

Mental Health in the Discourse of Decent Work: A CiteSpace-based Analysis of Research Trends and Managerial Insights

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Abstract

This study uses CiteSpace as a visualization tool to perform a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of 552 academic articles on decent work. The analysis elucidates the research context and identifies emerging trends within the scholarly discourse on decent work, thereby establishing a foundation for future research directions. Through advanced keyword clustering techniques, the study delineates 11 distinct clusters, which are systematically categorized into three primary thematic areas: (1) worker typologies, (2) psychological needs in labor processes, and (3) social enterprise security mechanisms. Temporal analysis using keyword emergence patterns and timeline mapping reveals that decent work research has evolved through three distinct phases: the formative, developmental, and maturation stages. This study ultimately predicts three key areas for future academic research: (1) the concept of decent work in emerging employment paradigms, (2) mental health in the discourse of decent work, and (3) bridging the significant gap between policy discourse and mental health.

Keywords: Decent work; Psychological needs; Trends; Research hotspots

1. Introduction

The United Nations' adoption of Sustainable Development Goal 8 (SDG 8) in 2015 marked a significant milestone in the global pursuit of inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full employment, and decent work for all. Since its conceptualization by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1999, decent work has been defined as "promoting opportunities for women and men to obtain productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security, and human dignity." Over three decades of scholarly engagement with this concept, research has progressively expanded to encompass various dimensions of decent work, particularly emphasizing its psychological aspects and framing work as a fundamental human right (Blustein et al., 2019; Peláez et al., 2024).

Despite sustained international efforts to promote decent work, significant challenges persist. A 2018 ILO report revealed that approximately 78% of workers in Southeast Asia remain engaged in informal employment, lacking essential labor protections (Kaiser et al., 2023). This persistent gap between policy objectives and implementation outcomes underscores the complex realities of decent work attainment, particularly in developing economies (Nourafkan & Tanova, 2023).

The advent of digital technologies has introduced new complexities to the decent work agenda. The proliferation of platform-based gig economies, exemplified by delivery riders, has paradoxically exacerbated worker vulnerabilities rather than improving working

conditions as initially anticipated (Khan et al., 2024). These precarious employment arrangements are characterized by algorithmic opacity, mandatory dispatching systems, and score-based evaluation mechanisms, which collectively undermine worker autonomy and intensify psychological stress (Vallas & Schor, 2020).

This study provides a systematic investigation into the evolution of decent work over the past three decades, aiming to both delineate its developmental trajectory and identify emerging research trends. Notably, the association between decent work and mental health outcomes has grown increasingly robust, suggesting that this interdisciplinary nexus will likely attract heightened scholarly attention in future research. This study employs multidimensional bibliometric clustering analysis to accomplish three primary research objectives. First, characterize the current state of decent work scholarship. Second, trace the conceptual evolution and clarify the distribution of core articles, authors, and journals related to decent work. Third, project future research directions and emerging areas of interest in the field.

2. Data Source and Method

2.1 Data Source

This research utilized the Web of Science Core Collection database as the primary platform for literature retrieval. The search was conducted using the subject term “decent work” and the title term “decent” to ensure the focus on relevant academic articles. The search resulted in 647 articles published between 1996 and 2024. To ensure the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the collected data, a manual screening and cleaning process was conducted on the initial list of articles. This process involved the removal of duplicates, irrelevant publications, and non-academic materials such as conference announcements and proceedings. After this filtering process, a total of 552 valid academic articles were retained for further analysis.

2.2 Research method

Based on quantitative data analysis, this paper uses bibliometric analysis method to comprehensively reflect the current situation and development trend of “decent work” research. CiteSpace is an information visualization software mainly used for measuring and analyzing scientific literature data, which is used to detect and visualize emerging trends and transient modes in scientific literature (Chen, 2006). This study uses citespace.6.4.r1 software, and the time slice is set to 1 year. It analyzes the research trends and hot spots in this field from the aspects of time axis view, emerging words and keyword clustering.

