal transitions, cumulative disadvantage, and the interaction between individual agency and structural constraints. This is further extended through Position Exchange Theory, which conceptualises how individuals move between social roles and identities over time. Together, these frameworks enable an analysis of employment not as a linear trajectory but as a dynamic, disrupted process shaped by health, stigma, and institutional responses.

Methodologically, the study adopts a phenomenological approach using a qualitative survey of 57 adults living with HIV in the UK, recruited through HIV organisations and advocacy networks. Data collection was through open-ended online questions and analysed using a hybrid of inductive, deductive and reflexive thematic analysis. This approach facilitated in-depth exploration of lived experience, while generating analytically robust themes across the dataset.

Findings reveal that employment trajectories are frequently disrupted by both physical and mental health challenges, including medication side effects, fatigue, and psychological distress following diagnosis. Work breaks are common, compounded by stigma, fear of disclosure, and workplace discrimination, which shapes career decisions, limits opportunities, and contributes to precarious employment patterns. Participants described managing a “double burden” of health and concealment, with non-disclosure generating ongoing emotional challenges and identity fragmentation. Structural misalignment between workplace practices and the episodic nature of living with HIV further exacerbates these challenges. However, supportive environments—characterised by flexible working arrangements, informed management, reasonable adjustments—significantly enhance employment sustainability. Remote working, peer support networks, and access to digital resources also emerged as critical facilitators.

The study contributes to the sociology of work and employment by advancing a life-course conceptualization of sustainable employment for people living with chronic conditions. It frames stigma and portrays disclosure as a continuous challenge rather than a one time decision. Empirically, it provides new evidence on the interplay between health, identity, and work in contemporary employment contexts. The research is at an advanced stage: data collection is complete, thematic analysis has been

conducted, and findings are being integrated into a broader doctoral research. The paper offers implications for policy and practice, particularly in relation to workplace inclusion, employer training, and the alignment of employment systems with fluctuating work capacity.

When Cognition Becomes Partially Externalised: Generative AI, Cognitive Work, and Reflexive Regulation in Knowledge-intensive Managerial Work

Virpi Kalakoski, Hilpi Kangas, Tiina Heusala, Matti Laukkarinen, Virpi Kalakoski, Heidi Lahti

(Finnish Institute of Occupational Health)

The rapid diffusion of generative artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming knowledge-intensive work by intervening directly in tasks traditionally reliant on human cognition, such as producing and revising text, synthesising information, and generating ideas. While existing research has largely focused on AI adoption and productivity gains, less attention has been paid to how AI reshapes cognitive work in everyday tasks.

This study examines how generative AI reshapes cognitive job demands and functions as a cognitive resource in knowledge-intensive managerial work, focusing on roles characterised by high autonomy in AI use. In such contexts, individuals can actively regulate when and how cognitive tasks are delegated to AI. The study asks: how is cognitive work reorganised as cognition becomes partially externalised?

The study draws on semi-structured interviews with seven managers and directors from multiple industries who use generative AI in their work. In addition to formal interview questions, the interviews included a segment where participants demonstrated their AI use in practice. Analytically, the study combines the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) framework with an inductive template analysis, focusing on cognitive work activities embedded in everyday managerial practice. In addition to examining changes in cognitive demands and resources, the analysis also attends to participants' reflexive regulation of AI use, understood as ongoing reflection and negotiation over when to delegate tasks to AI, how far to rely on it, and where to draw boundaries. Data were collected in December 2025 and January 2026, and analysis is ongoing.

Preliminary findings indicate that generative AI functions in three ways: 1) as a task-performing cognitive resource that often reduces cognitive demands, 2) as a capability-expanding resource, and 3) as a source of new or intensified cognitive demands. Thus, AI does not simply replace cognitive work but appears to reorganise it by shifting cognitive effort and introducing new cognitive demands. In particular, cognitive effort shifts from producing information toward evaluation, verification, and iterative guidance of AI outputs, while core activities such as prioritisation, judgement, and meaning-making remain human-centred in the accounts analysed.

Importantly, these transformations are shaped through reflexive regulation. Participants decided which cognitive tasks to delegate to AI and which to retain, while also reflecting on the reliability of AI outputs, the limits of their own expertise, and the boundaries of AI use. This included efforts to preserve cognitive skills, as well as the relational aspects of managerial work.

The study contributes to the sociology of work by conceptualising generative AI as a reconfigurator of cognitive work rather than a tool of simple substitution. It contributes to debates on expertise and cognitive labor by showing how generative AI both reduces and creates cognitive demands, performing some tasks while producing new requirements for critical oversight and direction. In addition, it foregrounds reflexive regulation as a key mechanism through which workers shape the consequences of AI use, particularly under conditions of discretion. More broadly, the findings show that AI must be understood as a technology that reorders cognitive labour, with implications for expertise, autonomy, and the social organisation of work.