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QWoRe

Quality of Work in Residential
long-term care services in Italy:
determinants and strategies

Research report

Quality of Working Life

in Italian residential long-term care facilities:

analytical framework

Milestone 1

November 2024

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Project: QWoRe - Quality of working in Residential long-term care services in Italy: determinants and strategies

Research report: Quality of Working Life in Italian residential long-term care facilities: analytical framework

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Executive Summary

The QWoRe - Quality of Work on Residential long-term care services in Italy - project aims to provide an accurate and in-depth account of the quality of working life (QoWL) in Italian residential long-term care (LTC) services and to identify innovative strategies to improve workers' wellbeing.

This report is the result of collaborative work within the QWoRe research team in the first phase of the project. It provides a multidisciplinary and integrated analytical framework, incorporating various theoretical, methodological, and empirical approaches. This framework is based on a comprehensive review of the literature on quality of work, including its conceptualization, operationalisation, measurement, determinants, and outcomes.

The report discusses the challenges in defining and measuring quality of work, emphasizing the lack of consensus on terminology and the multidimensional nature of the concept. It also acknowledges the evolution of quality of work research, its interdisciplinary nature, and the contribution of various fields such as labour sociology, organisational studies, the psychology of work, the study of professions, the sociology of emotions, and feminist studies of care.

Additionally, the report presents a review of international and Italian literature on QWoL in LTC residential settings, focusing on the specific dimensions, outcomes, and determinants of QoWL in this sector.

The analytical framework based on the literature analysis and discussion and summarised at the end of the report will guide the project's data collection and analysis and contribute to the scientific and policy debate on QoWL.

1. Introduction

The QWoRe project aims at providing an accurate and in-depth account of the quality of work in residential LTC services in Italy, and at identifying innovative and contextualised strategies to overcome the problematic nature of care work in residential LTC services and its most critical effects on worker's wellbeing.

To this end, the project has developed an innovative, multidisciplinary and integrated analytical framework by building on and incorporating existing theoretical and methodological approaches, as well as empirical knowledge.

The framework presented in this report is based on a comprehensive review and discussion of the literature focussing on or touching upon the concept of quality of work, its operationalisation and measurement, as well as its antecedents and outcomes.

The analytical model will guide the data collection and analysis of the project, and is offered as a contribution to the scientific and policy debate.

1.1 Terminology

One of the challenges of doing research on quality of work is that there is no consensus on the concept as such, its operationalisation and measurement. Within studies that explicitly focus on this topic, the terminology itself varies across and within disciplines, and often appears unclear and even controversial: job quality, work quality, employment quality, quality of work(ing) life, quality of the working environment are the most widespread notions, which reflect different objectives, analytical foci, methodological approaches and policy agenda.

In this report, we use “**Quality of Work**” (from **QoW**) as an overarching and broad term to indicate the focus of the diverse approaches that analyse working conditions, their determinants and outcomes, unless differently specified.

Eventually, the QWoRe analytical framework will refer to “**Quality of Working Life**” (from now on: **QoWL**) as the object of study within the research project. The report will clarify the reasons underpinning this choice and its analytical significance.

1.2 Scope and methodology

The present report is the result of a collaborative effort within the QWoRe research team that encompassed, first, a set of the literature reviews in different (sub)disciplinary and thematic domains and, subsequently, a collective theoretical and analytical elaboration.

We first surveyed the social scientific literature that explicitly has QoW (beyond work in residential LTC) as its object of enquiry. This encompasses studies in the field of labour sociology, organisational studies, and psychology of work. The aim was two-fold: to elicit different conceptualisations and operationalisations of QoW and to identify its determinants according to existing research work. Given the wealth of literature on the topic, we proceeded as follows. We mostly relied on available reviews of the theoretical and empirical literature, which addressed the conceptual, analytical, and methodological aspects of distinct approaches to QoW, including different measurements, the construction of indicators, and the relationship between the different dimensions of QoW and influences at multiple levels (i.e. macro-, meso-, micro determinants). Subsequently, we considered other streams of literature that, while not specifically addressing QoW as such, do offer crucial insights into the concept with more specific but not exclusive reference to care work: the studies on professions, the care literature (especially from a feminist perspective), the sociology of emotions, and migration studies addressing the relationship between migration and (care) employment.

Second, we performed a review of the international literature and the Italian literature on the QoW in LTC residential settings. The aims were to appreciate the extent to which this literature reflects the analytical frameworks adopted within the more general study of QoW and related areas of investigations. This approach allowed us to identify the specific aspects and dimensions that are underlined (or underrepresented) in the national literature, and to disentangle the conceptualisation of QoW and of the factors affecting it in this specific domain. As for the international review of the literature we interrogated the Scopus bibliographical database extracting documents that contained in the title, keywords or abstracts two sets of terms: quality of work (under different naming) and residential LTC. We extracted 174 documents. After a first selection based on the reading of the abstracts, 80 documents were retained (all research articles, besides seven reviews and one book) and the rest of the documents were considered only partly or non-pertinent. The review of the Italian literature needed a different approach, given the lack of encompassing databases of relevant scientific works. It was based on a combination of searches on Google scholar, on browsing and searching single relevant national journals, book series and research reports.

At different steps, the research group discussed the partial and provisional findings, exchanged feedback, assessed the gaps in the literature, and worked on the analysis, systematisation and integration of the different contributions. The result of this collective work is the analytical framework for QWoRe illustrated in the last part of the report, which informs the empirical strategy of the project.

1.3 Structure of the report

The report is organised in three parts.

Part I presents and discusses the different approaches to QoW, its conceptualisation and operationalisation. In particular, in chapter 2, we briefly summarise the development of the study of QoW across disciplines and the link with practical and policy aims, and the working contexts in which QoW research has developed. In addition, we show the relevance of other streams of literature –

namely the study of professions and the care literature - for the study of QoW in (residential) LTC contexts. Subsequently, chapter 3 is dedicated to the conceptualisation of the quality of working life – QoWL – as our object of analysis, its boundaries and internal articulation (dimensions), its relationships with determinants and outcomes. Chapter 4 focuses on the determinants of QoWL and chapter 5 on its possible outcomes.

Part II focuses on the contributions to the study of QoWL in (residential) LTC settings in the international literature (chapter 6) and in the Italian literature (chapter 7).

Finally, part III illustrates the analytical framework elaborated for the QWoRe project as a result of the previous literature review and discussion (chapter 8).

PART I

Approaches, conceptualisations and operationalisations of QoW

2. Quality of Work as a research topic: motivations, contributions and development over time

The research field of Quality of Work (QoW) emerged and developed due to practical, economic, and societal concerns. These preoccupations related to (a) working conditions, (b) workers' wellbeing and satisfaction, (c) work performance and productivity, workers' retention or turnover, (d) workers' social inclusion, social cohesion and inequalities, and (e) the relationships between these phenomena. Consequently, QoW studies are inspired by, select, and define a specific problem; they present an analytical perspective on it; and based on the research results, provide policy, normative, or prescriptive recommendations, which usually define goals and point to adapted instruments to achieve them. For these reasons, QoW is a dynamic and evolving concept, redefined in response to significant transformations in the labour market, macroeconomic conditions, and societal change. It is also a diversified construct in relation to specific disciplinary and interdisciplinary sensitivities, as well as methodological approaches.

Alongside different waves of research that explicitly tackle QoW, other areas of social scientific inquiry addressed the topic indirectly or developed frameworks and empirical research relevant to QoW, especially within the service economy and the care work domain. Below, we refer to three streams of literature – the study of professions (which offers insights relevant to QoW by examining the role of autonomy, self-regulation, education etc.), the sociology of emotions (which provides a framework applicable to understanding the emotional dimensions of QoW), and the feminist study of care (which contributes to QoW research by highlighting the specific quality of work challenges in the care sector) – and highlight their (implicit and possible) connections to QoW.

2.1 *Rise and development of QoW studies*

The study of QoW has its origins in the 1950s and 1960s, driven by concerns about the effects of Tayloristic work practices (Guest, 2022: 24-25). The researchers at the Tavistock Institute for Human Relations, founded in the UK in 1947, proposed that efficiency necessitated a combination of technical arrangements (e.g., Tayloristic work organisation) and social-relational arrangements (e.g., teamwork), which they termed 'socio-technical systems' (Cherns, 1976, Herbst, 1976). The Tavistock Institute also influenced the "Cooperation Project" run in Norway between the early 1960s and 1970 (Bolweg, 1976). This project, supported by trade unions, employers' organisations, and the government, addressed QoW through increased workers' participation and contributed the idea of autonomous work groups and means to introduce industrial democracy, which were influential in other European countries.

Subsequently, the 1970s saw QoW become a distinct research field, facilitated by institutional support and the development of a dedicated academic community, particularly in the US. This development was rooted in concerns about increasing alienation among blue- and white-collar workers due to Taylorisation, routinisation, and decreased control and autonomy. It was anticipated that a more

skilled, educated, and demanding workforce would react to this alienation in ways that would produce not only negative organisational consequences (e.g., absenteeism, turnover) but also social and political problems (e.g., democratic disengagement, social and political radicalisation) (Taylor, 1973).

The transition to post-Fordism furthered the QoW approach, leading to its application in the service sector, particularly in the area of early Information Technology (Gallino, 1983). Within this wave of research, the first attempts to define QoW more precisely emerged but proved particularly difficult. In addition, the initial optimistic aims of improving QoW based on research insights had to be revised (Guest, 2022).

However, the 1980s saw a reduction of interest in QoW, partly due to a changed political and cultural climate. The field regained momentum at the turn of the 2000s. Transformations such as the consolidation of the service economy, technological advancements, labour market reforms resulting in increased precariousness, and the economic crisis have fuelled extensive research on QoW and a rise in international comparative analyses (Gosetti & La Rosa, 2006). This more recent revival has also stimulated increased theoretical and methodological efforts to re-systematise the concept. Key issues such as the dimensions that constitute QoW, the challenges of measurability and indicators' definition, the influences exerted on QoW by factors and forces operating at multiple levels, and how characterisations of QoW are shaped by gender, racial, and territorial biases have dominated the academic debate. In addition, research has increasingly addressed occupations and professionals in the service sector and in particular in the welfare and (health) care domain, which are of specific relevance to research on Quality of Work and Related Employment (QWoRe).

Against the background of a growing policy and research interest, international organisations have produced guidelines and models to study and measure QoW (Eurofound, 2017a; 2021a; UNECE, 2015; Cazes et al 2016; OECD, 2017; World Bank Group, 2023) to guide data collection and analysis in an attempt to foster international comparative studies and improve comparability of nationally-collected data.

