The Threat of Physical & Psychosocial Violence and Harassment in Digitalized Work

Dr Phoebe V. Moore

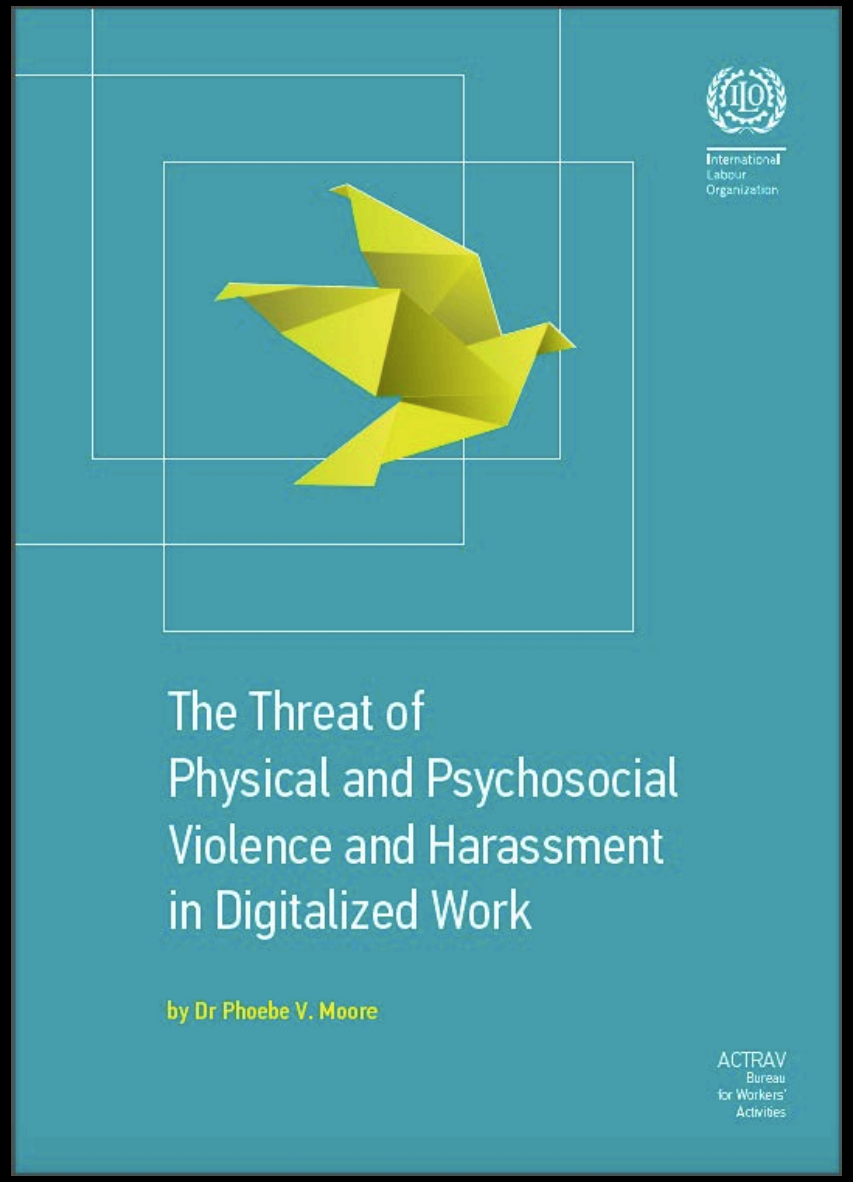
University of Leicester, School of Business

24st May 2018

Machinery must be restrained

Unrestrained machinery demoralises society – substitutes idleness for industry – want for competence – immorality for virtue. It has pauperised the peasant – pauperised the citizen. It has abstracted capital from agriculture; capital from manufactures. – it has abstracted money from circulation, and drawn it into heaps. – it has created taxes. It has destroyed domestic trade, domestic consumption, domestic industry. It has concentrated the population, and collected the people into dense masses. Whatever it does give a scanty sustenance, it is in crowded factories, prejudicial to health; the nurseries of every evil; setting at defiance every endeavour to work moral improvement; where the very means used to that end, are marshalled in formidable array, dangerous to social happiness. Where children are employed in the room of men; and the heads of families, instead of leading in the paths of virtue, are starving, turned adrift, to sigh for departed happiness; and to meditate on desperate plans to restore their cherished, but long-lost independence.

