

# Journal of Industrial Relations (JIR)

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## **CALL FOR PAPERS**

### **'Modern Slavery and the Employment Relationship: Defining the Continuum of Exploitation'**

**Special Issue:** *Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol.64(2), April 2022

Special Issue Guest-Editors:

**Dr Martijn Boersma**, University of Technology, Australia

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- **The objective and aim of the special issue**

An estimated 40.3 million people worldwide are trapped in a form of modern slavery, which includes forced labour (work that people perform against their will under the threat of punishment); bonded or indebted labour (when people work to pay off a debt while losing control over working conditions and repayments); human trafficking (which concerns the recruitment and movement of people, usually for forced labour or sexual exploitation); and child slavery (distinct from child labour, this type of exploitation does not only involve children working but also their exploitation for someone else's gain). Other exploitative practices include deceptive recruitment for labour; domestic servitude; and forced marriage. Sixteen million victims are exploited in activities connected to the private economy. The practice is found in emerging economies, as well as in developed countries (International Labour Organization and Walk Free Foundation, 2017).

The term 'modern slavery' in public discourse and in academic publications constitutes a broad non-legal umbrella term that refers to a range of abusive practices. It is questionable whether this expression constitutes a suitable overarching term. It is an expression that conjures up images of historical slavery, thereby making the practice seem unrelated to present times. Furthermore, it paints a picture of exploiters and traffickers who need to be brought to justice and of victims who are waiting to be saved. Such connotations incorrectly describe a complex issue, obscure our view of the true causes of exploitation, and deny agency to those exploited. Modern slavery also invokes images of the most shocking kinds of exploitation, thereby neglecting cases that are less likely to make headlines. Such flawed views of modern slavery may make it less likely that governments introduce appropriate legislation, while companies may not scrutinise their operations and

supply chains, and consumers may not consider the social footprint of their purchases, as modern slavery remains beyond their comprehension.

Modern slavery should not be seen as a continuation of a historical exploitative practice, but rather as an innovative response to abolition, providing new ways to carry out exploitation (Crane, 2013). Since slavery has been officially abolished, enslavement no longer revolves around legal ownership, but around illegal control. Two fundamental changes are the move away from the straightforward purchase of slave labour, and the existence of slaves as an employment category. While the statistics suggest that the 'market' for exploitative labour is booming, the notion that humans are purposefully sold and bought from an existing pool is outdated. While such basic transactions do still occur, in contemporary cases people become trapped in slavery-like conditions in various ways. Understanding how this happens is crucial if we are to bring modern slavery further into our realm of understanding (Nolan and Boersma, 2019).

Placing modern slavery on a continuum of exploitation recognises that people can be exposed to working conditions that gradually worsen, sometimes leading to slavery or slavery-like conditions. Indeed, while some individuals “enter labour situations that from the outset feature highly adverse conditions of little or no pay, debt or threats, [others] enter work on the expectation or promise of decent pay and conditions but find themselves in increasingly constrained and deteriorating circumstances that close down avenues for exit” (Lewis et al., 2014: 152–153). There are several factors that may make workers more vulnerable to falling victim to modern slavery: limited language skills and knowledge of rights (Dwyer et al., 2016), gender (LeBaron and Gore, 2019), migration status (Broek et al., 2019), and factors such as a history of unemployment, financial hardship or debt (Carswell and Neve, 2013). Furthermore, exploitation does not always have to be premeditated or involve human trafficking and captivity. Rather, the deterioration of labour standards and the absence of legal recourse can result in workers being at the mercy of their employers, leaving them no other option than to do as they are told (Nolan and Boersma, 2019).