2.2 Studies of professions and QoW

The extensive literature on professions originated within sociology in the 1950s and subsequently influenced management studies. This body of work is based on a distinction between professions and other occupations. Professionals are workers who possess specialised knowledge that is socialised, controlled, and assessed by a professional group, alongside working methods, norms, and values. Given these distinctive characteristics, professionals experience a high degree of autonomy in their work (Abbott, 1988; Elliott, 1972; Evetts, 2003; Freidson, 1994) – a key dimension also studied in QoW research. Freidson (2001) posits “professionalism” as one of three institutional logics that organise work, alongside “market” and “bureaucracy”. In market-driven contexts, workers are subject to consumer demands, while, within bureaucracies, they adhere to formal rules and hierarchical structures. In contrast, under the logic of professionalism, workers possess the specialised knowledge necessary to perform their tasks and have the discretionary power to organise their work.

The traditional literature on professions primarily focused on the processes of professionalisation, which was anticipated to be the dominant trend in societies increasingly characterised by technical and expert knowledge and information. However, since the 1970s, de-professionalisation has emerged as a significant concern (Haug, 1973) due to shifts in the balance of power, the democratisation of education, and the emergence of the information society. The bureaucratisation of professional work, which involves the parcelling of tasks, a reduction in control, waged labour, and collective agreements, has been identified as a source of the “proletarianisation” of professionals (Oppenheimer, 1973). Since the 1990s, in the area of welfare, health, and educational services, several scholars have analysed the restructuring of the welfare state and the introduction of bureaucratic rules and protocols, on the one hand, and of market principles, on the other. Both these trends were seen to challenge the position, autonomy, and recognition of welfare and care professionals, thereby potentially fostering de-professionalisation and subsequent re-professionalisation as professionals adapted to these new principles (Knijn et al., 2006; Noordegraaf, 2015).

While the professionalism literature has developed separately from that on QoW, the two present many points of contact with respect to the centrality of, for example, autonomy, control, and recognition as key aspects of the work experience.

2.3 Emotion work, emotion labour and QoW

Hochschild’s (1979, 1983) seminal contribution concerning the relationship between emotions and paid work, and its subsequent developments, holds significant relevance for the study of QoW. According to Hochschild (1979, 1983), emotion work refers to the management of feelings in everyday life to meet social expectations, whereas emotion labour denotes emotion work performed as part of one’s occupation and for remuneration. The consistent necessity to manage personal emotions in accordance with an organisation’s stipulated display rules (e.g., masking, suppressing, or altering feelings) can lead to stress, burnout, and alienation (Hochschild, 1983). Building on the premise that a growing number of roles within the service economy necessitate the management of emotions as an integral aspect of the work, this framework has been applied to the study of various service workers, including flight attendants, retail employees (Leidner, 1993), and those in hospitality and tourism (Chu et al., 2012), as well as teachers (O’Connor, 2008), social workers and therapists (Mann, 2005), and care professionals (James, 1989; Stacey, 2011). Subsequently, occupational psychologists have expanded upon this framework (Briner, 2004, 2005; Grandey, 2000) to explore the connections between emotional work/labour and emotion regulation in relation to work-related psychological wellbeing (Zapf, 2022). While the management of emotions is frequently associated with emotional exhaustion and burnout (Zapf et al., 2003), it has also been argued that specific forms of emotion work, when coupled with workers’ agency, can be a source of fulfilment rather than alienation (Bolton, 2005).

2.4 *Care literature and QoW*

The feminist literature focusing on (paid and unpaid) care work since the early 1980s also offers valuable insights for the study of QoW. Several contributions examine the ethics of care (Larrabee, 1993; Tronto, 1993), the position of women and care within the welfare state (Lewis, 1998), the interplay between care and economic factors (Folbre & Nelson, 2000), and the societal value attributed to care work (England, 2005). This body of literature also posits a significant relationship between the QoW experienced by care workers and the quality of care they provide. Given that care is fundamentally a relational practice, limited recognition, support, time, resources, and diminished wellbeing among care providers can negatively impact their capacity to deliver effective care (Tronto, 1993). Since the 2000s, feminist perspectives have also addressed the phenomenon of care migration, offering crucial insights into the experiences of migrant women within the international division of care work (Anderson, 2000; Glenn, 2010; Hochschild, 2000; Lutz, 2011; Parreñas, 2015; Yeates, 2004).

A central theoretical argument within this literature stream posits that care work, a sector of the labour market that is highly feminised and increasingly racialised, is often underpaid and undervalued due to its societal perception as “women’s work” (England, 2005; Folbre, 2001, 2006) and the work predominantly performed by migrant women or women of colour (Glenn, 2010). This gendered devaluation perspective highlights a relevant connection between QoW, prevailing cultural norms, the social organisation of care, and the demographic profile of care workers. Moreover, this literature makes a key contribution to understanding the lived experiences of care workers by underscoring how normative views on care shape care work itself. In particular, the “prisoner of love” perspective elucidates how care workers may feel constrained within their roles due to emotional, moral, and societal expectations, which can lead them to accept suboptimal working conditions and render them vulnerable to exploitation (Folbre, 2001; Kittay, 1999).

3. What is QoW

The literature exhibits a consensus that QoW is a multidimensional concept, encompassing various dimensions and attributes of work and employment relations that, in turn, positively influence workers' wellbeing and attitudes, such as job satisfaction (Holman, 2015; Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2011) and health. These features of work and employment reflect the interplay between workers' needs and the organisation of work activities (Gosetti, 2012; Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2011). Consequently, the primary objective of QoW analyses is to examine the relationship between the organisational microsystem in which work occurs and the broader socio-economic macrosystem (Gosetti, 2012; Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2011) to understand and address workers' needs. From this perspective, QoW is analysed through multiple analytical dimensions, implying that a high-quality job satisfies a wide array of workers' requirements.

Despite a diversity of approaches, a shared understanding appears to exist that QoW is a multidimensional construct that necessitates corresponding operationalisation and measurement. This is evidenced by the utilisation of comprehensive sets of quantitative or qualitative indicators, each addressing a specific facet of QoW (Vermeulen et al., 2012).

However, the precise nature of QoW and the methodologies for its study and measurement remain subjects of ongoing debate. Furthermore, varying definitions exist regarding the relevant dimensions of QoW and their respective positions within the overarching concept. In the subsequent sections, we will present and discuss the different dimensions of QoW, their content and boundaries, as well as their determinants and outcomes, as identified in the literature.

3.1 Dimensions of QoWL

Initially, the problem to be addressed is the identification of the aforementioned features.

3.1.1 Extrinsic and intrinsic dimensions

QoW is often conceptualised as a set of characteristics of a given work (or occupation) as such, and of the employment relation in which it is performed (Holman, 2015). Consequently, the majority of research differentiates QoW according to two major attribute areas: employment quality (also called: “extrinsic” aspects) and work quality (“intrinsic” aspects) (Gallie, 2007a, 2007b; Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2011). Work (intrinsic) quality refers to the inherent characteristics of a given occupation, to the nature of work itself and the conditions in which it is performed. For instance, work quality encompasses factors such as autonomy, control, intensity, skill structures, pace of work, social and physical environment, and health and safety (e.g., Cascales Mira, 2021). Employment (extrinsic) quality pertains to the employment relationship and the conditions under which work is performed. This includes aspects such as the employment contract, flexibility, pay, working times, career development,

employee voice and participation, work-life balance arrangements, and access to training (Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2009).

Muñoz de Bustillo et al. (2011) offer a useful synthesis of the above-mentioned QoW dimensions, also considering the interaction between employment quality and work quality. In this model, several dimensions contribute either to work quality – autonomy, physical working conditions, health, risk of accidents, speed, social working environment – or to employment quality – type of contract, working hours, distribution of working hours, wage, social benefits – while others, such as participation and skill development through training, influence both (Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2011).

While there is agreement on this dual nature of QoW, the precise identification of the specific dimensions of work and employment quality is far from consensual.

3.1.2 Defining the relevant dimensions

The dimensions relevant to QoW can be identified either by directly asking workers for their perspectives or through a more theory-driven approach.

The rationale behind the first approach lies in the belief that workers themselves are best positioned to define the significant dimensions of QoW. Consequently, researchers employing this method include elements that workers perceive as contributing to high-quality work or employment within their QoW dimensions. Following what Muñoz de Bustillo et al. (2009, 2011) term a “subjective” approach (which could also be labelled “grounded”), this involves constructing survey models on QoW by soliciting workers' input on aspects of their work they deem crucial in defining job quality. While not widely adopted, this approach presents both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, it empowers workers by giving them a voice, allows for greater flexibility and adaptability to diverse socio-economic and institutional contexts, and provides valuable information on the desirability of specific job attributes. On the other hand, it necessitates presenting workers with a pre-defined set of options (the job attributes under investigation) to mitigate excessive individual variation (Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2011). However, the very identification of these options can prove more complex than defining a model for job quality analysis, thus undermining the “grounded” logic inherent in this approach. Furthermore, an overemphasis on individual perspectives may impede the identification of common elements essential for international comparisons. Finally, individual perceptions of what constitutes a quality job can be shaped by expectations influenced by personal characteristics such as gender, class, age, education, and migration or citizenship status (Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2009).

The second approach proposes that researchers should identify relevant dimensions of QoW independently of workers' perspectives (Gallie, 2007a). This method of defining QoW – sometimes termed “objective” but preferably labelled “theory-driven” to avoid confusion with subjective and objective outcomes of QoW (as discussed below) – involves defining characteristics of occupations and employment that are theoretically expected to significantly contribute to the satisfaction of workers' needs and, consequently, influence their wellbeing (Gallie, 2007a; Knox & Wright, 2022; Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2011; Warhurst & Knox, 2022). Moreover, this literature operates on the premise that

work and employment conditions can be objectively identified in a manner that holds validity across occupations, contexts, and individual workers. According to Muñoz de Bustillo et al. (2009), the analytical categories underpinning the objective definition of job quality stem from distinct disciplinary traditions. From economics, compensating wage differentials theory conceptualises job quality as a function of the trade-off between wages and non-monetary job attributes, while labour market segmentation theory highlights structural inequalities by distinguishing between stable, well-paid jobs and precarious, low-paid employment. Human capital theory links job quality to skill acquisition, career progression, and the returns on education and training. From sociology, the labour process tradition examines work organisation, autonomy, and control, focusing on the degree of worker discretion and the potential for deskilling. Theories of alienation analyse job quality through powerlessness, meaninglessness, and social isolation, while research on work intensity explores how workload, pace, and managerial control impact working conditions. From occupational health and safety studies, job quality is assessed in terms of exposure to physical hazards, psychosocial risks, and the balance between work and personal life. From industrial relations and employment studies, job quality is defined by contractual security, employment stability, and worker protections, with an emphasis on collective bargaining and institutional regulations. These analytical categories provide the foundation for an objective and multidimensional approach to job quality that incorporates wages, employment conditions, work organisation, and regulatory protections.