Such is machinery: and unless restrained, will, ere long, involve this country



The Threat of Physical & Psychosocial Violence & Harassment in Digitalized Work

Section I Rise in risks of psychosocial and physical violence in the world of digitalized work

Section II Social partner, enterprise and academic responses

Section III Existing ILO codes of conduct and standards, preliminary recommendations

http://www.ilo.org/actrav/events/WCMS_616826/lang--en/index.htm

Digitalized management methods

- Selective, predictive, prescriptive.
- Utilisation of big data and algorithmic distribution of work;
- People analytics. Digitalized profiling; tone and sentiment analysis to make decisions about hiring/firing, workplace distribution, in appraisals, dealing with the ‘people problem’;
- Computerisation, automation;
- ‘Own-contract’ or bogus self-employment contracts to disguise employment relationships, blocking workers from having basic rights such as holiday and sickness pay in gig work;
- Tracking wellness and productivity with sensory and other monitoring devices and using data accumulated to make human resource decisions;
- Introduction of technologies to replace aspects of work or jobs altogether;
- Normalisation of interruptions and expansion of working time in offices;
- ‘Always on’ culture of work and boundary permeability, where workers are expected to be available by phone or email throughout the weekend and evenings and related practices and expectations.

Risk areas in digitalized work

(a) working in contact with the public;

(b) working with people in distress;

(c) working with objects of value;

(d) working in situations that are not or not properly covered or protected by labour law and social protection;

(e) working in resource-constrained settings (inadequately equipped facilities or insufficient staffing can lead to long waits and frustration);

(f) unsocial working hours (for instance, evening and night work);

(g) working alone or in relative isolation or in remote locations;

(h) working in intimate spaces and private homes;

(i) the power to deny services which increases the risk of violence and

(ii) harassment from third parties seeking those services;

(j) working in conflict zones, especially providing public and emergency services; and

(k) high rates of unemployment. (ILO 2016b: 40)

Further risks:

poor human resources management
poor organization of work, including lack of clear rules and responsibilities
inadequate assignment of tasks
unrealistic production targets
poor communication
poor labour relations
discriminatory practices
(ILO 2016b: 40).

Online gig work; Offline gig work

(Online) Work obtained by online platforms (eg. Task Rabbit Mturks), work itself also online

- Homes, cafes, libraries…
- High rates of preparatory work, reputation management
- ‘Double burden’ for women
- Racism, overwork, wage theft, domestic violence

…if I am ill, automatically my reputation breaks down. For me this would be a violence. Because if I’m a normal freelancer, I can ask a colleague to do my job. For example, I was working as a journalist, if I were ill, I could ask my employer to accept that another colleague does my job. There is no chance in crowdwork, if you lose your reputation. That is another problem, you can’t take the reputation from one platform to another one. (ver-di)

(Offline) Organization of work digitalized but work carried out physically

- Streets, homes
- Bogus self-employment, pressure to work harder/faster, no guaranteed income, stress, violence

Now everything is digital there is much less freedom and much higher control, thus meaning we are much less ‘independent’, even though our contracts say we are totally free and independent. (IWGB)

Drivers speed. There is a high rate of psychological violence because of the inability to earn enough money based on this work. Issues with local police and cases of bribery. (Argentina)

Very little protection from violence for riders despite the working conditions are risky, constantly at risk of having an accident or being attacked. (FAU Berlin)

Office spaces; Automation and Industrie 4.0

- Office spaces. People analytics, electronic performance monitoring, wearables for wellness
- Discrimination, lack of access to data, stress, ‘always on’, work intensification

Workers need the right to rest. Working in a permanently sped-up working framework leads to serious increased risks of PPVH. (IG Metall)

To avoid an institutionalised misbalance of power, it will be of upmost importance to establish workers’ data rights. (UNI Global Union)

- Automation and I4.0. Offices, factories, warehouses, landfills
- Automation, computerisation
- Worker monitoring, wearables
- Cloud computing
- Machine-to-machine communications (IoT)