Following the United Kingdom in 2015, Australia introduced its Modern Slavery Act in 2018. The Government produced guidance documents to recognise that modern slavery sits on a continuum of exploitation and should not be addressed in isolation. It acknowledges that there is a spectrum of abuse and that it is not always clear at what point poor working practices and lack of health and safety awareness seep into instances of human trafficking, slavery or forced labour (Home Affairs, 2019: 9). The overarching aim of this special issue is to examine how exactly employment relationships can deteriorate into forms of labour exploitation and modern slavery. We set out to identify the key factors contributing to this process, to determine what approaches can reduce the risk of labour abuses occurring, and to discern novel ways to remediate exploitation once identified. We aim to create a better understanding of modern slavery and the employment relationship by establishing how and why workers may move along the continuum of labour exploitation.

- **The scope, themes and topics to be addressed by the special issue**

All submitted papers will be double-blind reviewed by experienced international scholars from the relevant fields, in line with JIR's editorial policy. The guest editors encourage submissions from various disciplinary fields. Studies may describe any industry, country or geographical region. Conceptual papers and theoretically informed empirical papers are welcome. Articles in this special issue might include themes and issues in this indicative list which we would refine in consultation with the editors of the journal:

**Migrant Workers:** The International Organization for Migration notes that “migrant workers around the world generally lack the legal protection available to the domestic workforce”, and that “irregular migrant workers are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuses in the workplace, including slavery-like practices” (International Organisation for Migration, 2017). How do restrictive policies in destination countries exacerbate the risk of worker exploitation? How might visa conditions be leveraged by employers to exert control, to an increased likelihood of vulnerability to modern slavery and exploitation?

**Supply Chains:** Companies are exposed to the risk of labour exploitation through their supply chains (Clarke and Boersma, 2017). Since there is no direct employment relationship between companies near the top of supply chains and those workers employed by companies further upstream, how does that affect corporate approaches to the risk of modern slavery compared to the risk in their own operations? Does the (perceived) responsibility of companies at the top of the supply chain decrease as the number of supply chains tiers increases? How does the fissuring of the employment relationship influence the risk of labour exploitation?

**Business Models:** The purchasing practices of companies at the top of the supply chain (often brand-focused companies), have a significant impact on the conditions faced by workers at the bottom. Companies are subject to a range of market and financial pressures, which are passed down the chain to suppliers, which exert systemic downward pressure on workers' rights (Friends of the Earth Europe et al., 2017). How can certain business models contribute to worsening labour standards? What best practice approaches exist that seek to address the adverse impact of particular business models on working conditions?

**Regulation and Policy:** With the introduction of the Modern Slavery Act in Australia in 2018, and the introduction of a similar Act in the United Kingdom in 2015, entities are required to perform a modern slavery risk assessment and to publicly report on the actions they have taken as a result. How do reporting companies describe (the risk of) labour exploitation and modern slavery in their operation and supply chains? Do companies that are required to report under the legislation recognise that modern slavery sits on a continuum of exploitation and should not be addressed in isolation?

**Disclosures and Enforcement:** A broad assumption underlying the Modern Slavery Act disclosure model is that the requirement to report will exert external pressure onto companies to identify and address the risks for workers (Nolan and Bott, 2018). What role do market forces play in rewarding or punishing firms for taking appropriate or inadequate action? Are trade unions and labour rights organisations using combative or collaborative strategies to make companies address the risk of modern slavery in their operations and supply chains? Are these strategies successful?

**Precarious Work:** The link between precarious work and the ability to exercise labour rights is key to understanding how worsening working conditions can lead to modern slavery (France, 2016). Flexibility in the labour market is often promoted as providing workers with the freedom to choose, yet for many people accepting precarious work with limited rights is a question of survival (Lewis et al., 2014). How has the increase in precarious work influenced working conditions and the risk of exploitation?

**Digital Technology:** Digital technology has the capacity to disrupt the labour landscape as well as to empower workers in new ways. It also gives rise to a host of practical, ethical and legal challenges. Digital platforms and apps have facilitated the rise of “gig work”, which have had a dubious influence on working conditions (Kaine and Jossierand, 2019). At the same time, apps, big data, artificial intelligence and blockchain are examples of technologies that promise to solve the world’s problems (Boersma and Nolan, 2020). How does technology influence the employment relationship and working conditions, for better or for worse?