This theory-driven approach offers the advantage of mitigating biases related to workers' expectations and preference adaptation. Furthermore, it provides a more stable and policy-relevant framework, as objective job quality indicators can help identify structural factors affecting working conditions, enabling targeted interventions independent of workers' subjective perceptions. However, this approach is problematic in two key ways. First, it tends to exclude or underestimate the influence of the socio-economic context (such as employment levels, income distribution, gender division of labour, geographies of work, etc.) on the identification of relevant extrinsic as well as intrinsic quality dimensions. As work (and even more so employment) does not exist in a neutral and empty space "but in a social context in which public and private institutions such as the welfare state and the family are present" (Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2011, p. 457), it is necessary to identify contextualised forms of work and employment, even when apparently similar. Indeed, certain "objective" characteristics of QoW can be mediated, reformulated, and even contested by social and institutional arrangements (Meagher et al., 2016). For instance, comparative research has extensively documented that countries characterised by social democratic welfare systems generally exhibit higher levels of job quality compared to those with liberal-oriented welfare systems (Gallie, 2007a; Meagher et al., 2016). Thus, given different institutional setups, the relevance of specific dimensions of QoW may vary across socio-institutional contexts (Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2011). Second, this approach tends to neglect the characteristics of the workers themselves in the definition of QoW (in terms of their needs and the fulfilment of these needs). For instance, QoW conceptualisations should not be gender neutral, nor neutral with respect to age or migratory background. While often built around ideal types of (good) male occupations (Wright, 2013), the operationalisation of QoW should pay more attention to the

socially differentiated characteristics of workers in relation to gender and other socio-economic characteristics.

3.2 Defining QoW: content and boundaries

Once the relevant dimensions of QoW have been established, it remains necessary to clarify their precise content and boundaries. Such clarification is crucial to avoid conceptual ambiguity between QoW, its antecedents, and its outcomes, a lack of distinction that occasionally arises within the literature.

3.2.1 “Concrete conditions”

A primary complexity arises from the dichotomy between conceptualising QoW as a set of abstract regulations and as the actual manifestation of these regulations in the concrete conditions under which work is performed. The OECD (2017) guidelines propose that the characteristics of jobs relevant to QoW – termed “quality of the work environment” within their framework – should exclude “procedures”, or what could be considered rules and regulations, and instead focus on their practical realisation. For example, contractual provisions regarding wages for a specific occupation constitute a set of rules that are implemented variably across different organisations. These rules, alongside other factors such as the power dynamics between employers and employees, industrial relations at the workplace, and the oversight of labour regulation implementation, influence the actual wages received by individual workers. In essence, these rules form part of the context that shapes QoW, while QoW itself embodies the actual conditions under which work and employment are experienced. In this instance, the actual wage is a constituent element of QoW. On this point, the OECD framework suggests utilising rules and procedures as proxies for QoW only in the absence of more direct information (OECD, 2017, p. 13).

3.2.2 “Objective” and “subjective” assessments: conditions, behaviour, interaction, subjectivities

A second complexity pertains to the fact that virtually all dimensions of QoW can be measured both “objectively” and “subjectively”. For instance, it is possible to ascertain a worker's hourly earnings or the degree of autonomy they possess; however, it is equally possible to gauge how workers subjectively experience or perceive their wage or level of autonomy in relation to their needs. It is analytically important to distinguish between these two approaches to conceptualising and measuring quality, as they yield distinct sets of information (OECD, 2017).

In principle, each dimension constituting the extrinsic and intrinsic qualities of a job can encompass both objective and subjective sub-indicators. For example, assessing the quality of pay necessitates investigating both the actual remuneration and its adequacy in meeting workers’ needs within a given context, as well as the perceived adequacy of that pay (Knox & Warhurst, 2022). This approach therefore incorporates both objective and subjective measurements of work and employment characteristics (Brown et al., 2012; Cascales Mira, 2021).

However, the simple objective/subjective dichotomy may prove insufficient to fully disentangle the various QoW dimensions. Gosetti (2012) proposes considering two objective and two subjective “components” for each dimension of QoW. From an “objective” perspective, each (intrinsic or extrinsic) dimension encompasses both the “concrete conditions” under which workers operate and workers’ “behaviour”. For instance, a worker might possess a high degree of autonomy (the ability to make decisions about their work) but not fully utilise this potential (due to perceived risks, effort, or difficulty). Similarly, the actual availability of training (a concrete condition) might not be taken advantage of by a worker. From a subjective perspective, it is possible to differentiate between workers’ evaluation of their working circumstances and their satisfaction with these circumstances.

This approach appears particularly insightful as it highlights worker agency and their subjectivities. At the same time, including satisfaction within the definition of QoW appears problematic, given that satisfaction arguably pertains to the “effects” of QoW on worker wellbeing. As will be discussed subsequently (Chapter 5), work/employment satisfaction is more appropriately conceptualised as an outcome of QoW.

3.3 *Quality of Working Life (QoWL): a synthesis*

Drawing upon the foregoing discussion, in our analysis will focus on the Quality of Working Life, as summarised in Table 3.1.

QoWL encompasses three distinct yet interconnected elements:

- A. **Job quality:** This encompasses the observable, concrete conditions under which specific work and its associated employment relations are realised. It comprises both work quality and employment quality.
- B. **Behaviour and interactions:** This refers to the manner in which a job (both work and employment aspects) is enacted by the individual worker. It is represented by the observable behaviour of the worker in interaction with colleagues, organisational management, and other relevant parties. This component involves the implicit and explicit negotiations of the available concrete conditions (A), informed also by the worker's perceptions and subjectivity (C).
- C. **Reflexivity and subjectivity:** This denotes the ways in which a worker perceives and evaluates the quality of their work and employment relations across a range of dimensions.

For instance, the degree of professional autonomy is one dimension of job quality, specifically work quality. The degree of autonomy as outlined in a job description is not a constituent of work quality, but rather one of its antecedents. Instead, work quality is constituted by the concrete possibilities (the material conditions) for exerting autonomy based on the specific work organisation in which workers operate. These conditions form the object of behaviour, interactions, and negotiations that shape the actual experience of autonomy (e.g., exerted autonomy) in the workplace. Both material conditions and actual behaviour are externally observable and do not necessarily entail the subjective perspective

of the workers. Finally, workers' subjectivity encompasses their perspective and assessment of the degree of autonomy they experience.

A second example concerns working times as an extrinsic dimension of QoWL. Formal regulations – e.g., established by collective agreements – represent the antecedent of this specific dimension of QoWL, which encompasses: (a) the actual possibilities offered by the organisation for organising working times – e.g., shifts, time flexibility; (b) the use that workers make of these possibilities in interaction and negotiation with others; and (c) the meaning they ascribe to them.

It is important to note that the abstract rules underpinning the concrete work and employment relations, as well as their negotiation, are considered part of the broader "context" in which QoWL emerges (alongside other aspects to be addressed in Chapter 4), rather than a direct component of QoWL itself. Similarly, worker satisfaction is conceptualised as an outcome of QoWL (as will be elaborated in Chapter 5), and therefore is not included as a constituent element of QoWL.

Table 3.1.

Content	Abstract rules	Concrete conditions	Concrete behaviour	Assessment	Satisfaction
Perspective	Objective	Objective		Subjective	
Domain	Context	Quality of Working Life			Outcome
		A. Job Quality <i>Work quality + employment quality</i>	B. Behaviour Interactions	C. Reflexivity and subjectivity	Wellbeing
Example intrinsic dimension: autonomy	Autonomy according to job description	<i>Autonomy according to practical circumstances</i>	<i>Exerted autonomy</i>	<i>Evaluated/perceived level of autonomy</i>	Satisfaction with autonomy
Example extrinsic dimension: work-life balance	Rules and regulations regarding e.g. time flexibility and leaves	<i>Concrete availability of time flexibility and leaves within the specific employment relation</i>	<i>Use of time flexibility and leaves</i>	<i>Evaluated/perceived level of pay</i>	Satisfaction with pay

Source: own elaboration

3.4 Measuring QoWL

The measurement of QoW can be undertaken using either a system of indicators or a composite index. A system of indicators comprises a coherent and interrelated set of measures designed to capture the diverse attributes of work and employment that influence worker wellbeing. Conversely, a composite index represents a singular aggregate measure that synthesises information from the various dimensions of job quality into a single metric (Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2011).

Both approaches share fundamental components: the object of analysis (job quality), the modelling of the dimensions to be measured (ideally grounded in theoretical frameworks), and the identification of pertinent variables to assess these dimensions (Muñoz de Bustillo et al., 2011).

However, a key distinction exists between the two methodologies. A system of indicators provides individual scores for each dimension within the conceptual model, enabling a detailed and nuanced understanding of job quality across its multiple facets. In contrast, a composite index extends this process by aggregating these dimensional scores into a single numerical value. This aggregation implies a unified and unidirectional interpretation of job quality, which, irrespective of the number of constituent components, positions different countries or social groups along a one-dimensional continuum ranging from poor to excellent job quality. This approach yields a clear and straightforward ranking, thereby facilitating ease of comparison across different cases.

4. Explaining QoWL

In this chapter, we will discuss the potential determinants of QoWL as previously defined. It is important to note that the focus on antecedents may vary across different research streams and traditions, with some emphasizing the factors influencing specific aspects and components of QoWL – such as job quality (comprising work and employment quality) – while others focus on the perceptions, subjectivities, and behaviour of workers.

Based on a review of the existing literature, we can delineate three distinct levels of factors that potentially affect QoWL: macro, meso, and micro. Macro factors encompass the broader institutional context, ranging from prevailing social norms and meanings to the established framework of regulations and policies. Meso factors pertain to the organisational aspects within which work and employment are embedded. Micro factors refer to the characteristics of the individual actors within the work and employment organisational setting.

4.1 *Macro-level determinants*

Scholars concur that institutions exert a significant influence on QoWL, particularly on job quality, encompassing both work and employment quality. The primary and most evident influence stems from specific labour market institutions, such as employment protection legislation, collective bargaining systems, minimum wage regulations, union density, and union viability. These institutions shape job quality by affecting job stability, wage levels, working conditions, and collective representation, ultimately defining the structural conditions of employment across diverse contexts (Esser & Olsen, 2011; Meagher et al., 2016; Olsen et al., 2010). Furthermore, various features of the welfare state may exert direct or indirect effects on several components of job quality (Gallie, 2007a; Gosetti, 2012; Muñoz de Bustillo, 2011). A direct influence is exemplified by the (un)availability of paid care leave, which directly impacts work-life balance as a component of employment quality. An indirect influence is illustrated by the (lack of) access to high-quality healthcare, which is likely to affect health and safety as a component of work quality.