Figure 1

Summary of data source and selection

Data source	Web of Science
Searching keywords	Decent work
Sample size	552
Slice length	1 year
G-index	K=25

3. Research status of decent work

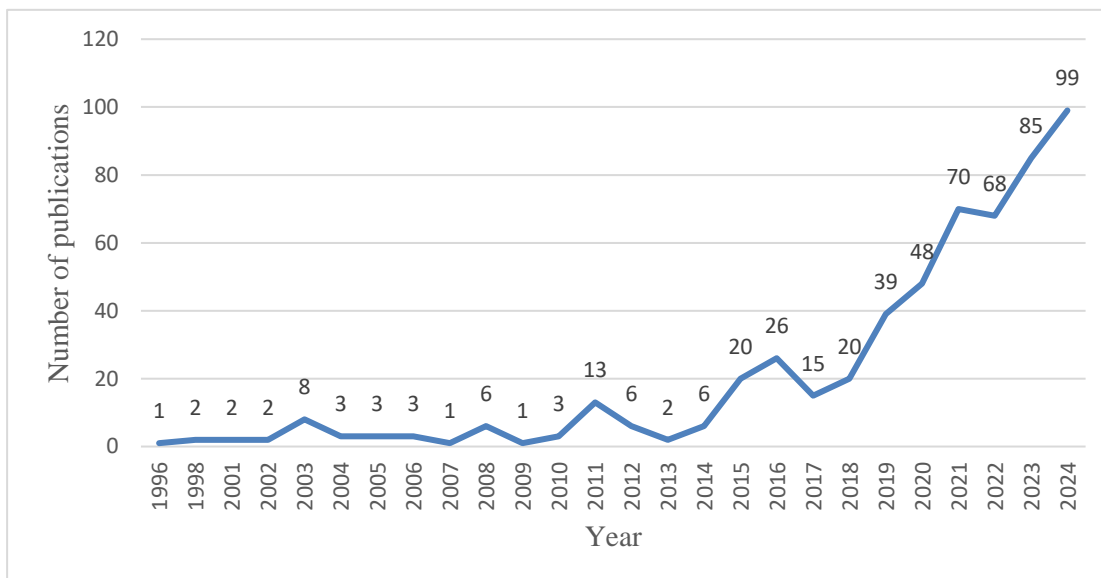
In order to better show the research status of decent work in the past 30 years, this paper reveals the research status of decent work in the past 30 years from three aspects: annual publication trend, research institutions and keyword map, and highly cited literature analysis.

3.1 Annual literature publishing trend

Figure 2 shows the annual publication of decent work articles from January 1996 to November 2024. In general, the research on decent work is on the rise. It can be divided into two stages: before 2014, the number of relevant papers was small and the overall trend was flat, which was in the preliminary research stage; Since 2014, the number of published papers has maintained an upward trend and increased rapidly. Although it decreased slightly in a specific year, its growth potential can still be found, and reached its peak in 2024 (99 papers), which is expected to continue to rise in the future. This means that the relevant research in the field of decent work is gradually becoming a research hotspot in the academic community and getting the attention of more and more scholars.

Figure 2

Annual literature publication scale



3.2 Research institutions and keyword network analysis

Research institutions serve as pivotal actors in advancing scholarly inquiry within specific domains. A comprehensive analysis of the co-occurrence network mapping of research institutions and keywords, generated through CiteSpace (Figure 3), coupled with relevant bibliometric data, reveals that decent work research is predominantly concentrated within academic institutions, particularly universities. The State University System of Florida, Universidade de Coimbra, Boston College, and the University of Évora emerge as leading research hubs, forming the core institutional base for decent work studies. Notably, these institutions frequently engage in collaborative research endeavors, both within and across national boundaries.

A prominent example of international collaboration is the joint research initiative between the European University of Rome and Universidad Autónoma de Chile, which investigated well-

