

‘It was doing my head in’: Low-paid multiple employment and zero hours work

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Abstract

This article explores the lived experiences and working time complexities of low-paid workers in legitimate multiple employment and zero hours work. Based on detailed qualitative research, these workers have 2, 3, 4, 5 and even 7 different jobs out of necessity due to low-pay, unpredictable working hours and employment precarity. The research reveals that workers need to be available for (potential) work at any point but may not actually be offered any hours, which we argue constitutes unremunerated labour time. The findings highlight a densification of working time with zero hours work as employers maximize productive effort into specifically numbered, demarcated and minimized working hours, which tightens the porosity of labour. There is a dual fragmentation and individualization of employment, as these workers traverse multiple, expansive, complex and dynamic temporalities of work. This study identifies new economic and temporal indeterminacies of labour, which fundamentally transform the employment relationship and wage-effort bargain.

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1 | INTRODUCTION

Over recent years zero hours work has become an established, important and contentious feature of UK employment relations. Zero hours contracts (ZHCs) are defined as ‘*contractual arrangements where the number of hours to be worked, and when they are to be worked, are not specified in the employment contract. Employees are, therefore, only paid for the hours that they actually work*’ (Pyper & Dar, 2015). The use of zero hours work is controversial and debated, with the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) asserting that they are unjustly portrayed as the ‘*pantomime villains*’ of today’s flexible labour market (Beatson, 2021). Indeed, the recent Taylor Review (2017) of modern employment practices celebrates ‘*the British way*’ of a ‘*vibrant flexible labour market*’ (p. 47), where non-standard employment, including ZHCs, are ‘*usually chosen and valued by workers*’ (p. 16). Moreover, The Work Foundation and the CIPD claim that ZHCs offer some flexibility to both employers and individuals (Beatson, 2021; Brinkley, 2013), and the CIPD testify that they ‘*appear to work for many*’, as 57% state that this is their choice and 65% are either satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs (2015: 2 and 6). Yet, Wood (2016) cautions that this is aggregated data drawn from a diverse sample, including highly paid professionals engaging in zero hours employment. Critics argue that many on ZHCs struggle financially due to low-pay, episodic working times and the emboldened managerial prerogative over the allocation of work (Moore et al., 2017). Bloodworth’s (2019) covert ethnography reveals the harsh realities of low wages, insecure work and ZHCs. Furthermore, Rubery et al. (2018) assert that ZHCs are emblematic of ‘the new norm’ of precarious work, which is marked by low-pay, insufficient and variable working hours, and limited employment protections. There has been an increase in the prevalence of zero hours employment since the financial crisis, with most experiencing lower pay and fewer working hours than comparable workers (Farina et al., 2020). This growth is partly explained by the impact of austerity and the outsourcing of public sector work, with downward pressure on terms and conditions of employment (O’Sullivan et al., 2020; TUC, 2015). It is estimated that in February 2022, around 1,030,000 workers were employed on zero hours contracts *in their main job* (ONS, 2022). This is particularly pertinent as this article focuses on low-paid workers with *more than one job*, many of whom are employed on ZHCs or highly variable hours (HVH) contracts.

There is a growing body of literature on precarious work and zero hours contracts. Under ZHCs there are no guaranteed hours, but there are similar forms of employment that offer limited working hours, such as, short-hours contracts (CIPD, 2015; TUC, 2015), low working hours (O’Sullivan et al., 2015) and minimum hours contracts (Moore et al., 2017). There are important commonalities in terms of variable working hours, as these workers are expected to be ‘flexible’, often at short notice, to meet managerial demands. Hence, such non-standard forms of work encompass job instability, together with changeable and unpredictable working times and consequently earnings. Several scholars make passing reference to such workers having more than one job to make ends meet (see Lambert et al., 2019; Rubery et al., 2018; Standing, 2011: ch. 5), and this is our explicit focus, being the first UK study to examine the lived experiences and working time complexities of low-paid workers in legitimate multiple employment. This article is based on a data subset of in-depth interviews with 21 zero hours workers and 8 workers from the retail sector who were employed on highly variable hours contracts. The following section critically reviews extant literature on employment relations and the indeterminacy of labour, working time arrangements and zero hours work, which provides a theoretical and analytical framework for the study. The research methods are then discussed, along with key findings that reveal new dimensions of precarity, where workers with 2, 3, 4, 5 and even 7 different lines of employment constantly

struggle to make ends meet. Furthermore, these workers have expansive, splintered and changeable working time arrangements; and with ZHC and HVHs there is an intensified pace of work within purposively constrained working hours. Along with volatile incomes and working hours, the lived realities mean these workers frantically dash from job to job, while also juggling caring arrangements and familial duties.

We argue that ZHCs and HVHs work fundamentally transform the employment relationship and the wage-effort bargain, as working time and, therefore, overall earnings are not fixed in advance. This article makes important contributions in revealing new temporal and economic indeterminacies of labour. Furthermore, the empirical data highlights the densification of working time, as employers aim to maximize productive effort into specifically numbered, delineated and minimized working hours, which further squeezes the porosity of labour. In addition, this study reveals the multiple, complex, fractured and transforming temporalities of precarious work. Finally, this research advances literature on contemporary low-paid employment and reveals the embedded and interconnected structural factors of insufficient earnings, variable hours, multiple employment and acute precarity.

2 | THE EMPLOYMENT RELATIONSHIP, WORKING TIME AND PRECARIOUS ZERO HOURS WORK

This section draws on conceptualizations of the employment relationship, the wage-effort bargain and the indeterminacies of labour. Working hours and ‘flexibility’ are central to studies of ZHCs, in particular the diversification and individualization of working time schedules. We critically engage in debates over zero hours employment, working hours and precarity, thereby highlighting the intersection of the temporal and economic. This offers a theoretical and analytical framework to critically examine the lived experiences of low-paid multiple employment, working time arrangements and challenges of making ends meet.