More broadly, welfare systems or welfare regimes are likely to generate discernible differences in QoWL. With specific regard to the care sector, the political economy approach offers an understanding of the quantity and quality of employment in this service sector as a specific response to the cost-disease problem (Baumol, 1967; Esping-Andersen, 1990, 1999). Beyond the familialising option characteristic of conservative welfare regimes, this perspective posits a state-versus-market dichotomy: as care work transitions out of the family sphere, it tends towards either state or market provision, with consequent high and low levels of public employment, regulation, wages, and worker protection, respectively. Overall, transformations observed in residential LTC services have been interpreted as a shift from “state” to “market” provision, driven by cost containment and marketisation/privatisation policies (Greve, 2017). Consequently, the degree of investment in and

regulation of care services appears pertinent to QoWL. Moreover, research on migrant care work (Da Roit & Weicht, 2013) indicates that the regulation of services, employment, and migration is likely to produce specific effects on working conditions.

Societal factors pertaining to the social organisation of paid and unpaid work, and the associated social norms, are also of considerable importance. Drawing upon the feminist gendered devaluation perspective, the degree of feminisation and racialisation/ethnicisation of specific segments of the labour market is likely to affect the status of workers within those segments, the regulations governing work profiles and employment conditions, as well as the concrete conditions prevailing on the work floor (Folbre, 2001, 2006; Glenn, 2010).

4.2 *Meso-level determinants*

At the meso-level, the analysis focuses on organisational features that are likely to influence QoWL, specifically the characteristics of employers and their management and work organisation practices.

For instance, a segment of the literature suggests significant differences in work experiences across for-profit, non-profit, and public organisations. Non-profit organisations, for example, are often argued to foster the development of meaningful work relations, autonomy, recognition, and non-material rewards (Benz, 2005; Borzaga & Tortia, 2006; Mirvis, 1992; Van Puyvelde et al., 2012). Workers' identification with the values of the non-profit sector is posited to enhance emotional engagement with the social relevance of their activities, a constitutive element of care work (Twigg, 2006). These dynamics may enable non-profit organisations to operate with greater work flexibility and potentially offer lower wages, which are accepted by workers through a form of “ethical self-containment” (Paci, 2007). Conversely, the degree of professionalisation and the size of these organisations may either mitigate or amplify these mechanisms (Paci, 2007), alongside the organisation of work itself, such as the extent of standardisation and Taylorisation of tasks. Overall, a simplistic dichotomy between public, for-profit, and non-profit sectors appears to be an oversimplification. Firstly, it remains unclear whether and under what conditions the non-profit sector genuinely provides an alternative, community-based, and value-driven logic, or if it functions as an extension of the state or the market. Secondly, the introduction of quasi-markets (LeGrand & Bartlett, 2003) and consumer-led markets, coupled with managerialisation and competition driven by New Public Management (NPM), has blurred the traditional public-private distinction (Braithwaite et al., 2007) as public (and non-profit) organisations have adopted market-based logics (Anttonen & Meagher, 2013; Armstrong & Day, 2004). The rise of hybrid forms of service provision based on outsourcing has effectively introduced private sector dynamics into public employment, altering job quality through increased casualisation, the fragmentation of employment relationships, and the transfer of risk from employers to workers. In numerous instances, outsourcing in the public sector has led to a deterioration of working conditions, as outsourced workers often experience weaker protections, lower wages, and reduced access to collective bargaining compared to their counterparts directly employed by public institutions (Dorigatti et al., 2020; Grimshaw et al., 2015; Mori, 2017).

The structure of the production chain also influences job quality by shaping employment stability and control over working conditions. Lead firms often possess greater resources and bargaining power, which can facilitate more effective enforcement of labour protections. In contrast, subcontractors, particularly those operating at lower tiers of the supply chain, frequently face pressure to reduce costs, leading to greater job insecurity and weaker labour protections (Grimshaw et al., 2015).

Furthermore, work organisation and management play a crucial role in shaping job quality, influencing key aspects such as autonomy, participation, job security, working time, and access to benefits (Eurofound, 2021b; Piasna, 2024). As highlighted in early studies on work design (Bolweg, 1976), organisational models based on standardisation, task fragmentation, and hierarchical control often limit workers' autonomy, restrict skill development, and increase feelings of alienation. Conversely, more decentralised structures that promote task enrichment, teamwork, and participatory decision-making can improve working conditions, strengthen professional recognition, and reduce job insecurity (Gallie, 2013).

Finally, trade unions play a significant role in shaping job quality (Simms, 2015). They are traditionally viewed as a force for equality and fairness in the workplace, helping to reduce wage disparities and enforce labour protections. Strong union representation is associated with higher wages, better contractual protections, improved labour standards, and a greater ability for workers to influence organisational decisions, which in turn enhances job quality (Bryson & Green, 2015; Vidal & Kusnet, 2009).

4.3 *Micro-level determinants*

At the micro-level, the analysis centres on the profile of workers – encompassing gender, age, socioeconomic circumstances, migratory background, and family situation – and their strategies, which present both opportunities and constraints for their agency. These factors influence their ability to negotiate concrete conditions and the meaning they ascribe to their work and employment experiences (Folbre, 2001; Kittay, 1999). Among the primary micro-level determinants, various resources, including skills and knowledge, social networks, and financial means, can shape job quality in diverse ways. Skills and knowledge, encompassing education, technical expertise, and work experience, are frequently associated with enhanced job opportunities and career mobility (Ashton & Green, 1996; Gallie, 2007a). Social networks, both professional and informal, can facilitate access to job opportunities, augment bargaining power, and provide support in precarious situations, although their impact is contingent upon the type and strength of social ties (Granovetter, 1973; Lin, 2001). Beyond these resources, the manner in which individuals construct the meaning of work shapes their experience of job quality, as different orientations – instrumental, expressive, or relational – mediate their expectations and evaluations of working conditions. These subjective interpretations do not exist in isolation but intersect with structural constraints and opportunities, influencing the perceived acceptability of certain conditions (Spanò, 2019).

5. The outcomes of QoWL

QoWL, understood as the concrete conditions under which work and employment are experienced, enacted, and evaluated by workers, is likely to contribute to specific outcomes in terms of their wellbeing.

5.1 Wellbeing

Well-being is typically conceptualised as a multidimensional construct encompassing (experiences of) health, life outcomes, and satisfaction. Assessments of well-being can be applied to both specific life domains and broader evaluations, employing either a subjective or an objective perspective. In recent years, a consensus has emerged among scholars in occupational health, human resource management (HRM), and management studies regarding the multidimensional nature of well-being (e.g., Grant et al., 2007; Huppert & So, 2013; Ilies et al., 2015). One influential model, proposed by Grant and colleagues (2007), identifies three key dimensions: health, happiness, and social well-being. Health refers to physical well-being. Happiness encompasses psychological well-being, which is further differentiated into hedonic (or subjective) and eudaimonic well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Relational (or social) well-being pertains to the quality of social interactions.

5.1.1 Health

Health, in this context, refers to the physiological and mental aspects of employees' well-being at work, encompassing job-related distress symptoms, anxiety, burnout, and depression (Imboden et al., 2024).

5.1.2 Hedonic happiness: subjective wellbeing and satisfaction

Happiness, a component of well-being conceptualised and operationalised as inherently subjective, is differentiated into hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Hedonic well-being primarily focuses on the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain, encompassing an individual's evaluation of their own life, specifically their assessment of how well their life is progressing and the extent to which they are obtaining desired outcomes, both emotionally and cognitively. It comprises (a) frequent pleasant feelings, (b) infrequent unpleasant feelings, and (c) an overall judgment of life satisfaction. Also known as subjective well-being (Diener, 1984), it has been commonly measured in the workplace through employees' job satisfaction and positive affect related to work.

More specifically, subjective well-being encompasses how individuals perceive and evaluate their lives holistically, as well as the specific domains and activities within them (Stone & Mackie, 2013). Over the past decade, subjective well-being, also referred to as self-reported well-being, has experienced a resurgence in interest among researchers, policymakers, the media, and the general public. This renewed attention stems from the recognition that subjective well-being offers valuable insights into

the economic, social, and health conditions of populations and can significantly inform policy decisions in these domains (Krueger et al., 2009; Layard, 2006).

5.1.3 Eudaimonic happiness: engagement and meaningfulness

Eudaimonic well-being refers to the realisation of valued human potential (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Within the work domain, it has been primarily measured through work engagement and the perceived sense of having a meaningful and worthwhile job.

5.1.4 Social wellbeing

Relational well-being, also referred to as “social well-being”, pertains to the perceived quality of employees' social interactions (Costello, 2020).

5.2 The relationship between QoWL and well-being

Several studies have demonstrated a significant influence of QoWL on subjective well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Bowling & Eschleman, 2010; Eurofound, 2017b; van der Doef & Maes, 1999; Warr, 1990). However, these studies also indicate that not all aspects and dimensions of job quality exert a direct impact on subjective well-being. According to Horowitz (2016), the effect of each dimension of job quality (e.g., monetary compensation, job security, individual task discretion, work intensity, and safe working conditions) on subjective well-being varies. Certain dimensions, such as job security, income level, and working hours and their distribution, may have a direct positive association with subjective well-being. For instance, individuals with stable employment, adequate income, and reasonable work hours are more likely to report higher levels of satisfaction and lower stress. Other dimensions are mediated by factors such as economic conditions and family responsibilities, social life, and individual characteristics (e.g., personality, resilience, and expectations), resulting in a more intricate relationship than previously understood. For example, a supportive work environment and positive relationships with colleagues can amplify the benefits of positive job quality factors. Employees who perceive a sense of control over their work and decision-making processes may experience better outcomes, even when other aspects of their job quality are suboptimal. High job demands without sufficient support may negate the positive effects of good pay or benefits, indicating that workload is a crucial mediator in the relationship between QoWL and well-being. For instance, a high-intensity job that leaves limited free time is likely to influence not only the quantity but also the quality of that free time, potentially leading individuals to engage in activities with lower social content (Horowitz, 2016).

This suggests that the influence of work quality on well-being is often indirect, operating through these mediating factors. This nuanced understanding underscores the complex interplay between the various dimensions of QoWL and their indirect effects on well-being, including satisfaction.

Furthermore, this literature highlights the importance of personal characteristics, social relations, and expectations (which are socially influenced) in mediating the relationship between concrete work and employment quality and satisfaction, as well as other aspects of well-being.

5.2.1 *QoWL and Satisfaction*

As previously discussed, satisfaction can be considered a component of subjective well-being: when work and employment conditions meet the needs of workers, they enhance their subjective well-being, particularly their satisfaction. Extending this concept, a tradition exists that views subjective well-being at work, and more specifically job satisfaction, as the principal indicator of QoWL (Clark, 2011). This perspective implies that if a worker expresses satisfaction with their job (or specific aspects thereof, such as pay, working hours, autonomy, etc.), the latter can be deemed of good quality (Brown et al., 2012).