- **Special issue process:**

**Abstracts of between 500-1,000 words should be submitted to the Guest Editors** (see contact details below) **by 25<sup>th</sup> September 2020**. The full paper online to the [JIR](#) for peer review by **1<sup>st</sup> March 2021**. All submitted abstracts will be examined by the Guest Editors for suitability for the special issue.

All submitted papers must be based on original material and not under consideration by any other journal or outlet. All manuscripts are reviewed initially by the Guest Editors and only those papers that fit within the aims and scope of the special issue and meet the academic and editorial standards of the journal, are sent out for external review. All papers will undergo a full double-blind review process and will be evaluated by the Guest Editors of the special issue and at least two independent reviewers.

- **Symposium:**

Questions related to the content and logistics of the symposium should be directed to the Guest Editors (see contact details below). While participation in the symposium is not a mandatory condition for submissions to this special issue, we strongly encourage it. The

guest editors aim to **host a symposium in Sydney in February 2021** (exact location and date to be determined). Alternatively, the guest editors will organise a *virtual symposium* should circumstances not permit us to host a symposium in Sydney.

Those who are successful will be expected to submit their *full paper* (formatted to JIR standards) for discussion by **31st January 2021** so that papers can be distributed (in pdf format) to other participants to read prior to the symposium.

- **Special issue - Timeline:**

- **25 September 2020** – Submission of abstracts to the guest editors
- **12 October 2020** – Confirmation/acceptance of abstract and invitation to submit full paper
- **31 January 2021** – Full paper submission for presentation at Symposium
- **February 2021** – Symposium in Sydney – *alternatively a virtual symposium will be held*
- **1 March 2021** – Full original papers to be submitted online to the [JIR](#) for peer review
- **28 October 2021** – Accepted papers to be finalised/submitted online to the [JIR](#)

➤ *Publication of the special issue, JIR Vol. 64(2), April 2022*

- **Contact details:**

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- **JIR manuscript guidelines for contributors – summary:**

- The length of the full manuscript (including references, tables etc.) should be around 10,000 words (max). Please note that it would not be possible for us to consider papers for publication unless they are within the standard length (so longer papers are not possible to publish nor is a large number of tables/figures possible to include).
- The anonymised manuscript should include a separate title page: with the author(s) affiliation and full contact details: full name of author(s), institution, postal and email address (noting the corresponding author). Authors to also provide a brief biographical note (100 word limit/author) to the title page. Please supply any personal acknowledgements in the title page and keep separate to the main text to facilitate anonymous peer review.
- The manuscript should include a brief abstract (150-200 words) and keywords (4-5 words).
- The manuscript should follow the Harvard (author, date) system of referencing, with ‘endnotes’ (if necessary and kept brief) rather than ‘footnotes’.
- For the full JIR submission guidelines and style guide, please consult the JIR website at <https://journals.sagepub.com/home/jir>

- **JIR online submission process:**

The *Journal of Industrial Relations (JIR)* is hosted on SAGE Track, a web based online submission and peer review system powered by *ScholarOne Manuscripts*. Simply visit <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/jir> to login and submit your article online.

How to submit a manuscript to the JIR online?

1. Navigate to the JIR’s *ScholarOne Manuscripts* site at <http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/JIR>
2. If you are not already registered, you will need to register with the system first to submit a manuscript.
3. To register, click the **Create Account** tab for new users.
4. Supply the requested information.
5. You will need to enter information in fields marked with a ‘req.’
6. Please take note of the user ID and password you create, for future use to log into the system.
7. Once your account is created, click the link to log in.
8. To submit a manuscript, click the **Author Center** link, and then select **Click here to submit a manuscript**.
9. When you upload your manuscript, please tick that this manuscript is ‘**submitted for a special issue**’ and please indicate the title of the particular special issue that you are submitting it to.

IMPORTANT: Please check whether you already have an account in the system before trying to create a new one. If you have reviewed or authored for the journal in the past year it is likely that you will have had an account created.

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