The nature of the employment relationship is conceptualized as a wage-effort bargain, whereby latent labour power is purchased by the employer who seeks to convert it into productive effort (Behrend, 1957). Managerial strategies of control and supervision are, therefore, utilized to maximize employee performance and efficiency gains. Fox states that this is not the ‘*personal and voluntary exchange of freely bargained promises*’ as this is an asymmetrical relationship, whereby the ‘*brute facts of power*’ mean that workers have constrained ‘choices’ and have to settle for what employment they can acquire (1974: 182–183). Yet, this is a complex and dynamic relationship that is laced with inherent ambiguities and contradictions due to the differing interests of key actors, namely employers’ and managers’ need to control employee behaviour and performance, while simultaneously attempting to garner compliance and cooperation. Hence, there is an on-going struggle over the terms of work and employment relationships, which Edwards (1986) conceptualizes as the structural antagonisms over capital accumulation. Moreover, the labour contract is open-ended and indeterminate as ‘*no employment contract could anticipate all relevant contingencies arising in work relations*’ (Fox, 1974: 182). The effort levels, in terms of the pace and volume of work are not explicitly specified in advance of work. Smith (2006) terms this the double indeterminacy of labour power, being labour effort and also the mobility choices of workers who may gain alternative employment. Smith contends that ‘*workers generally know in advance of starting a job the wages they will be paid for their time at work*’ (2006: 389). Yet, we argue in this article that ZHCs and HVHs contracts fundamentally transform the employment relationship through incorporating new dimensions of indeterminacy. As the working hours of these jobs are changeable,

unpredictable and irregular, there is the indeterminacy of working time and, therefore, wages. Employers want to constantly ramp-up effort levels and the intensity of work to make working hours as productive as possible (Green, 2006). This tightens the porosity of labour, which involves compressing greater levels of work while minimizing unproductive time (Nichols, 1991). Working time is a fundamental component of the wage-effort bargain, therefore, transformations to working hours and 'flexibility' are especially pertinent to studies of ZHCs and HVHs work.

Over recent years there have been significant changes as working time is being re-constructed with a shift from the collective and homogenous timeframes of the standard working week, being Monday to Friday from 9 am to 5 pm (Williams et al., 2008). The development of a globalized and highly competitive economy results in extended operating and opening times in many organizations. The erosion of the standard working week and the concomitant diversification of working time arrangements incorporates non-standard hours (Rubery et al., 2005); covering early mornings, evenings, nights and weekends. Given these extended temporalities, employers and managers are constantly attempting to efficiently and effectively manage working time. This involves carefully adjusting the configuration of staffing levels to match the fluctuating peaks and troughs in demand (McCrate et al., 2019; Supiot, 2001). Organizational demands for 'flexibility' in the deployment of labour indicate a clear reassertion of the management prerogative over working time, as hours are mandated and controlled by employers. Rubery et al. (2005) identify a new temporality based on an employer-led model of working time, which is founded on the imperatives of minimizing costs while simultaneously maximizing productive effort. ZHCs are highlighted by Rubery et al. (2005: 92) as the archetypal form of flexible labour, where workers are deployed as and when required by management, without any attention to their preferences or needs.

Thus, working time has become increasingly fragmented, individualized and heterogeneous (Supiot, 2001). Lambert (2008) argues that as managers vary the number, timing and distribution of hours to meet demand, the economic risks are transferred from the employing organization to the individual worker. This is exemplified in several studies where workers on ZHCs, variable hours and short-hours contracts are called into work at very short notice (Ball et al., 2017; Lambert, 2008; Lambert et al., 2019; Smith, 2016; Wood, 2018). Therefore, these transitions permeate the distinction between subordination time, being time at work, and free time, where you are not at the employers disposal (Supiot, 2001). In research on the use of ZHCs in the care sector, Rubery et al. (2015) reveal complex, extended and fragmented working time schedules, which incorporate unsociable hours that negatively impact on family life. Hence, the temporal boundaries between work and other activities become increasingly blurred (Williams et al., 2008). For Supiot (2001: 81–2) this has important ramifications as the shadow of work is projected onto free time. O'Sullivan (2019) argues that ZHCs represent the 'zenith' of labour flexibility for employers, which we argue raises fresh issues around the spatialities and temporalities of working lives. Moreover, Deakin and Morris (2012: 167) state that with zero hours work the employer '*unequivocally refuses to commit itself in advance to make any given quantum of work available*'. Hence, employers and managers seek to remove inactive periods of time, such as, paid travel time and waiting time (Ball et al., 2017; Moore et al., 2017). Boulin et al. (2006) term this the *densification of working time*, where unproductive time is eliminated. Wood (2018) claims that ZHCs and wider flexible scheduling practices are despotic and exploitative, whereby the discretionary power of management is emboldened. Indeed, Canadian research by McCrate et al. (2019) underscores income and working time volatility driven by employer labour flexibility practices. Furthermore, inequalities of time are identified by Chatzitheochari and Arber (2012), including depleted control of time and working non-standard hours, which have deleterious temporal

repercussions for workers and their families. Lambert et al. (2019), in a US quantitative study, argue that work schedule instability and a scarcity of hours fuels precariousness. This raises important contemporary issues around the intersection of time and income, in particular, unpredictable hours and the consequent shifting temporalities of work, together with pressures to make ends meet.

Advocates of zero hours work assert that some employers are unable to offer employment on any other basis; therefore, this is preferable to unemployment (Brinkley, 2013). Research by O'Sullivan et al. (2020) reveals that many employers claim ZHCs are essential features of competitiveness and flexibility. Furthermore, managers state that ZHCs can be a pathway to stable full-time employment (see Adams & Prassi, 2018), and such flexible employment can be mutually advantageous for employers and employees (Brinkley, 2013; Beatson, 2021). The Taylor Review is more circumspect stating that 'flexibility' is not always reciprocal (2017: 43); nevertheless, it endorses the '*distinctive strengths of our existing labour market and framework of regulation*' (p. 7). However, it should be noted that those who engage in non-standard employment are not homogeneous. For example, Dunn (2020) offers a useful typology in examining worker motivations to pursue such work, ranging from those who simply want to earn additional income in the short term, such as, graduate students, to the most precarious who are dependent on such employment to survive. The focus of our article is on employment precarity, and several scholars argue that the development of a 'flexible' deregulated labour market has created increasingly polarized employment (Clark et al., 2022; Green, 2006; Standing, 2011), with manifold inequalities experienced by those at the lower end of the labour market. This is marked by deep-rooted structural issues of low-pay, employment insecurity, ZHCs or variable working hours, and widespread precarity (Berry & McDaniel, 2022; Clark et al., 2022; Rubery et al., 2018). Alberti et al. (2018) utilize the concept of precarization to explore the subjective and objective conditions of employment insecurity, together with the experiences of precarity and the precarization of work. In terms of the drivers of precarization, these are twofold, being the role of the state in promoting labour market flexibility through privatization and outsourcing, together with managerial strategies imposing non-standard forms of employment (Alberti et al., 2018; O'Sullivan et al., 2020). This has created a growth in ZHCs and low-quality jobs, involving lower pay rates and fewer hours than other comparable workers, resulting in volatile monthly earnings (Adams & Prassi, 2018: ch. 2; Koumenta & Williams, 2018). Indeed, the variability and unpredictability of zero hours work and, therefore, earnings intensify feelings of insecurity (Bloodworth, 2019). Ball et al. (2017) report that workers are often reluctant to turn down shifts, as they fear they will not be offered any further work. Recent research by Clark et al. (2022) reveals that ordinary working families are struggling to pay bills and incurring debts, as a direct consequence of embedded precarious low-paid employment. Regarding the process of precarization, Ba (2019) reveals the daily struggles of financial instability and the antagonisms in reconciling work with family life. Moreover, precarious and ZHC employment, together with fluctuations in working hours and earnings, also have complex implications for accessing welfare benefits (Ball et al., 2017; Moore et al., 2017), and as a direct result, some workers have to use foodbanks to survive (Garthwaite, 2016). Yet there are new challenges and dilemmas for low-paid workers with multiple lines of employment and complex working time schedules who are attempting to earn a living. This raises a number of important research questions that contribute to the debates addressed thus far. What are the lived experiences of low-paid multiple employment and zero hours work? In what ways do variable, unpredictable and changeable working time schedules impact on work and domestic life? What are the challenges and complexities facing these particular workers in attempting to make ends meet?