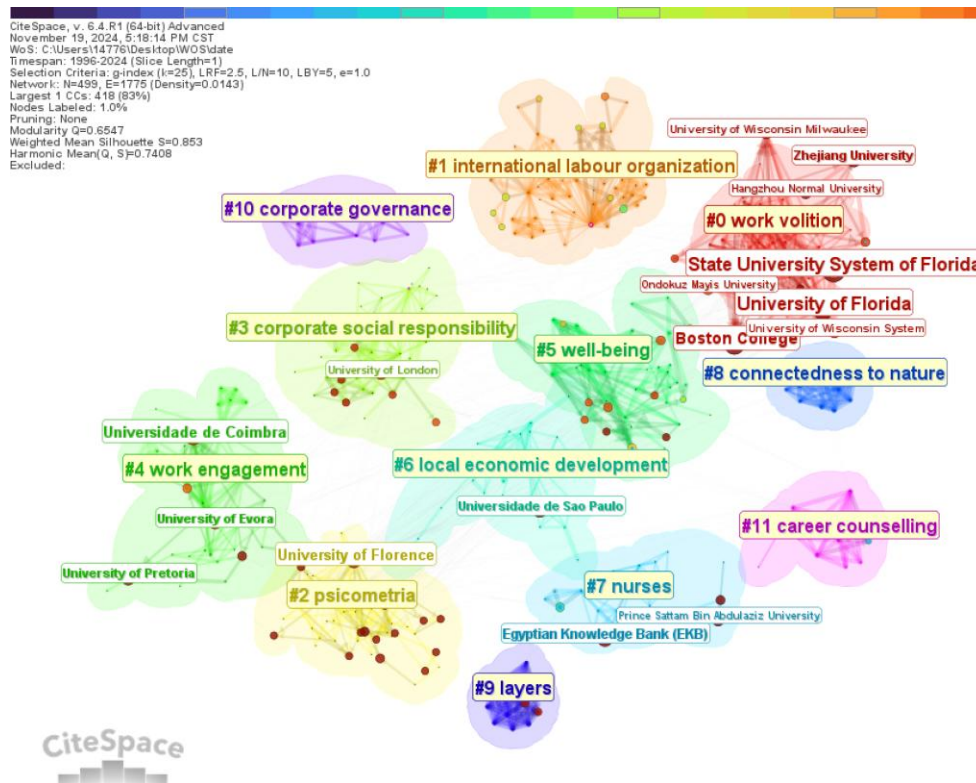
being (#5 cluster) within the decent work framework. Their seminal study demonstrated that workplace stress mediates the relationship between workplace bullying and health outcomes, underscoring the critical role of organizational anti-violence policies in enhancing worker well-being (Finstad et al., 2019). The geographical distribution of these collaborating institutions across Europe and South America reflects the global significance of well-being research within the decent work paradigm.

Similarly, in the African context, the University of Fort Hare and the University of Pretoria have collaborated on a significant study examining work engagement (#4 cluster) in relation to decent work. Their research focused on identifying key determinants of mental health among public sector employees in South Africa, highlighting the crucial intersection between decent work conditions and organizational citizenship behavior (Chinyamurindi et al., 2023). At the national level, collaborative efforts are exemplified by the partnership between Zhejiang University and Hangzhou Normal University, which focused on work volatility (#0 cluster). Their joint research delineated the central role of decent work in poverty alleviation strategies, emphasizing the critical function of social workers in advancing this agenda. The study proposed a comprehensive framework addressing job insecurity through educational improvements and enhanced participatory processes, while advocating for the integration of decent work principles within the solidarity economy model to foster more inclusive economic systems (Xue et al., 2024).

In summary, these collaborative efforts, spanning regional and international contexts, demonstrate the diverse yet complementary approaches to decent work research. Each collaboration contributes unique theoretical and empirical insights, collectively advancing the field's understanding of decent work dynamics across different socio-economic contexts.

Figure 3

Co occurrence map of research institutions and keywords



3.3 Analysis of highly cited literatures

Table 1 lists the top 10 frequently cited literatures in the wos database from 1996 to 2024. The observation found that these articles were mainly published from 2016 to 2019, with 8 published in 2019. Duffy RD and Blustein DL are the main cited authors. The former article has been cited for 179 times, with 4 articles ranking in the top 10 in terms of citation frequency, and the latter article has been cited for 52 times. Among them, reading the literature of Duffy Rd, we can find that he has been deeply cultivated in the field of decent work for many years and has rich experience. JOURNAL OF VOCATIONAL BEHAVIOR 、 JOURNAL OF COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY And other journals have collected most of the literatures with the highest citation frequency, and are the main publications and high-quality journals of decent work research results.

