HEALTH AND WORK

Also by Lesley Doyal

*What Makes Women Sick: Gender and the Political
Economy of Health*

HEALTH AND WORK

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

edited by

Norma Daykin and Lesley Doyal

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CONTENTS

<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	vii
<i>Preface</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xiii
Introduction: Critical Perspectives on Health and Work <i>Norma Daykin</i>	1
1 Women and Domestic Labour: Setting a Research Agenda <i>Lesley Doyal</i>	21
2 Paid and Unpaid Work in Mental Health: Towards a New Perspective <i>Sarah Payne</i>	35
3 The Wellbeing of Carers: An Occupational Health Concern <i>Liz Lloyd</i>	54
4 Health and Work in the Sex Industry <i>Graham Scambler and Annette Scambler</i>	71
5 Death and Injury at Work: A Sociological Approach <i>Theo Nichols</i>	86
6 Why We Still Have ‘Old’ Epidemics and ‘Endemics’ in Occupational Health: Policy and Practice Failures and Some Possible Solutions <i>Andrew Watterson</i>	107

7	Tracking the Invisible: Scientific Indicators of the Health Hazards in Women's Work	127
	<i>Karen Messing</i>	
8	In the Hand or in the Head? Contextualising the Debate about Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI)	143
	<i>Joyce E. Canaan</i>	
9	Zones of Danger, Zones of Safety: Disabled People's Negotiations around Sickness and the Sick Record	161
	<i>Ruth Pinder</i>	
10	Selling Sex, Giving Care: The Construction of AIDS as a Workplace Hazard	180
	<i>Tamsin Wilton</i>	
11	Postmodern Reflections: Deconstructing 'Risk', 'Health' and 'Work'	198
	<i>Nick J. Fox</i>	
12	Occupational Health Issues and Strategies: A View from Primary Health Care	220
	<i>Simon Pickvance</i>	
13	Participatory Approaches in Occupational Health Research	238
	<i>Rene Loewenson, Asa C. Laurell and Christer Hogstedt</i>	
	<i>Index</i>	253

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PREFACE

The impetus for this book came from several sources. At one level we were both aware of a number of theoretical and methodological assumptions that have impeded the study of health and work. We also recognised the increasing need for interdisciplinary collaboration in order to align the separate foci of the various contributing disciplines. While specialist literature addresses technical problems within the workplace, it often overlooks the social dimensions of risk. Similarly, psychologists have studied the impact of work stress on individuals but have paid less attention to the broader social processes involved in the construction of occupational health and disease. As far as sociology is concerned, research on labour markets and processes is well established but often seems to be founded on the assumption that it is the economic consequences of work that matter. While medical sociologists have examined the socioeconomic determinants of health, and highlighted employment status as a marker of broad social divisions, they have paid relatively little attention to the health effects of work itself.

These problems are compounded by those arising from reliance on limited and outmoded definitions of 'work'. Feminist critiques of this focus on paid employment in the productive sphere are now familiar but they are yet to enter mainstream research and practice in the field of occupational health. Finally, biological reductionism and technological determinism have often rendered occupational health research and practice unable to respond to the increasingly complex, chronic and multicausal nature of work-related ill health.

The problems of serial invisibility are responsible for various forms of epidemiological bias in occupational health research that are addressed in this book. The book aims to introduce interdisciplinary and global perspectives to the study of work and risk in order to inform both theory and practice. It is intended for students of social and health sciences as well as researchers, practitioners and policy makers in all the fields relating to health and work.

It is perhaps ironic that this project arose out of experiences very similar to some of those described in the pages that follow; the lack of

awareness of many health professionals about occupational health issues; the inadequacy or non-existence of workplace occupational health services; the difficulty of reconciling 'lay' and 'expert' views and the harmfulness of some well meaning but non-evidence-based clinical interventions. One of us (Norma Daykin) had the misfortune to experience these at first hand, an experience which led her to initiate the discussions between us which led to the idea for the book.

The book also testifies to the possibility of rehabilitation, underpinned in this case by the support and collaboration of colleagues, the availability of appropriate technical support, the reflexivity and skill of some (orthodox and complementary) health practitioners and, not least, the encouragement of students and friends. Special thanks are due to Nick Fox and Tamsin Wilton whose enthusiasm and support helped to relaunch the idea at a critical time and to Lorraine ayensu who never wavered in her belief and encouragement. We are also grateful to colleagues who helped in practical ways, in particular Jenny Dafforn and Julie Packer at the University of the West, both of whom gave invaluable secretarial support. Not least, thanks are due to the staff at Macmillan, in particular Houri Alavi whose efficiency and interest in the project helped sustain it until completion.

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