3 | RESEARCH METHODS

Based on a qualitative research strategy, the study centred on Yorkshire and the North-East of England, because at the inception of the study both were in the top three regions for underemployment (ONS, 2012). Furthermore, over 20% of workers in both regions were paid below the Foundation Living Wage (FLW) (Lawton & Pennycook, 2013), being a voluntary hourly rate based on the Minimum Income Standard which is regarded as a minimum socially acceptable standard of living. In terms of the sampling frame, our major focus was on those workers with more than one legitimate job who were paid below the FLW, as our key aim was to critically examine the work experiences and work–life challenges of these workers.

From the outset of this research project, we recognized that the workers we needed to speak to constitute a ‘hard to reach’ group, as they were relatively hidden (see Bonevski et al., 2014). In particular, as these workers had multiple jobs, with different employers in varying locations, this created complex daily lives. Consequently, one of our first challenges was identifying potential participants who were willing, and able, to take part in the study.

We developed partnerships with a range of key organizations to facilitate research access and established an ‘Advisory Group’ (AG) of key actors. Valerio et al. (2016) report that a community advisory board results in greater representation from hard to reach participants. Through the AG, our project was advertised widely and we also met with ‘lay stakeholders’, who provided unique insights on accessing hard to reach populations (see Kaiser et al., 2017). They offered useful advice on the use of ‘down to earth’ language for recruitment materials, posters and flyers, so that we presented a more person-centred identity in some locations, such as, foodbanks and trade union meetings.

We built up trust with the AGs by attending meetings and explaining our research to their members, for example, we attended 10 separate union meetings with 7 different trade unions explaining our research aims, handing out flyers and asking people to contact us with ideas. An unemployment community centre in the North-East issued 1000 flyers with their own regular postings. Some of the organizations in the AG advertised the project on their social media pages. We maintained regular contact with all of these organizations, which led to a continuous snowballing effect. Therefore, we utilized both purposive and snowball sampling techniques to access low-paid workers in multiple employment. In some instances, this led to what is referred to as ‘respondent-driven recruitment’ (Bonevski et al., 2014), whereby some participants handed out recruitment flyers in their own workplaces.

Arranging and scheduling research interviews was challenging due to the complex and changeable daily schedules of these workers. The location and timing of the interaction was, therefore, important and we conducted interviews in local libraries where we secured private interview rooms, cafés, private rooms facilitated by some members of the AG and our own work offices. We also offered a £20 supermarket voucher to all interviewees as recompense for taking time out of their busy schedules to participate in the study; such incentives are permissible in ESRC guidelines.

Between June 2015 and May 2017, we conducted 50 semi-structured interviews with low-paid workers in multiple employment, along with 6 senior managers, 9 trade union representatives and 2 foodbank organizers. This article is based on a specific data subset of 21 workers who were employed on ZHCs, along with 8 retail workers employed on HVHs contracts. The collated data is rich and in-depth, revealing the meanings and perceptions of low-paid multiple employment. Our detailed interviews with the workers focused on issues around routes into

employment, their primary and additional jobs, the pace and duration of work, working time complexities and challenges, care and familial responsibilities, low-pay and the reasons for engaging in multiple employment. The interviews were subjected to iterative and manual thematic data analysis, with open coding of transcripts to identify general themes relevant to our research questions. The narrative below is presented around a series of themes drawn out of the analysis of the participants' experiences, covering employment instability and precarity, working time schedules and unpredictabilities, and struggling to make ends meet despite engaging in several forms of employment. It should be noted that all respondents' names in the text that follows are pseudonyms.

4 | CHOOSE A ZERO HOURS CONTRACT?

While a number of commentators assert that workers 'choose' and 'prefer' zero hours contracts (see Brinkley, 2018; CIPD, 2015; Taylor, 2017), our findings strongly refute these claims. The workers we interviewed had constrained employment 'choices' due to limited job availability. Indeed, many of the jobs at the lower end of the labour market are tainted by job insecurity and instability (Gallie et al., 2017). Making ends meet was the main motivational factor for these workers having a multitude of jobs, and this was a direct consequence of ZHCs, low-pay and insufficient working hours.

While some of the workers we interviewed had curtailed 'preferences' of employment due to a lack of secure jobs being available with decent pay and sufficient working hours, others had no choice at all. Due to severe pressure from Jobcentre Plus and threats of benefit sanctions, two of our respondents, Jack and Thomas, were compelled to take *any job*, which Briken and Taylor (2018) also found in their study of agency workers at an Amazon 'fulfilment centre'. Furthermore, both Jack and Thomas had degree and 'A'-level qualifications, but due to the sanctions regime, they were denied the space and time to seek a suitable main job with a guaranteed income that reflected their academic qualifications. As illustrated in the quote below, this involved a necessity to garner multiple forms of non-standard employment to avoid constant scrutiny from Jobcentre Plus.

I found the whole process of the Jobcentre was geared to trip you up. The Jobcentre was by far the most annoying, it was probably even more annoying than all the employers I worked for. I think that is what pushed me to do that many jobs, because it meant I didn't have to deal with the Jobcentre. I felt like it was better for me to take all these ridiculous jobs.

(Thomas, 7 jobs – ZHC library, ZHC IT support, ZHC retail, ZHC utilities, ZHC IT, Self-employed accountancy and self-employed IT maintenance)

Due to the negative publicity associated with ZHCs, some employers offer 'alternative' contracts. These include 'short-hours contracts' (CIPD, 2015; TUC, 2015), 'minimum hours contracts' (Moore et al., 2017) or 'low working hours' (O'Sullivan et al., 2015). However, we argue that such employment practices constitute *reputational window-dressing*, as HVHs contracts that start from 10, 8, 6 or even 4 hours/week are little more than glorified zero hours contracts, as is exemplified below:

There are now more changeable and variable hours contracts. I think it is growing more in the last year, and that is because there has been a lot of media pressure on zero hours contracts, and employers see it as an alternative.