Table 1

Top 10 cited literatures in wos database in recent 30 years

Serial number	Title	First author	Published Journal	Year	Frequency
1	The development and initial validation of the Decent Work Scale	Duffy RD	JOURNAL OF COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY	2017	56
2	Expanding the Impact of the Psychology of Working: Engaging Psychology in the Struggle for Decent Work and Human Rights	Blustein DL	JOURNAL OF CAREER ASSESSMENT	2019	52
3	The Psychology of Working Theory	Duffy, RD	JOURNAL OF COUNSELING PSYCHOLOGY	2016	44
4	Decent work in Turkey: Context, conceptualization, and assessment	Buyukgoze-Kavas, A	JOURNAL OF VOCATIONAL BEHAVIOR	2019	42
5	Linking decent work with physical and mental health: A psychology of working perspective	Duffy, RD	JOURNAL OF VOCATIONAL BEHAVIOR	2019	41
6	Developing, validating, and testing improved measures within the Psychology of Working Theory	Duffy, RD	JOURNAL OF VOCATIONAL BEHAVIOR	2019	38
7	Decent work in Switzerland: Context, conceptualization, and assessment	Masdonati, J	JOURNAL OF VOCATIONAL BEHAVIOR	2019	37
8	Decent work in Portugal: Context, conceptualization, and assessment	Ferreira, JA	JOURNAL OF VOCATIONAL BEHAVIOR	2019	36
9	Decent work in Italy: Context, conceptualization, and assessment	Di Fabio, A	JOURNAL OF VOCATIONAL BEHAVIOR	2019	35
10	A test of psychology of	Wang, DN	JOURNAL OF	201	32

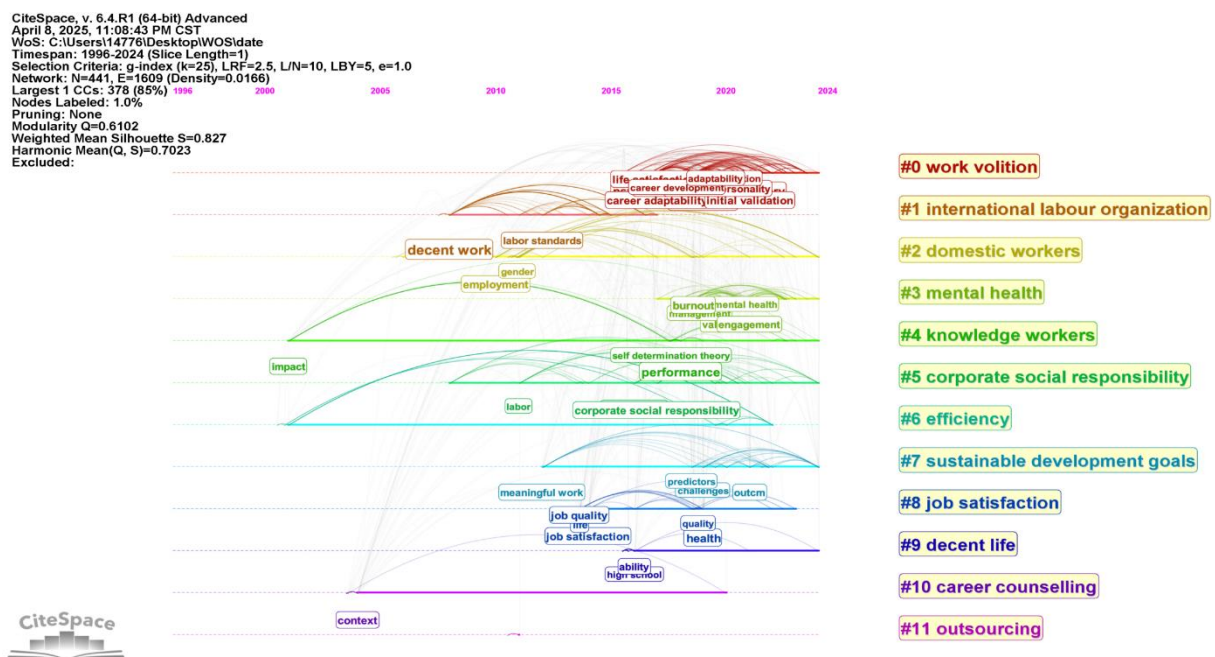
4. Evolution trend of decent work research in academia

4.1 Research progress

This study employed CiteSpace’s timeline visualization function to generate a comprehensive temporal mapping of research keywords related to decent work (Figure 4), which elucidates the evolutionary trajectory of these keywords across distinct clustering modules. The timeline map delineates the temporal distribution and thematic correlations within decent work research from 1996 to 2024, revealing three distinct developmental phases: the preliminary stage, development stage, and mature stage.