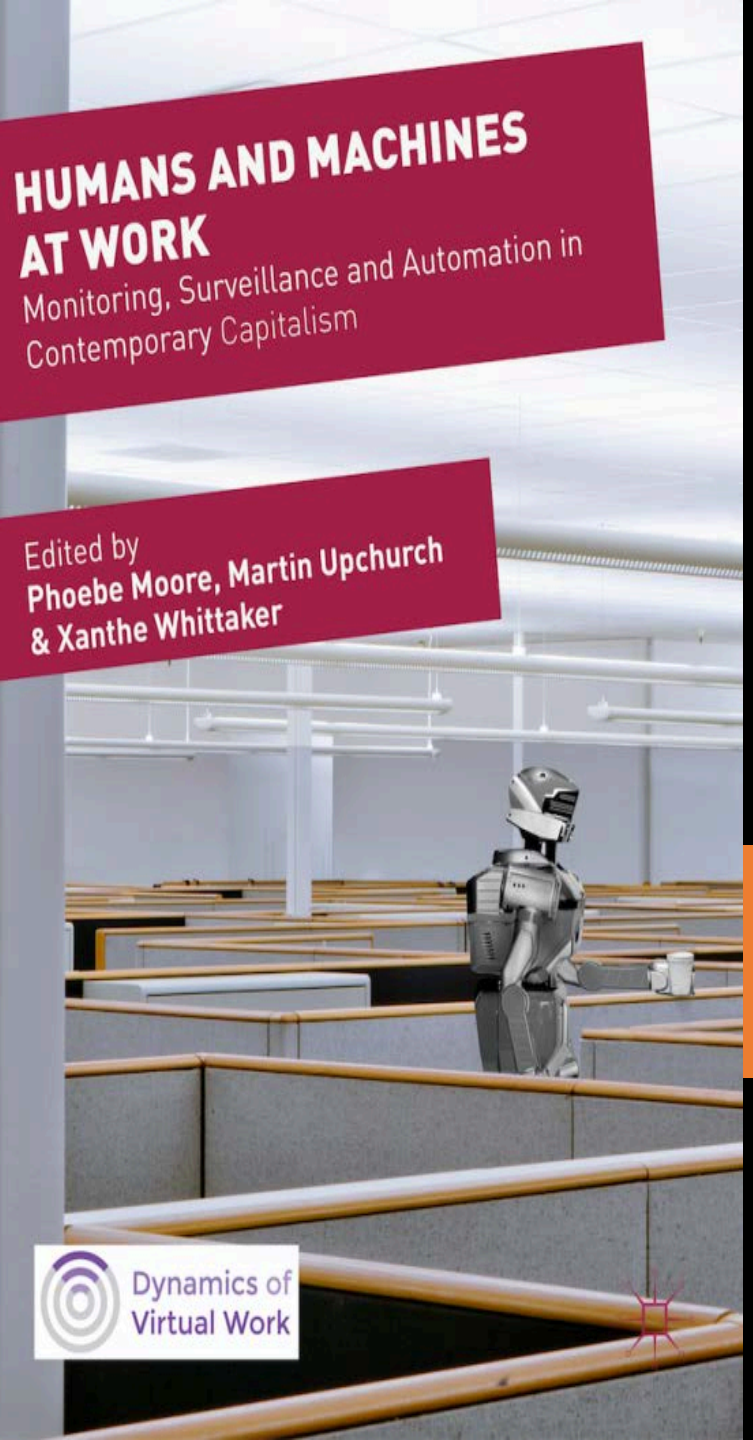
What impact will these changes have on people’s workloads? Is work going to be easier or harder? More stressful? Will there be more work? (IG Metall Arbeit 2020 in NRW)

We’re aware that the tracking might be used to put pressure on us to work faster, and it might be used to sack people. But lots of us feel that we don’t care anymore. Because physically we just can’t do any more. (Warehouse Operative)

What are social partners doing about it?

- ***ver.di*** mediafon
- ***IG Metall*** Bezirksleitung NRW, Projekt: 'Arbeit 2020 in NRW' Better Work 2020; Arbeit + Innovation; Fair Crowd Work
- ***IWGB, FAU Berlin*** Rebel Roo, rider campaigns, protests, working toward collective bargaining
- ***UNI Global Union (UNI)*** 'Top 10 Principles for Workers' Data Privacy and Protection'
- First success in collective bargaining between *Hilfr* and *Fagligt, Faelles, Forbung* (3F) (United Federation of Danish Workers)
- **Turkopticon:** interface-mediated labour politics, online forums

Academic work: *Fairwork; Decent Work and the Digital Economy*



QS Quantified Self

self knowledge through numbers

'…real change will happen in individuals as they work through self-knowledge… of one's body, mind and spirit… a rational [path]: unless something can be measured, it cannot be improved' Kevin Kelly, Wired & QS founder

QW Quantified Work

Self- and other-tracking through big data

'We're aware that the tracking might be used to put pressure on us to work faster, and it might be used to sack people. But lots of us feel that we don't care anymore. Because physically we just can't do any more.' (Warehouse worker where wearable devices have recently been introduced)

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C5. Meet Some Self-Tracker
C6. Robot Army of Redressers

Routledge Advances in Sociology

THE QUANTIFIED SELF IN PRECARITY

WORK, TECHNOLOGY AND WHAT COUNTS

Phoebe V. Moore

ROUTLEDGE