(GMB union official)

Indeed, an USDAW union representative termed ZHCs and similar ‘alternatives’ as ‘Martini contracts’ where ‘...workers are required at any time, any place, anywhere’, emblematic of one-sided flexibility at the behest of management.

As noted earlier, the workers we interviewed were employed on a multiplicity of contracts, incorporating ZHCs, full-time (FT), part-time (PT), agency, temporary, seasonal and casual. They were employed in cleaning, catering, the care sector, security, social services, education, retail, bar work, the entertainment industry, utilities, accountancy, public services, administration and IT services, sectors that are commonly identified as utilizing zero hours contracts (see Farina et al., 2020; Koumenta & Williams, 2018; O’Sullivan et al., 2020). This research reveals workers with 2, 3, 4, 5 and even 7 different jobs (see Table 1). Indeed, 8 of the workers from this data subset had more than one zero hours job. Furthermore, 12 of these workers had ‘A’ levels, 9 had degrees and 3 even had masters’ degrees, which is striking and highlights concomitant issues around constrained employment opportunities, low-pay and insufficient working hours.

Moreover, the context of austerity cuts and the aftermath of the financial crisis was also significant, with the outsourcing of work from the public sector. Of the 29 workers we interviewed, 15 had been directly employed and had their employment outsourced and 8 of these worked in more than one outsourced job. As subcontractors were under pressure to curtail costs and prioritize profitability, this often resulted in the imposition of inferior terms and conditions of employment. Under Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) legislation, employers can change employment contracts due to economic, technical and organizational reasons. Therefore, this was another factor why some workers we interviewed had to engage in multiple employment.

The pay is not great, the annual income is just over £16,000/year [for a full-time job], which is a lot less than core workers who are doing the same role as me – they’re getting £23 grand/year. It’s purely because if that was more significant, then I wouldn’t have to do these zero hours jobs – I could come home and just relax.

(James, 5 jobs – FT public services, PT social services, ZHC social services, and two ZHC care sector jobs)

Many of these subcontractors introduced two-tier and even multi-tier workforces, with new staff employed on ZHCs only. Some of the interviewees referred to these as ‘cowboy firms’ who won contracts solely on the grounds that they were the cheapest bidders. Indeed, some interviewees had their employment subcontracted on numerous occasions, with cuts to hours, but they still had to deliver the same level of service, which generated work intensification. Indeed, the worker quoted below had to endure several job interviews after her employment was transferred under TUPE legislation.

For my second job, I was initially employed by a company that went bankrupt, who were then taken over by a major retailer. So I was TUPE’d over and I can honestly say that I’ve never worked for such an ungrateful, horrible organisation... I just can’t even find

TABLE 1 Profile of research participants

Name	Age	Gender	Qualifications	Jobs, sectors and outsourcing	Familial and caring responsibilities
Abigail	58	Female	1 'A' level	Job 1 – ZHC security (private sector, outsourced) Job 2 – PT Bar work (private sector)	Single, lives alone, son aged 35, grandson aged 7. Elder care for mother 4 nights a week
Alice	46	Female	4CSEs 5 'O' levels	Job 1 – PT catering (public sector) Job 2 – ZHC retail (private sector, outsourced)	Single parent family, son aged 10, daughter aged 16
Arthur	20s	Male	4 'A' levels degree Master's degree	Job 1 – PT Administration (private sector) Job 2 – ZHC Library (public sector)	Single, no dependents
Edward	50s	Male	None disclosed	Job 1 – ZHC Maintenance (private sector) Job 2 – ZHC security (private sector, outsourced)	Married, no dependents
Fern	40s	Female	NVQ level 3 studying a mental health nursing course	Job 1 – FT support worker (private sector) Job 2 – ZHC Care sector (private sector)	Single, lives with son aged 20 and son aged 17
Hannah	47	Female	NVQ 2	Job 1 – PT cleaning (private sector, outsourced) Job 2 – ZHC cleaning (private sector, outsourced)	Married, son aged 20 and son aged 16 who live at home, childcare responsibilities for 1 grandchild
Iris	50s	Female	None disclosed	Job 1 – PT cleaning (private sector) Job 2 – ZHC catering (private sector, outsourced)	Married, son aged 17 lives at home
Jack	24	Male	4 'A' levels degree	Job 1 – ZHC care sector (private sector, agency work) Job 2 – PT bar work (private sector)	Lives with partner
Joanne	44	Female	None	Job 1 – PT cleaning (private sector, outsourced) Job 2 – ZHC cleaning (private sector, outsourced)	Married, with daughter aged 24 and son aged 21. Carer for mother and autistic brother
Lynne	30s	Female	3 'A' levels degree	Job 1 – ZHC cleaning (private sector, outsourced) Job 2 – ZHC entertainment industry (private sector, outsourced)	Single, daughter aged 12 and son aged 9
Melanie	40s	Female	9 GCSEs	Job 1 – PT bookmakers assistant (private sector) Job 2 – ZHC cleaning (private sector, outsourced)	Married, with son aged 22 who lives at home
Moira	47	Female	3 'A' levels degree	Job 1 – ZHC library (public sector) Job 2 – ZHC administration (private sector)	Single parent family, daughter aged 15, eldercare responsibilities

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Name	Age	Gender	Qualifications	Jobs, sectors and outsourcing	Familial and caring responsibilities
Ava	50s	Female	5 CSEs 2 'O' levels	Job 1 – FT retail (private sector) Job 2 – ZHC education (public sector) Job 3 – ZHC cleaning (private sector)	Lives on her own, eldercare responsibilities
Ella	30	Female	4 'A' levels degree Master's degree	Job 1 – ZHC education (private sector, outsourced) Job 2 – ZHC social services (public sector) Job 3 – ZHC education (public sector)	Single parent family, daughter aged 7
Anna	60s	Female	None	Job 1 – PT cleaning (private sector, outsourced) Job 2 – PT cleaning (private sector, outsourced) Job 3 – PT shop assistant (private sector) Job 4 – ZHC catering (private sector)	Married, with 4 children and 9 grandchildren Carer for disabled cousin on Sunday afternoons. Carer for grandchildren – sleeps at daughter's house 3 nights per week.
Evie	50s	Female	NVQ 1	Job 1 – PT cleaning (private sector, outsourced) Job 2 – PT cleaning (private sector, outsourced) Job 3 – ZHC cleaning (private sector, outsourced) Job 4 – cleaning (self-employed)	Married, daughter aged 23, son aged 19 and son aged 15 who all live at home, and childcare responsibilities for 1 grandchild
Katie	60s	Female	None disclosed	Job 1 – PT cleaning (private sector) Job 2 – ZHC cleaning (private sector, outsourced) Job 3 – volunteer at foodbank Job 4 – volunteer at 'Peoples Kitchen' for the homeless	Single, lives alone, daughters aged 35 and 32, son aged 30. Childcare responsibilities for 2 grandchildren
Les	45	Male	NVQ 1 and 2	Job 1 – PT catering (private sector, outsourced) Job 2 – ZHC cleaning (private sector, outsourced) Job 3 – PT cleaning (private sector, outsourced) Job 4 – PT cleaning (private sector, outsourced)	Lives with partner, eldercare responsibilities
Elsie	Late-40s	Female	9 'O' levels 3 'A' levels	Job 1 – PT public administration (public sector) Job 2 – ZHC library (public sector) Job 3 – ZHC library (public sector) Job 4 – ZHC administration (public sector) Job 5 – ZHC Administration (public sector)	Married, son aged 23 and daughter aged 18 who live at home, eldercare responsibilities for both parents and her husband's parents, childcare responsibilities for 2 grandchildren