This approach, particularly favoured among economists, offers certain pragmatic advantages, such as facilitating the analysis of pertinent variables, simplifying data collection, and enabling the utilisation of readily available or easily collected data. However, researchers have raised significant concerns regarding the identification of QoWL solely with job satisfaction. Firstly, satisfaction does not invariably reflect the actual fulfilment of workers' needs (Green, 2012). Secondly, the paradox exists wherein objectively low-quality jobs may be subjectively perceived as satisfactory by workers (Brown et al., 2012; Green, 2006). This paradox can be attributed to several factors, including workers' aspirations and expectations, which are shaped by their preferences and orientations towards work, as well as by socio-demographic and biographical factors such as gender, race, class, migration status, and age. Furthermore, occupational characteristics like qualifications, experience, and skills influence these perceptions (Brown et al., 2012; Hebson et al., 2015). Social positioning, encompassing personal circumstances, socio-economic background, and external conditions and constraints, also plays a considerable role (Brown et al., 2012; Dorigatti et al., 2024; Hebson et al., 2015). Numerous studies have observed gender as a determinant of job satisfaction: women, on average, report higher levels of job satisfaction than men, despite often being engaged in objectively lower-quality work (Brown et al., 2012; Hebson et al., 2015). For example, research examining job satisfaction in the care sector has indicated that female workers tend to express high levels of job satisfaction despite frequently facing sub-optimal working conditions (Armstrong & Day, 2004; Folbre, 2012; Hebson et al., 2015; Walters, 2005). This phenomenon has been attributed to a combination of altruistic motivations characterizing workers' orientation, the intrinsically rewarding nature of the work itself, and the influence of social norms and gender expectations on women caregivers, which "shape the intrinsic motivation to care for others" (Folbre, 2012, p. 597). Thirdly, the notion that satisfaction serves as a comprehensive measure of job quality presents several challenges when considering the influence of expectations on work (Brown et al., 2012). For example, Clark (1997) suggests that women's higher self-reported job satisfaction may stem from many of them working in low-paid part-time positions, leading to lower expectations compared to those pursuing careers, thus increasing the likelihood of reporting high job satisfaction. However, without a more systematic examination of norms and expectations, it is difficult

to ascertain whether high job satisfaction arises from high job quality, where all job-related needs are met, or if norms and expectations have evolved in response to low job quality, indicating unmet needs (Brown et al., 2012). Furthermore, the specific characteristics of different welfare systems can also have varying impacts on satisfaction. For example, Westover (2012) found that in countries with high levels of unionisation and job protection, job security may be less critical to worker satisfaction. Conversely, in countries with low levels of job protection, perceived safety plays a more significant role in job satisfaction. Consequently, workers in environments with a strong income protection network are less concerned about job security (Gallie, 2007a). Finally, focusing solely on job satisfaction as an indicator of job quality does not elucidate why employees are or are not satisfied (in other words, which features of the working environment are most influential). Therefore, it represents a simplification that does not provide useful guidance for policy formulation.

5.2.2 *Theoretical models of work-related risks for employee wellbeing*

There are three primary models that establish a connection between QoWL and well-being (OECD, 2017). The job demand-control model (or job-strain model) (Karasek, 1979) emphasises the crucial role of job control in mitigating the risks of stress. The effort-reward imbalance model (Siegrist, 1996, 2016) underscores the necessity of a balance between the efforts exerted by workers and the rewards they receive from the organisation. Rewards encompass three key factors: salary and career prospects; esteem; and job security. An imbalance characterised by high effort and low rewards at work elevates the likelihood of adverse health outcomes. The job demands-resources model, in contrast, focuses on the equilibrium between the demands inherent in a job and the resources available to workers to meet those demands (Bakker et al., 2023; Demerouti et al., 2001).

The OECD framework builds upon the third approach, the job demands-resources model (Cazes et al., 2016; OECD, 2017). It posits three complementary dimensions of job quality: (a) earnings quality, (b) labour market security, and (c) the quality of the working environment. Furthermore, it proposes a worker-oriented index of the quality of the working environment, drawing on established research in sociology and occupational health to identify the principal aspects of jobs that contribute to workers' well-being. This index, adopted by the European survey of working conditions (e.g., Eurofound, 2021b), pertains to the nature and intensity of work performed, the organisation of work, and the working atmosphere. Consistent with the demands-resources theory (Bakker et al., 2023; Demerouti et al., 2001), this index measures the balance between job demands and job resources that can influence employees' health. Two types of job demands are identified (i.e., time pressure and physical health risk factors), and two types of job resources, namely (a) work autonomy and learning opportunities, and (b) workplace relationships (i.e., the extent to which positive relations prevail) (OECD, 2017, pp. 73-75) (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1 Summary of the job demands-resources model

Job demands	Job resources
Time pressure (e.g. long hours, no time off, high speed, tight deadlines)	Autonomy (e.g. order and method of tasks) Learning opportunities (e.g. training)
Physical health risks (e.g. positions, loads, exposure to vibrations, noise, high/low temperature)	Good workplace relationships

Source: own elaboration on OECD 2017: 73-75

PART II

Studying QoWL in residential care facilities

6. The international literature on QoWL in (residential) long-term care services

This chapter discusses the conceptualisation and study of QoWL within residential LTC facilities, as well as how its determinants and outcomes have been addressed in international literature.

6.1 *QoWL in residential care services: problems, focus and conceptualisation*

Research on QoWL within the sector of residential LTC facilities has largely developed since 2010, with a considerable increase in scholarly attention following the Covid-19 pandemic (henceforth “pandemic”). A review of the international literature indicates that the majority of publications on this topic have been concentrated in the 2020-2024 period. Geographically, the primary contributions originate from Anglophone countries (particularly the US and Canada) and the Netherlands.

6.1.1 *Structural problems and the role of the pandemic*

The pandemic significantly amplified attention towards the structural challenges within the residential LTC sector, issues that had, to some extent, already been evident in the preceding decade. Numerous studies underscore that, in the face of increasingly complex needs among residents, these services exhibit high workforce turnover, absenteeism, and shortages. These features are frequently associated with the critical working conditions affecting the workforce in residential LTC facilities (Berta et al., 2018; Bittman et al., 2003; Choi et al., 2023; Freidus & Shenk, 2024; Hawes & Wang, 2022; Hidaka et al., 2022; Howe, 2014; Howes, 2009; Kennedy, 2023; Kim & Choi, 2023; Kleunen et al., 2000; Radford et al., 2015; Steward et al., 2023; Tummers et al., 2013; Yang & Shiu, 2023). Several contributions specifically analyse the impact of the pandemic on the QoWL within these working environments (Bahr et al., 2023; Duijs et al., 2023; Freidus & Shenk, 2024; Roca-Escoda et al., 2022; Simmons et al., 2022; Song et al., 2024; Thirsk, 2022; Thorne, 2023; Titley, 2023).

In the subsequent sections, we will illustrate how these studies conceptually and analytically relate to the study of QoWL and their specific contributions to this field.

6.1.2 *Conceptualisation and measurement: between QoWL and its outcomes*

The majority of the reviewed studies do not directly engage with the analysis of QoWL and the intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions of job quality. Instead, they tend to concentrate on its outcomes – such as burnout, turnover, and shortages – treating these as proxies or indicators of QoWL.

Firstly, job satisfaction is the most prevalent indicator employed in the selected papers, typically analysed through questionnaires and interviews with care aides, nurses, and also supervisors and managers in residential care settings (Hawes & Wang, 2022; Howe, 2014; Ikeda-Sonoda et al., 2020;

Kim et al., 2019; Krueger et al., 2002; Pardo-Garcia, 2021; Park et al., 2017; Perreira et al., 2019; Sikorska-Simmons, 2006).

Secondly, there is a rather widespread focus on well-being, with indicators such as the level of burnout and stress frequently used as proxies for QoWL (e.g., Bittman et al., 2003; Kim & Choi, 2023; Kim et al., 2019).

Thirdly, turnover rates are utilised as a proxy for QoWL (Alfredson & Annerstedt, 1994; Freidus & Shenk, 2024; Howes, 2009). Some studies also include workers' intentions or motivations to leave or stay in their job as proxy indicators (Bittman et al., 2003; Chamberlain et al., 2020; Duan et al., 2023; Hidaka et al., 2022; Kalanlar & Kuru Alici, 2020; Kawamura et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2019; Kim & Choi, 2023).

Fourthly, the literature analyses workers' perspectives and thoughts regarding their performance or sense of efficacy and the needs for improvement within the work environment (Hidaka et al., 2022; Jung et al., 2020; Park et al., 2017).

6.1.3 Contributions on QoWL dimensions and outcomes

While not consistently framed within an explicit QoWL framework, the reviewed literature offers insights into specific (particularly intrinsic) dimensions of LTC care work that align with the more general QoWL literature, as well as their relationship with well-being outcomes.

Several studies highlight the inherently challenging nature of the job from a physical, relational, and emotional standpoint. High physical and psychological workload, health and safety risks, and demanding existential experiences (e.g., contact with death, complex illness, the physical body, dementia) are identified as key features that make care work in residential services intrinsically difficult (Braedly et al., 2018; Caspar et al., 2020; Duijs et al., 2023; Freidus & Shenk, 2024; Hale et al., 2021; Heijkants et al., 2022; Hussein, 2017; Kalanlar & Kuru Alici, 2020; Leclerc et al., 2014; Roca-Escoda et al., 2022). Similarly, the compromised conditions and behaviours of residents (older adults with dementia or experiencing social isolation, responsive behaviours, and neuropsychiatric symptoms) present an inherently challenging aspect for residential LTC workers (Chamberlain et al., 2020; Cranley, 2011; Yang & Shiu, 2023; Zwijsen et al., 2015).

These intrinsic challenges are reflected in problematic physical and, especially, psychological health outcomes: burnout, emotional exhaustion, stress, psychological strain, as well as injuries and muscle pain, are considered manifest symptoms of care staff discomfort (Bittman et al., 2003; Braedly et al., 2018; Choi et al., 2023; Duan et al., 2023; Hussein, 2017; Kim et al., 2019, 2023; Park et al., 2017; Tsukamoto et al., 2015).

Secondly, QoWL in elderly care is associated with a limited possibility of observing clinical improvement among residents, which can negatively influence workers' sense of efficacy (Alfredson et al., 1994). More generally, studies underscore a discrepancy between workers' perceived contribution to the quality of care, including residents' and their family caregivers' well-being, and the difficulty in fulfilling

such expectations. This mismatch frequently arises because care aides and nurses must primarily address residents' basic needs (feeding, bathing, medication administration, etc.) and only secondarily focus on their holistic well-being (Berta et al., 2018; Bjerregaard et al., 2017; Boumans et al., 2008; Caspar et al., 2020, 2021; Hale et al., 2021).