Figure 4

Keyword timeline map



Stage 1: Preliminary Stage (1996-2004). During this formative period, scholarly inquiry into decent work primarily focused on conceptual development and foundational understanding. Early research emphasized the theoretical underpinnings and policy implications of decent work, with seminal contributions establishing its conceptual framework. Emerging keywords such as “context” and “impact,” reflecting the initial exploration of decent work’s conceptual boundaries. (Hepple, 2001) argued that equality is at the core of decent work, while (Egger, 2002) highlighted the role of the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) role in promoting it, particularly in developing indicators and national programs for its advancement. Research in this stage predominantly addressed the conceptualization of decent work and the perspectives of policymakers, marking the beginning of its academic exploration.

Stage 2: Development Stage (2004-2014). As more workers attained basic living standards, the subsequent decade witnessed a significant expansion in the scope of decent work research. Scholars shifted their focus from broad policy discussions to targeted investigations of specific demographic groups and regional contexts. (Rosas & Rossignotti, 2005) emphasized the importance of youth employment in the success of poverty eradication and sustainable development. (Egger, 2003) examined decent work in the European Union, suggesting that full employment based on decent work would become a central objective for candidate countries negotiating EU accession, especially amid the European Union's expansion. During this period, research became more specialized, focusing on specific groups or regions.

Stage 3: Mature Stage (2015-2024). The current phase is characterized by a substantial proliferation of research themes and keywords, reflecting the maturation of decent work as a multidisciplinary field of study. Emerging topics such as "adaptability," "corporate social responsibility," "economic constraints," and "health" have gained prominence, with the labor process emerging as a central focus of scholarly inquiry. Notably, the "work voltage" cluster has experienced rapid growth, becoming the largest thematic grouping during this period. In response to the dynamic global economic landscape, researchers have increasingly explored strategies to enhance workers' skills and professional competencies, addressing challenges posed by technological advancements and evolving industrial models. This focus underscores not only the importance of sustainable labor processes but also its implications for corporate human resource strategies. The pursuit of decent work has thus evolved into a complex, multifaceted challenge requiring collaborative efforts among diverse stakeholders.

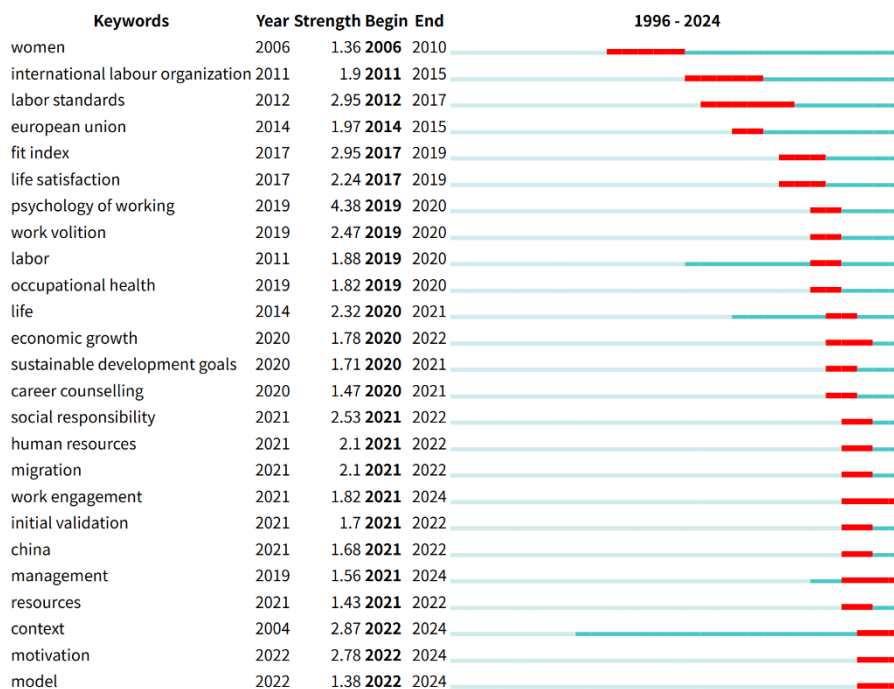
4.2 Keyword burst analysis

By leveraging CiteSpace's keyword emergence analysis functionality, this study presents a systematic visualization of the developmental trajectory and evolving research frontiers within the decent work domain. Through burst detection analysis of 552 scholarly articles, a comprehensive keyword emergence map was generated (Figure 5), enabling the identification of four distinct evolutionary phases in decent work research from 1996 to 2024..

