

Editorial

Working anywhere and anytime in the 24-h society: impact on the world of work

The title of a book published by Martin Moore-Ede in 1993 shows an expression related with the continuity of work that apparently had not yet been coined at that time. Its presence and effects became more visible to the general public, especially since the development of the World Wide Web in the early 90's. Moore-Ede called it “the twenty-four-hour society”, an “around the clock community”¹⁾. Around the clock operations are known since the 18th century with the first industrial revolution in England, when new production technologies allowed the workday to start early in the morning and extend beyond sunset, in the textile industries. Since then, different ways of regulating work have emerged, and the individual extension of the workday has been established according to legislative, global and national parameters. Just over 100 yr ago, the International Labor Organization (ILO) convention number 1, approved the duration of the working day of 8 h a day and 48 h a week for the industry. Over the following decades, this limit was reduced or maintained and the temporal work arrangements particularly during non-diurnal hours were recognized as a risk condition for the health of the workers²⁾.

In the post-industrial 21st century, the regular working day seems to be dying out. The ease of communication using several technologies, practically anywhere on the planet, at any time of the 24 h, impacts the limits of work and non-work times, leisure and rest, with consequences on health, social and family relationships, and how today's societies work. According to Internet World Stats³⁾, in the second quarter of 2020 there were almost 5 billion internet users worldwide, with the penetration rate being higher in North America (90.3%), followed by the European continent (87.2%).

In recent decades, the relationship between work and health has been challenged by a scenario of generalized increase in demands, influenced by information and communication technologies and the general context of intensification of work⁴⁾. Contrary to expectations, such technologies did not free up our time, but on the contrary, they increased the number and diversity of tasks, thus pro-

ducing people who complain on lack of time⁵⁾. Changes in work arrangements have also led to the intensification of flexible work in its various forms (e.g. part-time work, temporary work, irregular working times, flexible working hours and location, compressed work weeks, precarious employment), which, often do not allow freedom of choice for the workers. The reduced job security and long working hours are some of the consequences for nowadays employees⁶⁾. Thus, the long hours and the constant availability of workers in relation to customers and superiors are part of the current framework in several sectors⁷⁾. This situation is expressed in the tendency to the fast pace of work⁸⁾ and the increase in daily and weekly work hours observed in several countries⁹⁾. In this context, people may not be at the workplace, but it is expected that they will always be “available”.

In several professions work is no longer restricted to the professional physical space, since one can work at any time anywhere⁷⁾, leading to the attenuation of the limits between the private sphere and professional life¹⁰⁾. This situation occurs at the expense of free time, which is essential to health behaviors and recovery in relation to work itself. Such structural changes in space-time relations and in the perception of work take place in a context of strong neoliberal influence that has strongly contributed to increase work precariousness worldwide¹¹⁾.

When analyzing the so-called “telework” in terms of the link with the company, Reseda¹²⁾ states:

When having the availability to carry out his activity anywhere, as long as connected by computer, the employee will be linked to the company in a virtual way, being possible, therefore, a greater availability to the employer, since whenever he is using the information technology you may be “linked” to the company. In other words, the hierarchical superior will also leave the physical limits of the company and enter other areas of his subordinate's life.

In fact, most empirical studies show that, despite the popularity of flexibility as to work hours, telework tends to be associated with long work hours¹³⁾. Comparison on work hours per week considering total telework, partial

telework and no telework shows that a higher percentage of total teleworkers (24%) and partial teleworkers (15%) reported more than 45 working hours a week, compared to the no telework group (10%)⁷⁾.

The COVID-19 pandemic required companies to adjust to the recommendation of social distance, imposing telework for groups of workers who had to adapt their routines to this new condition. In Europe, 4 out of 10 employees started working at home during the pandemic¹⁴⁾, which made teleworking more visible with work hours being compulsorily replaced by productivity targets.

Health risks associated with informal employment are highlighted by Fujishiro¹⁵⁾ in a recent editorial by Industrial Health. Those risks may have worsened due to the current global health and economic crisis derived from COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, precarious work, with a large number of informal workers, temporary/on-demand jobs, job insecurity and limited protection are present in the current social scenario and need to be managed¹⁶⁾. In several countries, workers have not social protection, e.g., not having the right to paid leave during a period of illness related or not to work conditions. Vulnerable workers not covered by labor laws, such as self-employed professionals, digital platform workers undergo an increased number of hours worked to guarantee minimum income. In the case of flexible work and telework, it is desirable that teleworkers have guaranteed rights, benefits and adequate working conditions similar to those of workers working on the employer's premises⁷⁾.

It is not by chance that the debate on precarious work takes place in the midst of a neoliberal context focused on the growing demand for results, which substantially affects the organization of work. The greater competition in virtually all economic sectors (industry, production, trade and services) brought by neoliberalism has strongly affected many workplaces. Autonomy, freedom and self-control can become contradictory¹⁶⁾. External control has become internal, since information and communication technology equipment have the ability to control each click, as a symbolic invasion. On the other hand, today's society is still being challenged to deal with aspects of this global digital transformation, which can lead to changes in labor relations, with the unwanted deregulation that can lead to increased social inequality¹⁷⁾.

The United Nations (UN) has proposed a 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes among its goals "promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all"¹⁸⁾. Efforts need to be made in this context

of the 2020's in favor of actions such as the regulation of working and non-working times, the right to disconnect, the greater formalization of employment relationships, and the full protection of workers in order to build a society that offers better living conditions.

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Frida Marina FISCHER

Department of Environmental Health, School of Public Health,
University of São Paulo, Brazil

Evelise Dias ANTUNES

Federal Institute of Paraná IFPR, Brazil
Graduate Program of Public Health, School of Public Health,
University of São Paulo, Brazil

João Silvestre SILVA-JUNIOR

São Camilo University Center, Brazil

Lucia ROTENBERG

Laboratory of Health and Environmental Education,
Oswaldo Cruz Institute, Fiocruz, Brazil