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Name	Age	Gender	Qualifications	Jobs, sectors and outsourcing	Familial and caring responsibilities
James	Mid-30s	Male	NVQ level 2 3 'A' levels degree Master's degree	Job 1 – FT public services (third sector, outsourced) Job 2 – PT social services (public sector) Job 3 – ZHC social services (private sector, outsourced) Job 4 – ZHC care sector (private sector, outsourced) Job 5 – ZHC care sector (private sector, outsourced)	Married, son aged 6, daughter aged 4 and daughter aged 1
Thomas	30s	Male	3 'A' levels degree	Job 1 – ZHC library (public sector) Job 2 – ZHC IT support (private sector, outsourced) Job 3 – ZHC retail (private sector) Job 4 – ZHC utilities (private sector, outsourced) Job 5 – ZHC IT (private sector, outsourced) Job 6 – accountancy (self-employed) Job 7 – IT Maintenance (self-employed)	Single, lives with parents.
Allan	40s	Male	9 GCSEs	Job 1 – PT variable hours, retail (private sector) Job 2 – PT bar work (private sector)	Married, son aged 20 and daughter aged 17, who live at home
Annie	40s	Female	9 GCSEs	Job 1 – PT variable hours, retail (private sector) Job 2 – PT cleaning (private sector)	Single, son aged 21 lives at home
Ellen	30s	Female	NVQ 1 and 2 8 GCSEs	Job 1 – PT variable hours, retail (private sector) Job 2 – PT cleaning (third sector)	Married, daughters aged 9 and 5
Harry	Early 20s	Male	4 'A' levels degree	Job 1 – PT variable hours, retail (private sector) Job 2 – PT bar work (private sector)	Lives alone
Isabelle	50s	Female	9 'O' levels	Job 1 – PT variable hours, retail (private sector) Job 2 – PT cleaning (private sector)	Single parent, son aged 15
John	Late 20s	Male	3 'A' levels degree	Job 1 – PT variable hours, retail (private sector) Job 2 – PT care sector (private sector)	Lives with partner, eldercare responsibilities
Phoebe	Late Teens	Female	9 GCSEs 3 'A' levels	Job 1 – FT, administration (private sector) Job 2 – PT variable hours, retail (private sector)	Lives on her own
Wendy	40s	Female	8 GCSEs	Job 1 – PT variable hours, retail (private sector) Job 2 – PT cleaning (private sector) Job 3 – PT cleaning (private sector)	Married, 2 daughters aged 9 and 6

the words to describe their management style – it's awful. I transferred over to them and had 4 interviews, I hasten to add, for a zero hours contract job!

(Alice, 2 jobs – PT catering and ZHC retail)

Fundamental to ZHCs are not only wages, but working time variabilities and unpredictabilities, together with work intensification and the densification of working hours, which are examined in the following section.

5 | WORKING TIME COMPLEXITIES AND DENSIFICATION

All of the employees we interviewed with multiple jobs and ZHCs or HVHs contracts worked indeterminate, changeable and splintered shifts, which typically spanned non-standard hours of early mornings, evenings and weekends. Those on ZHCs worked unpredictable, irregular and intermittent hours ranging from 0 up to 55 or 60 hours/week. There were clear commonalities with those on HVHs contracts, where the structure, duration and timing of hours was also highly changeable and irregular, ranging from 4, 6, 8 or 10 up to 40 or even 60 hours/week.

Despite the claims that ZHCs and HVHs offer 'flexibility' to both employers and employees (see Beatson, 2021; Brinkley, 2013), our research revealed that this is one-sided flexibility to bolster the managerial prerogative over working time. Many employers preferred to overemploy and utilize ZHCs, HVHs contracts, part-time, temporary and agency staffing arrangements in order to enhance organizational 'flexibility'. Hence, employers and managers had a pool of readily available labour to draw upon so that they could carefully match the allocation of employees to meet market fluctuations, while also minimizing costs. For those on ZHCs, this involved waiting by their phones all day long in the hope of receiving a call with the offer of more hours.

I get up really early [at 5am] 5 days/week and do 2 hours care work from 6–8am. Then I wait for the rest of the day for a phone call from work. Occasionally I do get calls, but I have to keep my phone on loud all the time. And if I do get phone calls, it's literally, 'You've got to get here now, can you do it?'

(Jack, 2 jobs – ZHC care sector and PT bar work)

In the case above, this 'immediacy' was also problematic for Jack as he was unable to drive because he has epilepsy.

Again, there were distinctive similarities between ZHCs and HVHs employment. For instance, many employers in the retail sector demanded '*full flexibility*' from staff who had to indicate all of the time when they were available for work. However, the hours of work were mandated and controlled by managers attempting to cover the transforming peaks and troughs in demand. There was pressure for workers to cover unsociable and peak times, such as, Fridays and weekends. Furthermore, the use of '5 over 7 contracts' allowed managers to demand which 5 days an employee was required at work per week, and, therefore, an employee's 'weekend' was variable and determined by managers. Many retail workers were regularly contacted at very short notice, sometimes at the end of shifts, with managerial requests to cover additional hours; but shifts could immediately be reduced to a standard 4–10 hours/week if store budgets were restricted. There were national union agreements that there should be 7 days' notice of changes to shift patterns, but this could be reduced to 24 hours in emergencies. Yet union representatives were concerned that

last-minute scheduling was becoming '*custom and practice*'. Moreover, staff were often asked to 'flex up' during peak times of the year, such as, Christmas and Easter, and then 'flex down' during quieter periods. Indeed, staff at some retailers were asked to go home during slack periods but would not be paid for the remainder of the shift; hence, these were little more than *de facto* ZHCs. Therefore, just like ZHCs, those in retail and social care often had to indicate all of their 'availability', but the employer was under no obligation to offer hours of employment. Workers needed to be available for (potential) work at any point, which we argue is, therefore, *unremunerated labour time*. Hence, the notion of 'flexibility' is all at the behest of employers, whereby the number, duration and pattern of working hours is indeterminate, as managers can deploy staff as and when required.