Thirdly, several papers emphasise the central role of relational dimensions in care work within residential services. Positive caring interactions with residents and their family caregivers, as well as effective communication and cooperation among colleagues and supervisors, are found to foster a sense of belonging and affiliation to the workplace, which contributes to job quality (Berta et al., 2018; Bjerregaard et al., 2017; Hale et al., 2021; Radford et al., 2015).

Fourthly, the literature reports on the contradictory role of specific extrinsic dimensions of QoWL in this sector. Partly as a result of evolving employment relations, care work tends to be characterised by low wages and limited job security (Osterman, 2019), which can negatively affect QoWL. However, research on the impact of rewards and incentives on workforce recruitment and retention has indicated that pay increases are often not the primary influencing factor in choosing and remaining in care jobs (Lucas et al., 2009). The perceived lack of material recognition appears to be, to some extent, compensated by the intrinsically rewarding and virtuous nature of the work (Hussein, 2017).

Finally, the literature explores the influence of “unpaid work” as a dimension affecting QoWL. Neoliberal policies applied to care employment regulation (Baines & Armstrong, 2019; Martinez-Lacoba et al., 2021) have fostered the reduction or elimination of relationship-building practices, leaving many care staff with workloads consisting almost entirely of repetitive technical tasks to be completed within the shortest possible timeframes. Consequently, care staff often work unpaid hours to complete their care duties, leading to increased fatigue and stress (Baines & Armstrong, 2019).

6.2 Models and measurements

Regarding the measurement of QoWL outcomes in terms of well-being (or its absence), the reviewed studies employ validated scales to assess burnout, such as the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1986; Maslach & Leiter, 2008) and the Utrecht Burnout Scale (Van Duinen et al., 2019). Stress and burden are measured using instruments like the Brief Job Stress Questionnaire (Kawada & Otsuka, 2011; Yu et al., 2020) and the Professional Care Team Burden Scale (Auer et al., 2015; Kalanlar & Kuru Alici, 2020).

Furthermore, scales are available to evaluate the quality of the work environment and identify needs for workplace improvement, for example, the Work Environment Scale and the Systematic Workplace-Improvement Needs Generation (Hidaka et al., 2022).

The Leiden Quality of Work Questionnaire (LQWQ) (Van der Doef & Maes, 1999) comprises 23 items divided into five subscales. The 'work and time pressure' subscale (five items) measures demands, the “job satisfaction” subscale (six items) assesses general job satisfaction, the “autonomous decision making” subscale (four items) measures control over work, and the “social support from colleagues”

(four items) and “social support from supervisors” (four items) subscales measure social support. An adaptation of this instrument exists for nurses (Zwijnen et al., 2015).

The Quality of Work Life (QoWL) Measure (Berta, 2018; Sirgy et al., 2001) was designed to capture the extent to which the work environment, job requirements, supervision, and other organisational programs are perceived to meet employees' needs. This instrument identifies seven major needs: (1) health and safety; (2) economic and family needs; (3) social needs (collegiality at work and leisure time off work); (4) esteem (recognition and appreciation of work within and outside the organisation); (5) self-actualisation needs (realisation of one's potential); (6) knowledge needs (learning to enhance job and professional skills); and (7) aesthetic needs (including creativity).

6.3 *The CWRQoL model*

Finally, Hussein and colleagues (2022) developed a specific scale to measure Care Work Related Quality of Life (CWRQoL). The authors rightly argue that much existing research confines well-being at work to measures of burnout or to single-item scales assessing general job satisfaction or intention to quit. To address this gap, they employed a mixed-methods approach to conceptualise and detail the specific components of quality of life at work among LTC workers through an iterative process involving a literature scoping review, qualitative interviews and focus groups, and content validity testing (Hussein et al., 2022). This process resulted in the identification of seven domains, subdomains, and items that constitute a comprehensive scale for measuring CWRQoL. The theoretical model posits three underlying factors influencing care workers' well-being.

The first factor is the societal recognition of care work, which encompasses professional identity (e.g., feeling respected and valued by the employer, colleagues, clients, other professionals, and the public, as well as a sense of pride in the profession) and the perceived value attributed to the work. The second factor consists of care organisation characteristics, such as staffing levels, management and supervision practices, work environment, training and development opportunities, and pay and benefits. The third factor is the nature of care work itself, which encompasses time management, interpersonal relations, specific tasks, and clients' needs. These factors interact to affect care workers' physical, mental, financial, social, and environmental well-being, which in turn can affect their broader life through a spillover effect from work to home life.

The authors clarify that these domains range from concrete and objective aspects (such as employer characteristics) to abstract, subjective experiences (such as emotional well-being). Through their effects and interactions, these domains collectively formulate care workers' CWRQoL.

The proposed model is dynamic, acknowledging that the components and their interactions can vary between individuals and within an individual's experiences over time.

6.4 *Determinants of QoWL in residential LTC facilities*

The international literature on QoWL in residential LTC services presents a diversified picture of the primary determinants at the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels. However, scholarly attention appears to be disproportionately directed towards meso-level (organisational) factors.

The majority of contributions focuses on organisational features that are likely to influence QoWL (Caspar et al., 2020; Hale et al., 2021; Krueger et al., 2002; Ulsperger et al., 2007). In particular, several studies underscore the effect of the implementation of specific interventions (staff training programs, teamwork initiatives, new care practice approaches) on job satisfaction and motivation, retention rates, workforce performance, and quality of care (Alfredson et al., 1994; Berendonk et al., 2019; Bittman et al., 2003; Boersma et al., 2017; Boumans et al., 2008; Caspar et al., 2021; Heijkants et al., 2022; Howe, 2014; Iwata et al., 1976; Van Duinen, 2019; Verbeek et al., 2020).

Organisational support, such as supervisor support and mutual support among colleagues, is considered a significant instrument for underpinning daily care work activities (Berta et al., 2018; Hawes & Wang, 2022; Perreira et al., 2019; Radford et al., 2015). Notably, one contribution reports that workers define a company that successfully promotes QoWL through its organisational culture as a "caring company" (Bjerregaard et al., 2017). Some contributions address how more specific organisational aspects, such as the division of tasks, working hours distributions, and the use of digital tools, affect QoWL (Dussuet et al., 2022; Kawamura et al., 2015; Kim & al., 2019).

At the macro-level, international literature explores determinants of QoWL, primarily focusing on employment and care regulation, and secondly on migration regulation. Global and local policy directions, including austerity measures, New Public Management, and workplace safety and health policy, are considered as factors influencing work pressure, wages, and workload (Baines & Armstrong, 2019; Duijs et al., 2023; Hussein, 2017). Privatisation and marketisation of the care sector, reductions in social and healthcare funding, and a professional training system providing limited education for care workers are the main factors identified (Bittman et al., 2003; Boumans et al., 2008; Howes, 2009; Kim & Seo, 2018; Stone & Harahan, 2010). Few articles analyse features connected to migration regulation (Redfoot et al., 2008; Zallman et al., 2019), focusing on how policies curtailing immigration are likely to compromise the availability of care for elderly individuals.

At the micro-level, the literature addresses how and what individual features and profiles of workers are related to QoWL in residential facilities. Gender (and to some extent migration) operates at the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels. The majority of contributions highlight gender factors. Care work represents a feminised work environment in which the norms, values, pay, and working conditions reflect social assumptions that women's "natural" abilities, family roles, and subordinate position in society make them ideal for this work, which is usually considered unskilled or low skilled. Several authors analyse the prevalence of women among care staff and how gender characteristics affect some dimensions of job quality, such as wages, work-life balance, type of contracts, and career development (Baines et al., 2019; Chamberlain et al., 2020; Hussein, 2017; Leach & Joseph, 2011; Redfoot et al., 2008). Similarly, studies on the prevalence of minority and immigrant workforces examine how

racial/ethnic differences influence job satisfaction, job strain, or experienced working conditions (Hawes & Wang, 2022; Hurtado et al., 2012; Redfoot et al., 2008; Simmons et al., 2022).

7. The Italian literature on QoWL in (residential) LTC services

In this chapter, we present the findings of our review of the Italian literature concerning QoWL within (residential) Long-Term Care (LTC) services, conducted as an integral part of this project.

7.1 *The Italian debate*

Prior to the pandemic, a limited number of Italian studies addressed the quality of care provision in residential care facilities, often touching upon the QoWL of LTC workers (Collini et al., 2010; Fiabane et al., 2012; Guerrini, 2018; Iurlaro, 2010; Minelli et al., 2010; Montemurro, 2011; NNA, 2015; Nuzzo et al., 2012; Sebastiano et al., 2011, 2014; Tanzi et al., 2009; Iseppato & Ricchini, 2013).

Subsequently, the pandemic crisis, which exerted a particularly severe impact on residential care facilities, evidenced by exceptionally high mortality rates among both residents and staff (Amnesty International Italia, 2020; Arlotti & Ranci, 2021; Mattioli et al., 2020; Pellegrini & Sicuro, 2020; Zaccone et al., 2021), drew considerable attention to structurally problematic conditions within this sector. This situation also instigated public debate regarding deficiencies in basic hygienic standards and safety for both care recipients and care workers, alongside prevalent issues of high staff turnover and understaffing (Bais & Patussi, 2019; Crippa et al., 2021; Mohcine El Arrag, 2020). Media reports have increasingly highlighted concerns pertaining to widespread shortages of professional staff – primarily nurses and an increasing number of personal care workers – exacerbated by the growing pressure resulting from the increasingly severe conditions of residents and insufficient staffing levels. This confluence of factors has subsequently contributed to the spread of burnout, recruitment difficulties, and staff turnover.

Notwithstanding this heightened awareness, scholarly inquiry has remained limited, particularly concerning personal care workers (in Italian “OSS”, i.e., *operatore socio-sanitario*), with the existing literature predominantly focusing on nurses within acute care settings (Serra et al., 2023). A few contributions primarily address satisfaction, work engagement, and stress/burnout, alongside their antecedents, from an occupational health perspective (Foà et al., 2020; Mangiavalori et al., 2024) or from an economic and managerial standpoint (Fosti et al., 2023; Fosti et al., 2022). Furthermore, research has underscored the necessity to revise care, living, and working conditions within residential LTC facilities (Crippa et al., 2021).

7.2 *QoWL in residential care services: dimensions, outcomes and determinants*

While the body of Italian literature specifically addressing Quality of Working Life (QoWL) in residential LTC services remains limited, a discernible trend emerges. Studies predominantly focus on

job satisfaction, stress/burnout, work engagement, and turnover, both as key indicators of QoWL and as potential antecedents influencing the quality of care provided. Occasionally, attention is directed towards QoWL dimensions that may yield both positive and negative outcomes in terms of satisfaction and well-being. In the subsequent sections, we will delineate the principal aspects identified in our literature review, initially with respect to QoWL, satisfaction, and health, and subsequently concerning the factors believed to exert an influence upon them.