Figure 5

Keyword burst detection

Top 25 Keywords with the Strongest Citation Bursts



The initial stage(1996-2005) represents the nascent stage of decent work research, characterized by limited scholarly output and the absence of significant keyword emergence. The second stage, spanning from 2006 to 2016, marks a period where research on decent work began to gain significant attention, with 2006 emerging as a critical inflection point for the field. During this stage, research focused on critical issues such as gender empowerment and the development of labor standards by major international organizations, including the European Union and the International Labour Organization (ILO). The third stage, from 2017 to 2020, was characterized by a focus on labor-related topics, including the psychology of work, work stress, and occupational health. Among these, “psychology of working” stands out as a major emergent keyword with an intensity score of 4.38, a topic that continues to be of significant interest to scholars. The fourth and most recent stage, from 2021 to 2024, has seen a rapid increase in research on decent work, with an expanding diversity of research hotspots. Notably, China emerged as a prominent keyword in 2021, reflecting the country’s growing academic engagement with decent work issues following its rapid economic development and successful poverty alleviation initiatives.

The developmental trajectory of these stages demonstrates not only a theoretical deepening and methodological diversification in decent work research, but also an evolution in the academic understanding of the concept. Initially, studies adopted a policy-oriented approach, operating under the assumption that decent work could be primarily achieved through top-down policy interventions. However, subsequent shifts toward regional and collective dimensions (e.g., youth employment and EU expansion) revealed the limitations of universal policy applications. This transition marked a paradigmatic change from "normative definitions" to "contextualized practices." In the mature stage, the emergence of multiple research focuses further challenges the singularity tendency of early research. Concurrently, post-industrial society has witnessed new forms of work alienation, wherein technological advancements have failed to consistently enhance work quality and, in some instances, have

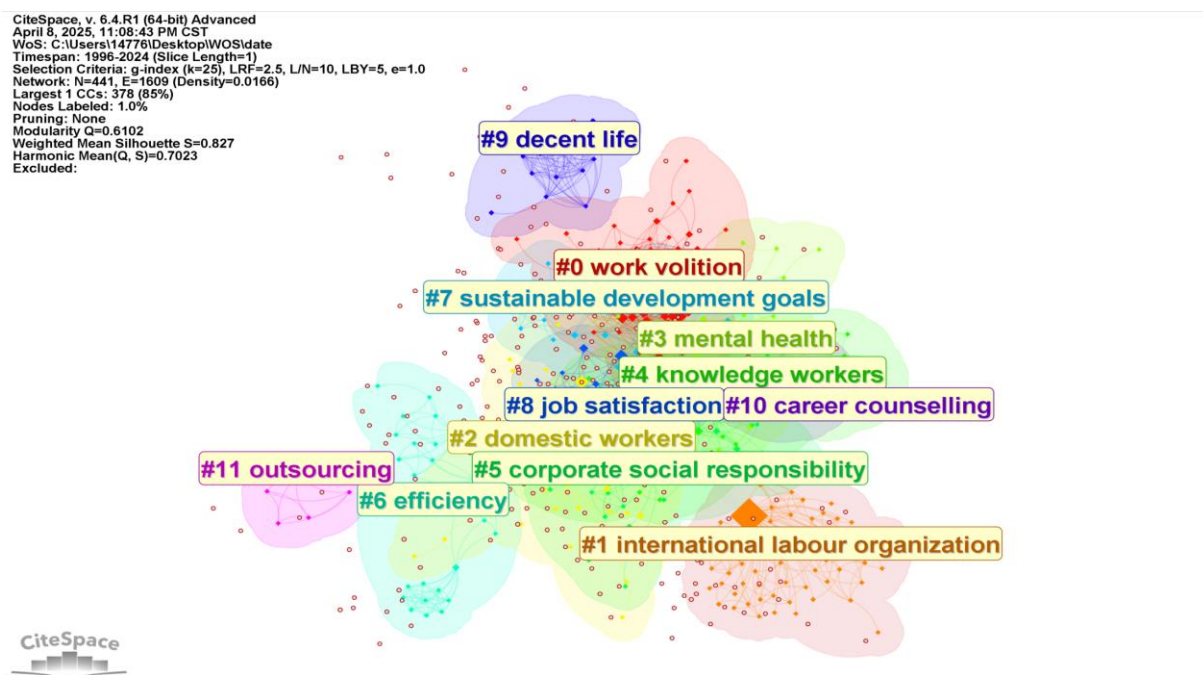
intensified psychological burdens—as exemplified by algorithmically monitored gig economy platforms (Wang et al., 2024).