All of the interviewees on ZHCs and HVHs stated that there was a '*relentless*', '*hectic*' and '*frantic pace of work and life*'. In particular, with ZHC outsourced jobs there were limited working hours, under-staffing, cheaper materials and pressures that entailed '*cutting back on every penny*'. For example, Les reported a harsh pace of work on his ZHC cleaning job, '*they [management] want me to work every minute and keep piling more work on me*'. There was a similar scenario of an '*unrelenting pace of work*' in the retail sector, due to competitive pressures, variations in demand, high labour turnover and stretched staffing levels. For those staff on checkouts there was an expectation to scan at least 19.6 items/minute and some workers remained on the tills for 5 hours without a drink or comfort break. Furthermore, there were cameras monitoring customer shopping patterns, with calls for functional flexibility via 'queue busters' to immediately be deployed onto checkouts, as Phoebe states, '*it gets manic within 0.2 seconds with queues, queues, queues*'. Regarding a fast-moving intense working environment, an USDAW representative said, '*there is no downtime. The employers get their money's worth, without a doubt*'.

The workers we interviewed also emphasized the pernicious nature of ZHC employment, as there was no transparency over how working hours were allocated. Workers were '*pitted against others*' and many requested more hours, but managers did not even have the decency to reply. Moreover, many were fearful of turning down shifts, and had to '*drop everything*', as they felt that they would not be offered work again.

Managerial requests could cover very short or very long hours. For example, in the care sector, this could involve shifts from 7.30 am until 11 pm, or covering all weekend. While other employers could call workers in for very limited hours and this could involve travelling across wide geographical areas. Therefore, some of our respondents stated that these 'jobs' had to be at least 3 hours in duration to make it economically worthwhile. As this is all at the employer's volition, it involved irregular, changeable and unpredictable hours, which also created work-life 'balance' complexities.

6 | MAKING ENDS MEET AND WORK-FAMILY CHALLENGES

All of the workers we interviewed had a combination of low-paid and zero hours jobs to survive. Indeed, they all lived hectic daily lives of juggling a multitude of jobs with domestic and caring responsibilities. Moreover, they faced significant pressures due to volatile working hours and, therefore, incomes, which created harsh economic realities.

These workers had an amalgamation of jobs across expansive and unpredictable timeframes, which invariably incorporated non-standard hours. The daily realities involved frantically dashing from job to job, while trying to grab a sandwich or drink between jobs. This time squeeze of late shifts and early starts also had deleterious implications on sleeping patterns.

The latest I finish is 11:00pm, but by the time I get home it's 11:45pm. It takes you an hour to unwind. Then I get up for 4:30am. So sometimes I just get three and a half hours sleep. (Lynne, 2 jobs – PT cleaning and ZHC entertainment industry)

What is also important to note here is that Lynne is a single mother with childcare responsibilities. Indeed, 18 out of the 29 workers we interviewed had care responsibilities. Of these, 10 had childcare duties and 5 were single parent families. Seven had eldercare obligations and 5 cared for grandchildren – see Table 1. There were overlaps within these categories, 2 workers cared for children and grandchildren, 1 had childcare and eldercare duties and 1 combined eldercare with care for grandchildren. For example, some were juggling multiple jobs with complex care arrangements, Elsie had 5 jobs along with eldercare responsibilities for her parents and her husband's parents, plus childcare responsibilities for 2 grandchildren. The daily realities of 'balancing' work with stressful care responsibilities are exemplified below:

I go to my mum's every day, between jobs. She's nearly 80, and she's quite demanding. She can't go to the doctors, too unsteady now on her feet. I've got to help her in and out of the car. But apart from that, she's pretty good for her age. My brother's badly autistic. He can help himself, but sometimes you've got to prompt him to get medication. I usually go down there every day, give him something to eat. (Joanne, 2 jobs – PT cleaning and ZHC cleaning)

Many faced unique challenges and pressures of trying to 'balance' multiple jobs. Indeed, two workers used diaries to help plan and manage their hectic working schedules –

I literally had every minute of my day mapped out in Google Calendar, all in different colours so I knew what job it was. I would get up at 7am and get ready. My calendar would just pop up and I'd go here and then do my slot there. I'd come home at maybe 7pm to eat and then it would be back out again. I'd do that until ten/eleven at night. Then I'd go to bed and do it all over again the next day. The whole week is mapped out. (Thomas, 7 jobs – ZHC library, ZHC IT support, ZHC retail, ZHC utilities, ZHC IT, Self-employed accountancy and self-employed IT maintenance)

In attempting this juggling act, workers had primary and additional jobs based on income and the regularity or number of working hours likely to be offered. They endeavoured to mix and match additional jobs around off-peak times, such as evenings and weekends, and some took on more hours during holidays from their main job. However, this was difficult and managerial requests to cover shifts at short notice took priority, to the detriment of family duties.

[In my retail job] I'd maybe do 6:30am until 1:30pm one day and do 3[pm] until 7pm the next day. You never really know. You have to promise that you'll be available for those days. It's pretty grotty because they [management] want all the shifts that I really struggle to do. It all depends on my childcare, really. Weekends are really, really hard if I've been working all week. I do quite a lot of 5pm to 10pm, but they do want blood out of a stone. Some managers are akin to Cruella de Vil. (Alice, 2 jobs – PT catering and ZHC retail)

Those who worked ZHCs and HVHs faced constant struggles to ‘keep a roof over your head’. Many lived a hand to mouth existence and struggled to pay bills. This was succinctly summed up by James, with 5 jobs, who described being ‘caught in this vicious loop of working and trying to provide for my kids’.

Despite the claims of some employers that ZHCs are a steppingstone to better work (Brinkley, 2018), none of the workers interviewed saw these as secure jobs. Moreover, workers spoke of ‘panicking’ and ‘scrambling’ to acquire enough hours to actually earn a living. Many were on a financial tightrope with no savings ‘for a rainy day’ and were worried about how they would be able to cover the costs to replace everyday essentials, such as, cookers and fridges.

There was acute precarity due to irregular employment, working shifts and income. The practicalities of multiple employment with unpredictable working hours were fraught with anxiety and instability.