7.2.1 QoWL, satisfaction, health, and workers' strategies

The reviewed literature consistently indicates generally lower wages and more precarious employment conditions within residential LTC, particularly in comparison with similar occupations in acute healthcare settings and especially within the private sector and subcontracted LTC services (Agenas, 2012; Bonetti et al., 2020; Di Simone et al., 2023; Sarti, 2011). When considering the intrinsic dimensions of job quality, the focus lies on the challenges posed by the physically demanding nature of the work, which involves tasks such as mobilising residents and exposes workers to specific health risks (Amico, 2019). Attention is also given to the role of the physical work environment in shaping QoWL, particularly concerning the size of the facility and the availability of private and communal spaces. These aspects are posited to influence both the quality of life of residents and the QoWL (and well-being) of workers; furthermore, the availability of adapted equipment for safety is specifically highlighted (Ceron et al., 2023; Tanzi et al., 2009).

Moreover, the relational, communicative, and emotional facets of the work are frequently underscored (Maragon, 2010). "Emotion management" is required to align with organisational expectations, and "sentimental work" is deemed necessary to produce the emotional expressions essential for personalised care (Bellé et al., 2016; Benvenga & Clemente, 2024). Significant sources of stress encompass managing patients with behavioural disorders, addressing the emotional and physical demands of caring for dependent patients, and navigating challenging interactions with patients' families (Ghiglia et al., 2016). The characteristics and conditions of the individuals cared for also constitute a relevant issue. For instance, research has demonstrated that workers employed in Alzheimer's units report higher stress levels, and self-esteem scores are lower among caregivers of patients with mental impairments (Nuzzo et al., 2021). The unsuitability of the physical environment exacerbates difficulties in managing patients with specific behavioural issues, such as wandering, and elevates the risk of falls (Ghiglia et al., 2016). Furthermore, several studies signal the significant role of relationships among colleagues and with supervisors as factors that can either foster or impede well-being in the workplace (Nuzzo et al., 2012; Violante et al., 2009).

Overall, reports depict a demanding work environment necessitating considerable physical and emotional exertion, alongside a high risk of burnout (Crippa et al., 2021). Evidence suggests that the level of stress among workers in residential LTC was already elevated prior to the pandemic due to workload and high emotional exposure (Ghiglia et al., 2016; Sarti, 2011). A recent quantitative study

indicated that while overall stress levels did not significantly change between the pre-pandemic period and one year into the pandemic, the nature of the stress evolved, with fatigue and burnout symptoms becoming more prominent post-pandemic, linked to the demanding work environment and exposure to suffering (Conti et al., 2022; Crippa et al., 2021). Inadequate pay, workload, high staff turnover, and intense emotional experiences related to elderly individuals are found to increase work-related stress/burnout, whereas working autonomy, psychological support, and positive relationships with the elderly appear to mitigate it (Foà et al., 2020). Professional autonomy, a sense of belonging, opportunities for professional growth, and specific training enhance work engagement, while limited career prospects, job insecurity, and low recognition of one's contribution impede it (Foà et al., 2020). It has also been shown that nursing assistants particularly value the opportunity to perform activities that border on typical nursing responsibilities and tasks, such as recording and noting parameters, measuring blood glucose levels, and performing simple dressings and bandages (Primavera & Leonelli, 2022).

The relationship between extrinsic working conditions, workload, emotional burden, and stress, on the one hand, and satisfaction, on the other, appears complex. Low pay and precarious employment are frequently cited as key reasons for recruitment and retention difficulties, and studies report staff dissatisfaction with salaries (Agenas, 2012; Bonetti et al., 2020; Di Simone et al., 2023; Fosti et al., 2022). The challenging working conditions, including heavy workloads, negatively impact workers' overall satisfaction and contribute to staff turnover (Agenas, 2012). However, in some instances, workers express relatively high levels of job satisfaction, learning and development opportunities, teamwork, and recognition of individual contributions (Ghiglia et al., 2016). Other studies underscore that difficult working conditions can coexist with a high level of satisfaction, as it is believed that workers in this sector are often intrinsically motivated rather than primarily by factors such as wages and benefits (Sarti, 2011). For example, qualitative research has demonstrated that nurses derive satisfaction from helping patients, providing relief, building trust, and witnessing improvements in patients' health (Benini & Magenti, 2021). Inter-professional collaboration and positive relationships with superiors, colleagues, and elderly individuals foster job satisfaction (Foà et al., 2020). Conversely, challenges such as heavy workloads, reduction of rest periods, lack of resources, and difficult interactions with colleagues, patients, and families engender dissatisfaction (Benini & Magenti, 2021; Foà et al., 2020).

7.2.2 Policy and regulations affecting QoWL, satisfaction and health

While the Italian debate primarily focuses on organisation-level factors that might enhance QoWL and well-being at work (as discussed below), the literature also highlights the relevance of policy and regulatory factors at the national and regional levels. The increasing complexity of residents' needs, evidenced by rising frailty, higher comorbidity, increased pre-admission acute care needs, and elevated mortality rates (Fosti et al., 2024), has significant consequences for the QoWL of formal care workers, notably heightened physical, psychological, and time pressure (Gabelli, 2023). While this trend is partly a direct consequence of the broader demographic ageing process, it is also linked to the policy and

regulatory framework governing the LTC system. Firstly, the comparatively limited availability of residential care facilities contributes to the concentration of increasingly severe and complex needs (Da Roit, 2010; Da Roit & Ranci, 2021; Asioli, 2024). Secondly, restricted access to appropriate community-based or home-based care, as well as limited accessibility to residential care facilities, leads individuals and families to seek recourse in LTC facilities only when conditions become significantly more severe and unmanageable at home (Da Roit, 2010). Thirdly, the clear trend towards rising clinical complexity within residential care facilities suggests a subtle yet significant shift in their functional role within the LTC continuum: Residential Care Homes (RSA) appear to be providing care that borders on sub-acute or long-term hospital-level intervention, moving beyond a primarily residential or social support model (Asioli, 2024).

This aforementioned evolution has profound implications for the necessary skills and qualifications of staff, the appropriateness of existing operational and quality standards, and the adequacy of staffing and funding models, which were initially designed for a potentially less complex resident population. Based on social policy regulations (predominantly at the regional level), nursing homes are mandated to adhere to specific professional standards, including a minimum number of professional work minutes, to be eligible for public funding (often referred to in Italian as *minutaggio*, i.e., minute-based rules of professional involvement) and receive funding. However, these professional standards and the associated subsidies have been scarcely updated over time, implying a substantial funding gap (Fosti et al., 2024; Pesaresi, 2018). The combination of these (and considered inadequate) “minute-based rules” and funding with the altered profiles of residents imposes considerable pressure on both the organisations and the individual workers, and exacerbates conflicts among workers, residents, and informal caregivers (Benini, 2021; Furnari, 2023).

Moreover, the Italian context is characterised by a high degree of fragmentation in employment regulation: different national collective agreements apply to public, private non-profit, and private for-profit entities. National collective agreements and their implementation, as well as the outsourcing of services, significantly affect wages, job security, and working hours (Falsone, 2024). Furthermore, several reports highlight excessive bureaucracy and administrative tasks as a considerable burden within the Italian LTC sector. These tasks consume valuable time that could otherwise be dedicated to direct resident care, staff training, or relationship-building, potentially impacting both operational efficiency and the quality of the work experience (Agenas, 2012; Sebastiano, 2016; Crippa et al., 2021). The pandemic appears to have amplified these problems due to additional workloads and procedures (Favretto et al., 2021). The critical issue of economic remuneration and the increasing demand for higher wages among care workers following the pandemic (Di Raimondo, 2022; Iurlaro, 2022), particularly in a context of staff shortages, has placed considerable pressure on service providers. This trend, coupled with rising inflation, has led to increased overall costs for service provision. This situation creates constraints for service providers, who, as previously mentioned, cannot rely on increased subsidies, and implies further understaffing, reduced time available for workers to perform their tasks, and heightened work pressure (Anaste, 2022; Fosti et al., 2023).

7.2.3 *Organisational factors affecting QoWL, satisfaction and health*

Meso-level factors influencing QoWL are extensively discussed in the literature, with a particular emphasis on organisational aspects and change management (Iseppato et al., 2024). A prominent argument within the literature posits that the high prevalence of burnout reported in the sector should not be solely attributed to individual vulnerabilities but rather signifies underlying systemic and organisational issues within the Italian LTC system. Factors such as chronic understaffing, inadequate workload management, insufficient support structures, and suboptimal work design significantly contribute to the elevated risk of burnout. This perspective suggests that sustainable solutions necessitate systemic, organisation-level changes rather than solely relying on individual coping strategies (Foà et al., 2020; Fosti et al., 2023).

Given the existing employment regulations, the decisions that organisations make regarding the outsourcing or direct management of services have important ramifications for the quality of work (Agenas, 2012; Bonetti et al., 2020; Di Simone et al., 2023; Sarti, 2011). Similarly, within the established employment regulation framework, organisations may offer supplementary benefits and remuneration, as well as flexible work arrangements that promote work-life balance. The concept of "organisational climate," which encompasses the interplay of supervision, leadership styles, work organisation and task allocation, work programmes, and the degree of bureaucratisation or flexibility in the management of regulations such as minute-based rules, is frequently discussed as crucial for enhancing QoWL (e.g., Bruno et al., 2019). A related concept is that of "relational climate" at the organisational level, referring to the extent to which the organisation fosters positive relationships between management and workers, among workers themselves, and between workers and residents and their informal caregivers, as well as the degree to which the organisation promotes the recognition of workers' contributions (Pasqualotto et al., 2024).

Similarly, attention is directed towards the ways in which organisations enable and encourage training opportunities (Colombo, 2023; Furlaro, 2019), address management and evaluation processes in a manner perceived as "just," and focus on professional development (Sarti, 2011). Employers can assist staff in recognising and differentiating between stress and fatigue to enhance the quality of work (Orsenigo, 2012). Fostering a positive and harmonious environment based on trust and collaboration between colleagues and managers is considered essential for workers' well-being (Della Torre, 2016). Given that care services produce and provide intangible products rich in relational and human content, feedback is identified as a key asset (Maragon, 2013). Attention to communication is highlighted as crucial in managing the emotional aspects of work: organisational strategies can facilitate the sharing of emotions with superiors and colleagues to foster a positive relational climate and workplace well-being, thereby protecting and supporting employees in their interactions with clients and their family members (Pasqualotto et al., 2024). Accessibility to relevant information is deemed crucial for QoWL in terms of safety and for psychological and relational well-being. Finally, it has been underlined that emotions are often individualised in organisational settings, and their management remains the responsibility of individual workers, while the management of emotional expression becomes a metric for evaluating individual work performance, rather than an organisational concern for fostering respectful work practices (Bellè et al., 2014).