5. Key words and themes of decent work research

In CiteSpace, we usually use keyword clustering map and keyword co-occurrence network to interpret the hot spots in the research field. Run CiteSpace to get the keyword clustering map shown in Figure 4 ($q=0.6102>0.3$, $s=0.827>0.5$). There are “#0 work volume”, “#1 International Labor Organization”, “#2 domestic workers”, “#3 mental health”, “#4 knowledge workers”, “#5 corporate social responsibility”, “#6 efficiency”, “#7 sustainable development goals” and “#8 job”.”Satisfaction”, “#9 decent life”, “#10 career counting” 11 cluster tags. The smaller the cluster number, the larger the cluster volume.

Figure 6

Keyword clustering map



5.1 Labor diversity and decent work

The clustering #2 domestic workers, clustering #4 knowledge workers and clustering #11 outsourcing are all labor types. This part of the study analyzes the current situation of decent work of diversified labor from the perspective of workers. These categories represent new forms of employment, often involving unconventional labor arrangements. In addition to traditional labor rights and interests—such as working conditions, salary levels, and career development—such studies also explore the non-traditional needs of these groups, particularly regarding job satisfaction, mental health, and social identity. (Borges et al., 2024) highlight that domestic workers, a relatively vulnerable group, face unfavorable employment conditions, with limited labor rights and protections. Based on survey data, they emphasize issues arising from job instability. Similarly, (Janta & Ladkin, 2024) explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrant workers, noting that the pandemic’s effect on the tourism industry and the emerging challenges of the gig economy have intensified the instability faced by these workers.

Despite the richness and diversity of existing research on labor force diversification and decent work, its practical applicability remains limited. For example, domestic workers frequently encounter low wages and substandard working conditions; knowledge workers often grapple with psychological stressors, including high-pressure environments and occupational burnout; and outsourcing workers face challenges such as contractual instability and job insecurity. To address these gaps, future research should adopt a more practice-oriented approach, focusing on evaluating the efficacy of decent work policies and interventions while exploring the specific policy needs of distinct labor groups.

5.2 Multiple guarantees and decent work

The clustering #1 International Labour Organization, Clustering #7 Sustainable Development Goals, Clustering #5 Corporate Social Responsibility and Clustering #10 Career Counting are all key concerns for promoting decent work at the social enterprise level. This level has become increasingly significant in ensuring the maintenance of decent work conditions. According to (Abundes-Recilla et al., 2024), policies and laws are essential parameters in determining whether sustainable and decent work conditions are present in the auto parts industry. They emphasize the critical role of corporate social responsibility in encouraging managers to improve policies and working conditions. (Bas et al., 2024) assessed the impact of the International Labour Organization's decent work standards, expanding the ILO's 9 indicators to 12 standards. They suggested that factors such as corporate culture and the relationship between managers and employees should be incorporated into the decent work standards at the international level.

While existing research on social security and decent work has made significant progress, gaps remain. For instance, ensuring the effective implementation and supervision of policies remains a challenging issue in practice. Furthermore, balancing corporate interests with the rights of workers, particularly in terms of enterprise culture and labor relations, requires further exploration. Additionally, as globalization and technological advancement continue to progress, new forms of employment and work methods are emerging. Research into how to adapt to these changes and promote decent work is an area that warrants further academic attention.