It was doing my head in, working manic hours for the worst pay possible. I would actually sometimes go through a period and not get enough hours to make ends meet. But I wanted to have a stable job. You don't feel in control of your life. You can't plan anything when you don't know what pay you're going to get. I'd end up working like a 55-hour week. But then the next week I might get two hours and I might get two hours the week after. It can't be good for my health. I've got cystic fibrosis so there's a period in the morning and the night when I have to do treatment.

(Thomas, 7 jobs – ZHC library, ZHC IT support, ZHC retail, ZHC utilities, ZHC IT, Self-employed accountancy and self-employed IT maintenance)

Furthermore, for one of these jobs, Thomas did not receive any wages for over a year, engaging in a constant dispute with the employer, which is clearly not good for his health predicament, but also clearly exacerbates fears over job insecurity.

Regarding the volatility of working hours and incomes, many struggled to get by and some received financial support from family and friends. Some made use of credit unions or sought advice from debt management charities. Indeed, Jack was over £1500 in debt and in a ‘dire situation’ where the ‘choice’ was whether ‘do you pay your rent or do you eat?’ Others had to rely on foodbanks to ‘help them out’ periodically, but due to the social stigma ‘did not dare tell their family and friends’.

Some faced difficulties in accessing in-work benefits due to working multiple jobs with variable hours, and the inability of the benefits system to accommodate these unpredictabilities. The quote below from a single mother with 3 jobs highlights the stressful nature of such scrutiny and financial insecurity.

I've got a real issue at the minute with my housing and council tax benefit. They've been suspended, because my hours fluctuate so much, and they can't seem to cope with zero hour contracts and fluctuating wages. So, it's got to the point where they claim they've overpaid me, and now I owe them over a grand, so they've stopped my housing benefit, they've stopped my council tax benefit, and now I'm going to have to find an extra £300 a month. And, I just don't know how I'm going to do it, if I'm not entitled to any benefits. I do feel really vulnerable.

(Ella, 3 jobs – ZHC education, ZHC social services, ZHC education)

Indeed, ZHCs are particularly precarious and pernicious as employers do not have to offer any hours. As Jack stated, *'You could essentially be sacked at any time; they just don't have to give you any hours'*. There was a bitter irony that some workers were financially more stable when they were unemployed. As Jack continues, *'I think it's really bad that when you're working, you're earning less money than what you would be if you weren't working!'*

All of the workers interviewed spoke of the physical, emotional and financial strain of low-paid multiple employment. The volatility of earnings and the associated complexities of working hours, along with fulfilling domestic responsibilities, left workers feeling *'shattered'*. John was *'perpetually exhausted'* due to early and late shifts, while Evie with 3 jobs and childcare responsibilities for her grandson, described feeling *'zombified and dead on your feet'* by the end of the working week.

Many of these workers were constantly applying for other jobs in the hope of securing better quality employment. However, there was a notable different attitude and expectation based on educational qualifications and age. The older workers were resigned to being in similar precarious situations in future years. Those with good GCSEs, 'A' levels, degrees and masters' degrees were more optimistic, as is indicated in the quote below from a worker who planned to enter the creative industries:

I want to have a career that I've worked hard for and that I enjoy doing, because I love theatre. I love acting. I love performing. And if I can do that forever then I'm going to be happy. Not like shitty little jobs that mean nothing to me, that I'll just stay in because I need the money.

(Lynne, 2 jobs – ZHC cleaning and ZHC entertainment industry)

Finally, all yearned job stability and security, with better pay and good terms and conditions of employment. Many sought standard employment of *'one decent full-time job'* with stable hours. Control over working time was a key issue in order to have guaranteed working hours and flexibility to spend quality time with family and friends. All of the workers interviewed wanted respect and understanding from management. They all wanted ZHCs to be banned and were supportive of trade union campaigns to re-regulate the employment relationship.

7 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This article critically examines the lived experiences of low-paid workers in legitimate multiple employment and zero hours work. There is an expanding body of literature on precarious work and ZHCs. Several scholars make fleeting reference to these workers needing more than one job to survive (see Lambert et al., 2019; Rubery et al., 2018; Standing, 2011: ch. 5), and this is our explicit focus. The article draws on a unique data subset of workers employed on ZHCs and retail workers with HVHs. There are distinctive commonalities in terms of unpredictable and changeable working hours and, therefore, earnings. In considering issues of low-pay, zero hours work, multiple employment, working time arrangements and making ends meet, this article raised several pertinent research questions. What are the lived experiences of low-paid multiple employment and zero hours work? In what ways do variable, unpredictable and changeable working time schedules impact on work and domestic life? What are the challenges and complexities facing these particular workers in attempting to make ends meet? In doing so, we provide original and detailed qualitative empirical data on the 'normalization' of precarious work, whereby workers

in ZHC and HVHs employment need a combination of jobs in order to make ends meet. This research highlights how such work fundamentally transforms the employment relationship and wage-effort bargain in revealing new temporal and economic indeterminacies of labour. In addition, there is an individualization and densification of working time arrangements, as employers attempt to maximize productive effort into specific working hours, which squeezes the porosity of labour. The article makes further contributions in illuminating the dual fragmentation of employment and working time, where these workers have to traverse an expansive and shifting terrain of temporalities due to acute precarity.

First, regarding the lived experiences of low-paid multiple employment, this research offers new contributions to debates over zero hours contracts and precarious work. Proponents of zero hours work celebrate the '*vibrant flexible labour market*' of 'the British Way' (Taylor, 2017: 47), which offers enhanced competitiveness and efficiencies. The CIPD claim that ZHCs are unjustly portrayed as the '*pantomime villains*' of labour market flexibility (Beatson, 2021), as many employees are satisfied with zero hours work (CIPD, 2015). Similarly, the Taylor Review purports that non-standard work is '*usually chosen and valued by workers*' (2017: 16). Yet, if there is a large labour supply then those willing to 'choose' ZHCs may transform the way the labour market operates, so that others are forced to accept such precarious work. The phraseology used by the advocates of zero hours work is replete with the terms 'choice' and 'flexibility'. Indeed, they argue that such flexible work can be mutually advantageous to both employers and employees, and provide a steppingstone to stable employment (Beatson, 2021; Brinkley, 2018). Our research findings are in stark contrast, as the workers we interviewed had constrained 'choices' regarding employment. Indeed, as a direct result of the conditionality of welfare benefits and punitive sanctions, together with pressures from Jobcentre Plus, some felt compelled to take *any job* – similar empirical findings are reported by both Ball et al. (2017) and also Briken and Taylor (2018). For example, Thomas had a degree and 7 different jobs in order to attempt to make a living, 5 of which were ZHCs. These findings corroborate the arguments that such employment is marked by low-pay, job instability, insufficient and variable hours, as precarious work is becoming increasingly normalized (Berry & McDaniel, 2022; Rubery et al., 2018). This research reveals new features of precarization (see Alberti et al., 2018), where these workers needed to have multiple jobs due to constrained job availability and the proliferation of low-pay, ZHCs, HVHs and outsourced work. One of the key drivers of precarization is outsourcing (Alberti et al., 2018; O'Sullivan et al., 2020), and 15 of the 29 workers interviewed had their employment outsourced, plus 8 had more than one outsourced job. This typically involved the imposition of deleterious terms and conditions of employment, which has significant implications for work and employment relations.