7.2.4 Micro-level factors affecting QoWL, satisfaction and health

With respect to more individual-level characteristics, the literature identifies gender as a key issue, particularly concerning emotions. Emotional expression is found to be downplayed or stigmatised, especially for women (though more so in acute care settings than in LTC settings), intersecting with power dynamics and gender roles (Bellè et al., 2014). Furthermore, female professionals appear to be at a higher risk of experiencing violence (Mamo et al., 2020).

In addition, among the micro-level factors influencing the quality of work, the attitude of the workers is considered relevant. Specifically, care professionals exhibiting high personal involvement, often characterised by a lack of professional boundaries rooted in strong work motivation and long-term affiliation with the same organisations, are susceptible to experiencing overtime and unpaid work (Nuzzo et al., 2012).

Furthermore, research sometimes addresses the role played by tenure and experience in work engagement and retention, suggesting that workers with more years of experience tend to remain with their organisation but are less inclined to be engaged in their work (Sarti, 2011).

Finally, while the migratory background of workers and the specific vulnerabilities it entails have been the subject of extensive discussion in home care, particularly within the framework of live-in migrant care work (Da Roit and Weicht, 2013; Pasquinelli & Pozzoli, 2021; Pasquinelli & Rusmini, 2008), it has received considerably less attention in the area of residential LTC work.

PART III – Integrated analytical framework

8. The QWoRE framework: QoWL, wellbeing and workers' strategies in context

8.1 *The framework*

Based on the preceding literature review and discussion, we have elaborated the QWoRe analytical framework, which is summarised in Figure 8.1.

At the centre of the figure are three interdependent objects of analysis:

- QoWL
- Workers' well-being, encompassing satisfaction, health, and social relations
- Workers' strategies in terms of future work and employment pathways

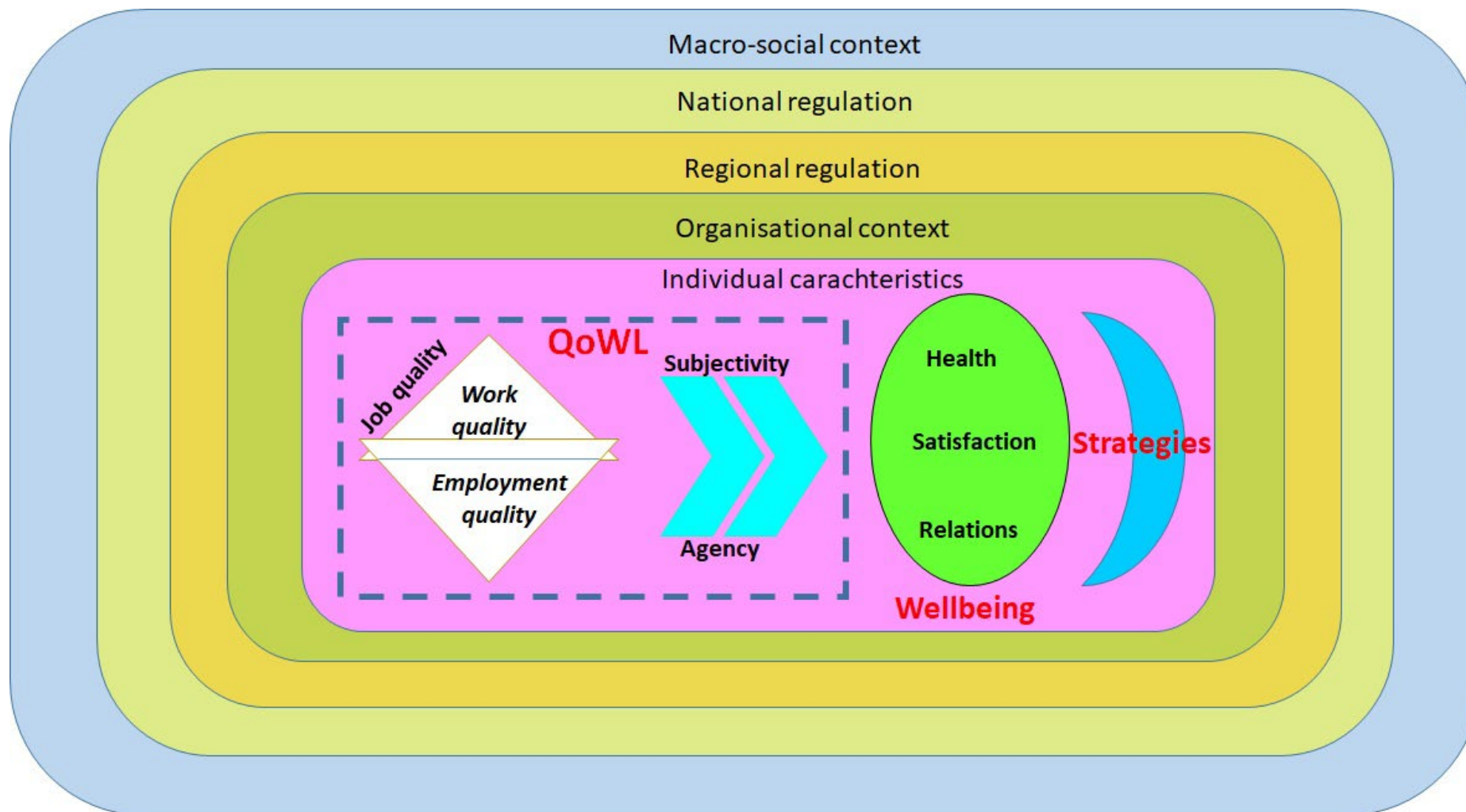
These three objects are embedded within concentric areas that denote the influence of individual characteristics, organisational context, regional- and national-level regulations, and societal norms, which function as antecedents.

The proposed framework is intended as a flexible yet systematic means of guiding the study of QoWL, well-being, and workers' strategies. Specific research questions and hypotheses can be explored regarding the determinants and effects of each of the different elements at the centre of the figure – job quality (or more specifically work and employment quality), workers' behaviour and subjectivities, workers' well-being (including satisfaction, physical and mental health), and strategies. The choice of the specific object of study permits the identification (and selection of its) antecedents and potential consequences. For instance, it is possible to investigate how job quality and/or employment quality are affected by a combination of macro- to micro-level conditions, or which constellations of conditions (including job quality, employment quality, subjectivities, etc.) produce, for example, satisfaction with work.

The framework is amenable to application across qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method research strategies, including those based on a configurational approach, as envisaged in the QWoRe project.

In what follows, we specify the elements that constitute the framework and their interrelations.

Figure 8.1 – QWoRe analytical framework



Source: own elaboration

8.2 QoWL

As illustrated in paragraph 3.3, we define QoWL as constituted by job quality (work and employment quality) and the concrete behaviour of workers, alongside their subjectivity.

More precisely, we consider job quality to be the set of conditions under which work is performed, corresponding to a certain degree and mode of fulfilment of workers' needs. These conditions do not solely entail abstract rules and provisions, but rather the tangible nature and organisation of the work within which individual workers operate, and the actual employment relations of which they are a part.

Job quality is operationalised and measured at the level of individual workers (within the same organisation, different workers may experience varying conditions and therefore differing job quality). Work quality and employment quality together constitute overall job quality.

Work quality refers to the intrinsic dimensions of the work, namely the features that characterise the specific occupation and the organisational, relational, and professional modalities in which the work is structured. In particular, based on the Job Demand-Resource Model and the evidence on QoWL in residential LTC services, we identify four elements of Work Quality, each comprising different components (Table 8.1).

Employment quality refers to the extrinsic dimensions of the relationship between the organisation and the worker.

While we maintain this analytical distinction, we acknowledge that some dimensions of job and employment quality may overlap.

Table 8.1 – Job quality and its dimensions

	Dimensions	Sub-dimensions
Work quality	WQ1) Task characteristics	WQ1a: Autonomy WQ1b: Skill discretion WQ1c: Quantitative demands and time pressure WQ1d: Cognitive demands, i.e. complexity WQ1e: Emotional demands WQ1f: Physical demands
	WQ2) Relational characteristics	WQ2a: Number and strength of professional relations WQ2b: Social support and feedback WQ2c: Adverse relational environment
	WQ3) Recognition	WQ3a: Perceived recognition by society WQ3b: Perceived recognition by organisation WQ3c: Perceived recognition by colleagues/residents/relatives of residents
	WQ4) Physical environment	WQ4a: Safety and physical risks WQ4b: Availability of health protection devices
Employment quality	EQ1) Material reward	EQ1a: Wages EQ2b: Benefits
	EQ2) Employment status	EQ2a: Employee vs self employed EQ2b: Fixed-term vs permanent employment
	EQ3) Social protection	EQ3a: access to sick (and other) leaves EQ3b: access to social security schemes
	EQ4) Participation	EQ4a: Participation in employment-related decisions EQ3b: Unionisation
	EQ5) Working times, mobility, work-life balance	EQ5a: Part-time/full-time EQ5b: Shifts and (un)friendly working hours EQ5c: Predictability of working times EQ5d: Working time management and flexibility EQ5e: Distance from work to home; travel time

Source: own elaboration

Furthermore, contingent on the material conditions under which work occurs (job quality), individual workers possess subjective experiences, interact, and exercise agency. In so doing, they contribute to both realising and transforming the material conditions of their work. For instance, they may or may not utilise the available time flexibility schemes, personal protective equipment, or instruments designed to mitigate the risk of injuries.

In turn, these conditions and experiences influence workers' perceptions, meanings, and assessments of working and employment conditions.

8.3 QoWL, wellbeing and strategies

We expect workers' experience and assessment mediate between job quality and (physical, psychological, emotional and social) wellbeing, which encompasses satisfaction, health and social relations (see chapter 5).

We also assume that strategies about staying in the job or searching alternatives are associated to job quality, subjectivities and interactions, and wellbeing.

8.4 Multilevel determinants

Not only job quality, but also interaction and subjectivities, wellbeing and work-related strategies are expected to be influenced by:

- the individual characteristics of the workers (e.g. sex, age, family situation, migratory background, education)
- the organisational context in which the work takes place (e.g. public vs private nature, dimension, workforce composition, users' composition, localisation; labour shortages within the organisation; managerial styles and practices; organisational policies related to training, work organisation, etc.)
- the regional regulation of care, employment and migration (e.g. LTC rules concerning professional standards and funding; policies concerning care migration; labour shortages in the region; LTC supply density)
- the national regulation of care, employment and migration (e.g. employment contracts; migration quota)
- The macro-societal context (care/gender, work and migration social norms and roles).

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