

## Table of Contents

Introduction—Beyond the Individual: Connecting Work Environment and Health • Economic Globalization and its Effects on Labor • The Growing Imbalance: Class, Work and Health in an Era of Increasing Inequality • The Changing Nature of Work in Canada and Other Developed Countries: What Do the Trends over Time Tell Us? • The Changing Nature of Work in the United States • The Workplace and Cardiovascular Disease • From Stress to Distress: The Impact of Work on Mental Health • Work, Ethnicity and Health in California • Work, Psychosocial Stressors and the Bottom Line • Stakeholder Perspectives on Work and Stress: Seeking Common Ground • Interventions to Reduce Job Stress and Improve Work Organization and Worker Health • Using Participatory Action Research Methodology to Improve Worker Health • The MUNI Health and Safety Project: A 26-Year Union-Management Research Collaboration • Organizing and Collaborating to Reduce Hotel Workers' Injuries • The Maintenance Cooperation Trust Fund: Combating Worker Exploitation and Unfair Competition through Collective Action with Responsible Employers • Occupational and Environmental Medicine in the Twenty-First Century • Emotional Labor and the Pursuit of Happiness • Measuring the Protection of Workers' Health: A National Work Security Index • Conclusion—Curing Unhealthy Work

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# UNHEALTHY WORK

## Causes, Consequences, and Cures

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## About the Book

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Work, so fundamental to well-being, has its darker and more costly side. Work can adversely affect our health, well beyond the usual counts of injuries that we think of as “occupational health.” The ways in which work is organized—its pace and intensity, degree of control over the work process, sense of justice, and employment security, among other things—can be as toxic to the health of workers as the chemicals in the air. These work characteristics can be detrimental not only to mental well-being but to physical health. Scientists refer to these features of work as “hazards” of the “psychosocial” work environment. One key pathway from the work environment to illness is through the mechanism of stress; thus we speak of “stressors” in the work environment, or “work stress.” This is in contrast to the popular psychological understandings of “stress,” which locate many of the problems with the individual rather than the environment. In this book we advance a social environmental understanding of the workplace and health. The book addresses this topic in three parts: the important changes taking place in the world of work in the context of the global economy (Part I); scientific findings on the effects of particular forms of work organization and work stressors on employees’ health, “unhealthy work” as a major public health problem, and estimates of costs to employers and society (Part II); and case studies and various approaches to improve working conditions, prevent disease, and improve health (Part III).

This book was made possible, in part, by the generous support of the UCLA and UCI Center’s for Occupational and Environmental Health and the Center for Social Epidemiology.

**How work is organized can be as toxic to the mental and physical health of workers as the chemicals they breathe. This interdisciplinary book examines the changing nature of work, new evidence linking work conditions with ill-health, and “unhealthy work” as a public health problem.**

## About the Associate Editors

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**Dean Baker** is a professor of clinical medicine and director of the Center for Occupational and Environmental Health at the University of California, Irvine. He is also director of the Preventive Medicine-Occupational Medicine Residency Program. He has been actively involved in research on occupational stressors for 30 years, including collaborative research with Robert Karasek and his colleagues at Columbia University in 1980 on job strain and cardiovascular disease. He is coeditor of *The Workplace and Cardiovascular Disease* (Hanley and Belfus, 2000) and has published many papers on work stress and health outcomes.

**Paul Landsbergis** is an associate professor in the Department of Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences, Graduate Program in Public Health, State University of New York–Downstate Medical Center, Brooklyn. He is coeditor of the textbook *The Workplace and Cardiovascular Disease* and coauthor of recent review articles on job strain and cardiovascular disease and on interventions to reduce job stress and improve health. Dr. Landsbergis was a member of the National Research Council’s Committee on the Health and Safety Needs of Older Workers and of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health’s Intervention Effectiveness Research Team.

**Deborah R. Gordon** is a medical anthropologist who has conducted anthropological research in health care settings since 1970 in the United States, Israel, and, since 1984, Italy. She is currently an adjunct professor in the Department of Anthropology, History, and Medicine at the University of California, San Francisco. In 2002 she was awarded a grant from the NIH Human Genome Institute to conduct “community engagement” in a Tuscan town (Italy) for the International Haplotype Map project. In 2003 she began research with opinion leaders on work and health in California, which led to organization of a California Forum, “The Way We Work and Its Impact on Our Health,” and to this volume.

## About the Editors

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**Peter Schnall** is a clinical professor of medicine at the University of California, Irvine, Division of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, where he directs the program in work organization and cardiovascular disease. He is a recognized expert and active researcher on the role of occupational stress in causing hypertension and cardiovascular disease. Dr. Schnall is also the director of a nonprofit foundation, the Center for Social Epidemiology, based in Venice, California, whose purpose is to educate the public about the health consequences of work stress.

**Marnie Dobson** is a medical sociologist and is currently a research associate at the Center for Occupational and Environmental Health at the University of California, Irvine, and associate director of the Center for Social Epidemiology in Venice, California. She received her Ph.D. in social science from the Department of Sociology at UC Irvine. Her research interests focus on gender and work, emotional labor, and work organization/psychosocial stressors and mental health outcomes.

**Ellen Roskam** is a policy scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, visiting senior fellow at the University of Surrey, Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences, visiting professor at the University of Massachusetts, Lowell, Work Environment Department, and principal at Roskam International Development Consulting. She is a public health and social protection specialist, and is author of many books and scientific publications. Her latest book is *Excess Baggage: Leveling the Load and Changing the Workplace* (Baywood, 2007).