5.3 Psychological needs in the process of work and decent work

The clustering #0 (Work Voltage), Clustering #3 (Mental Health), Clustering #6 (Efficiency), Clustering #8 (Job Satisfaction) and Clustering #9 (Percent Life) correspond to the psychological needs during the labor process. (Blustein et al., 2019) explored the role of applied psychology and career development in advancing decent work from the perspective of work psychology. They argued that work psychology provides a clear ethical framework for promoting decent work, supporting the goal of respecting and protecting workers' rights and human rights.

While previous studies have extensively addressed the psychological needs of the labor process and decent work, the rapid development of society and technology has led to unprecedented changes in the labor market and working environments. Emerging fields, such as telecommuting and the platform economy, are reshaping working methods and labor relations while presenting new challenges to the psychological needs of workers and the realization of decent work. Therefore, future research should focus on exploring and enriching these emerging fields to better adapt to and guide the evolution of the labor market.

6. Psychological theories in the hot topics of decent work research

Utilizing CiteSpace bibliometric analysis, this study reveals a significant scholarly focus on mental health within decent work research. Against the backdrop of labor market digitalization and evolving conceptions of decent work, the mental health dimension has gained increasing academic attention, emerging as a critical criterion for decent work (Duffy et al., 2019). Previous research employing the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model demonstrates that job demands and resources significantly influence worker fatigue and predict health outcomes (Ahola et al., 2005; Meng & Yang, 2023). Building upon these findings, we propose that future research should systematically apply the JD-R model to investigate mechanisms for promoting decent work during digital transformation, thereby strengthening the theoretical framework. Subsequent studies should not only analyze the impact of platform algorithms and flexible employment arrangements on mental health outcomes but also examine collective employee resistance strategies. Such multidimensional inquiry is crucial for advancing a liberation theory paradigm genuinely committed to worker empowerment, rather than serving as an academic instrument for labor control within capitalist systems.

7. Research conclusions and Prospects

Decent work represents a fundamental indicator for safeguarding the basic rights and interests of workers. Future research on decent work can be further optimized and deepened through the following aspects.

First, conceptual and Measurement Framework Development. In terms of the connotation and index construction of decent work, we should pay attention to improving the index system and promoting the theoretical innovation and upgrading of decent work research. The expansion of decent work indicators in the digital economy is an inevitable choice in the face of social reality. Under the background of the times, decent work continues to deepen its connotation and importance, showing diversified and multi standard characteristics.

Therefore, it requires the academic community to use the existing research basis and realistic situation to interpret and answer the new decent work, and give the measurement method of keeping pace with the times.

Second, implementation and Stakeholder Collaboration. In the practical implementation of maintaining decent work, it is important to explore effective tripartite cooperation among workers, enterprises, and government entities to facilitate the early attainment of decent work. To some extent, decent work can be understood as fulfilling spiritual needs beyond the basic necessities of food and clothing. The underlying essence of these needs is the development of the economy, with workers serving as its primary vehicle. Consequently, the core of sustaining decent work lies in promoting steady and sustainable economic development. All sectors of society must strengthen cooperation and dialogue to advance the comprehensive dissemination and practical application of the concept of decent work, thereby contributing to a more equitable, harmonious, and sustainable social development.

Third, mental health constitutes a crucial dimension of decent work in contemporary society. In the current era, workers face dual pressures: the need to adapt to precarious employment conditions through continuous skill development, and the persistent challenge of structural economic inequalities - particularly wage suppression in platform-based economies - which systematically erode the foundations of decent work. This tension reflects an evolution in scholarly focus from policy frameworks to psychological dimensions, mirroring broader societal value shifts in conceptualizing work: from mere economic subsistence, to identity formation, and ultimately to holistic well-being integration. However, an excessive research emphasis on individual adaptation strategies (e.g., skills training and psychological resilience) risks obscuring the imperative for structural labor market reforms, effectively transferring

systemic responsibilities onto individual workers. This study argues that future research must maintain critical interdisciplinary engagement, carefully balancing micro-level psychological analyses with macro-level political economy examinations, to prevent decent work theory from being co-opted as a discursive instrument of technological governance.

In conclusion, research on decent work has become an important component of mental health and sustainable development, occupying a crucial position in labor studies. As new employment paradigms and technological advancements continue to reshape the labor landscape, the field of decent work research will face both challenges and opportunities. With sustained scholarly engagement, this research domain is poised to address contemporary realities effectively and generate increasingly impactful outcomes.

8. Acknowledgements

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