Second, we argue that ZHCs and HVHs work fundamentally transform the contours and dynamics of the employment relationship and the wage-effort bargain, and this study makes important theoretical contributions in identifying new indeterminacies of labour. Pay and working hours are key features of the wage-effort bargain, and Smith (2006: 389) contends that these are '*generally known in advance*' of the commencement of employment. However, we argue that what is unique with ZHCs and HVHs work is that working time and, therefore, earnings are not fixed in advance and are variable, changeable and unpredictable. This research reveals new and significant temporal and economic indeterminacies of labour, which have serious ramifications for workers. Indeed, the dimensions of temporal indeterminacies include (a) the number of working hours, (b) the timing of those hours, (c) the duration of working times and (d) the configuration of working schedules. Furthermore, Smith (2006) states that the labour contract is open-ended and that worker output is indeterminate. Hence, employers and managers continually strive to increase effort levels while simultaneously reducing unproductive time, which

Nichols (1991) refers to as squeezing the porosity of the working day. Boulin et al. (2006) identify the twin trends of work intensification and the densification of working time, where work intensity is a direct result of densification. The workers we interviewed reported a 'relentless' pace of work with ZHCs and HVHs employment, as a direct result of cost reduction pressures, stretched staffing levels and constrained working times. Our research extends the concept of working time densification (Boulin et al., 2006), as under ZHCs and HVHs employment there is the maximization of productive effort into specifically numbered, demarcated and minimized working hours, which further tightens the porosity of labour. This exacerbates the power asymmetries inherent in the employment relationship and, therefore, extends the management prerogative over the allocation of work, pay and specific working hours. Thus, the '*brute facts of power*' (Fox, 1974) are emboldened as workers '*need*' – and some are '*desperate*' for – extra hours and wages, and, therefore, have to acquire a multitude of jobs in order to attempt to make a living. Furthermore, we argue that as workers must be available for (potential) work, but may not actually be offered any hours, this constitutes *unremunerated labour time*; as this is all at the behest of the employer. Thus, with HVHs, employers demand 'full flexibility' from staff, but hours are controlled and mandated by managers. Indeed, with ZHCs there is no prior commitment from the employer regarding working hours. Both ZHCs and HVHs individualize the employment relationship and further weaken traditional employer responsibilities and obligations to employees. These new indeterminacies of labour have important implications regarding working time and employment relations.

Third, regarding the impact of variable, unpredictable and changeable working time schedules on work and family life, this creates complex and transforming temporalities of work. There has been a diversification of working time arrangements, with extended opening and operating hours across many organizations. Rubery et al. (2005) identify an employer-led model of working time, whereby managers prioritize the 'flexible' deployment of staffing levels to accommodate fluctuations in demand. Hence, working times become variable and changeable, which permeate non-standard hours (Smith, 2016). Regarding ZHCs in the care sector, Rubery et al. (2015) highlight complex, extended and fragmented working time schedules that invariably incorporate asocial working hours. Hence, there is the individualization of working time, where the economic risks are transferred from employers to hourly paid workers (Lambert, 2008). Yet what is unique in this study is the dual fragmentation of employment and working times, which are individualized and restricted in duration, number and timing in order to reduce costs and maximize productivity. Supiot (2001) makes the key differentiation between subordination time and free time, the latter being personal time where the employers hold over workers' lives is constrained and curtailed. However, with the fragmentation and individualization of working time arrangements, these boundaries become increasingly permeable, and Supiot (2001: 81–82) states that the shadow of work is now projected onto free time. A key contribution of our research is that there are *multiple shadows of work*, as these workers have more than one ZHC or HVHs job, which has significant temporal and spatial implications. These workers have a multitude of jobs across a number of locations and have to frantically dash from job to job. Moreover, they have to constantly adapt to an expansive and shifting terrain of temporalities, due to both indeterminate hours and earnings of ZHCs and HVHs employment. Thus, there are multiple, complex, fragmented and dynamic temporalities of contemporary precarious work. This study corroborates the arguments of Wood (2018) that ZHCs and flexible scheduling practices are exploitative and despotic. Furthermore, with the unilateral managerial prerogative over working time, this also creates a divisive and pernicious dog eat dog culture, as workers are desperate to acquire additional working hours; McCrate et al. (2019) also uncovered competition between workers due to scarce hours.

Williams et al. (2008) argue that temporal boundaries are increasingly blurred due to organizational demands, as workers and their families attempt to traverse a multiplicity of times. Moreover, Chatzitheochari and Arber (2012) highlight the temporal and financial inequalities of low-paid employees working non-standard hours. This study reveals additional challenges of combining multiple employment with unpredictable and irregular working time configurations, as 62% of the interviewees had care obligations, 34% had childcare responsibilities, 24% had eldercare duties and 17% cared for grandchildren. Indeed, many had complex familial responsibilities involving childcare and eldercare, while facing daily financial struggles.

Finally, this research critically addresses the challenges and complexities facing low-paid workers with multiple jobs in attempting to make ends meet. The temporal and economic indeterminacies of labour revealed in this research highlight the embedded and interconnected structural factors of low-pay, insufficient working hours and precarious work. Indeed, zero hours workers not only receive lower pay and fewer hours than comparable employees (see Adams & Prassi, 2018; Farina et al., 2020), but experience what we term ‘acute precarity’ as they could be offered no working hours from immediate effect – further illuminating new dimensions of the ‘brute facts of power’ (Fox, 1974) of contemporary employment relations. Furthermore, due to fluctuating hours and concomitant volatile earnings, some of these workers faced difficulties in budgeting and accessing welfare benefits, in keeping with other studies (see Ball et al., 2017; Moore et al., 2017); but this was all the more complex and stressful with multiple jobs. Indeed, some had to utilize foodbanks, credit unions and debt management charities; for example, Jack a 24-year-old graduate with 2 jobs was over £1500 in debt due to zero hours work. All of the workers we interviewed yearned for secure standard employment, with guaranteed sociable working hours, decent pay and dignity at work. In complete contrast to claims of ‘choice’ and ‘flexibility’ with zero hours work, this research illuminates the harsh daily realities of acute precarity of low-paid workers with multiple jobs trying to keep a roof over their heads and providing for their families.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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