

University of Sydney Policy Reform Project

Research Paper for the NSW Council of Social Service: Measurements of Precarious Employment in NSW and Australia

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About the University of Sydney Policy Reform Project

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Executive Summary and Recommendations

This literature review examines the measurements of precarious employment in NSW and Australia. It is evident that precarious employment has been steadily on the rise and accelerated by COVID-19. Traditional economic measures often cannot adequately assess the definition and the extent of precarity. The multidimensionality of precarity is best captured through a combination of statistical, and self-reported qualitative measurements. We found that some demographics are more susceptible to precarious employment than others, both before and during the pandemic. ‘Intersectional inequality’ is highlighted. Precarity is most clearly seen in lower levels of educational attainment, higher levels of poverty, and engagement in industries that have high levels of precarity, such as hospitality and food service, retail, and tertiary education. While precarious employment is still evolving during COVID-19, it is evident that precarity will be ‘felt most’ by certain vulnerable demographic groups, as well as affecting the wider population. Therefore, based on our findings, we propose the following recommendations:

1. Future research: Longitudinal surveys and economic studies investigating precarious employment of at-risk demographics and certain industries.

We recommend that future research into this topic incorporate longitudinal survey studies combined with economic studies. This would assist more comprehensive engagement with the impact of COVID-19 on precarious employment in NSW. It would also allow NCOSS to more fully understand the complexity of the issues surrounding precarious employment for each of the demographics outlined in this report, and the industries that have been identified as being more impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Advocate for the extension of JobKeeper, other financial incentives and training programs to support businesses heavily impacted by COVID-19.

Financial performance plays an important role in influencing what type of employment employers can offer. JobKeeper has effectively saved around 904,000 jobs (Breunig 2020), but it has excluded casual workers who have been employed for less than 12 months, and temporary visa holders, including some migrants and all international students. NCOSS can continue to advocate for government-provided financial incentives or employee training programs to support businesses in offering more full time, permanent, or more long-term employment.

3. Advocate for legal requirements to provide certain job benefits, such as parental leave and superannuation.

Women are still doing an unequal proportion of care work and are disproportionately represented in precarious paid employment. NCOSS could advocate for equal parental leave, regardless of gender, to reduce inequality between men and women. Equal access to parental leave has been shown to increase the likelihood of both parents to perform caring duties, thereby freeing the disproportionate burden from one parent. This would allow some women to be less engaged in precarious employment. Other benefits such as superannuation and sick leave should also be considered.

4. Advocate for the stronger regulation of casual contracts, making it easier for casual workers to be converted to full-time workers.

Casual and limited-term contract workers who have been engaged in employment with businesses for 12 months or longer should legally be provided the option to obtain a permanent contract that provides employment security. This is especially important in industries that have high levels of precarious employment. Regulations should be improved to ensure that employers do not continue to rely on precariously employed workers. This mandate can be advocated for by NCOSS to avoid precarity in the future and protect employees against unprecedented global and domestic developments.

5. Future research: a review of the gig economy and better regulations to protect precariously employed workers.

NCOSS and other relevant bodies could commission research specifically on the gig economy, which has led to the increase and inevitable dominance of on-demand, short-term employment. Such research would allow for a greater understanding of how to develop regulations that protect workers currently employed in precarious circumstances. It would also be a step towards ensuring that this new form of precarious work is better regulated, and that employers are held responsible for their worker's welfare.

1. Introduction

This literature review outlines the issue of precarious employment and analyses its existing measurements in New South Wales (NSW) and Australia, by discussing the advantages and disadvantages of different measures. Although precarious employment has been on the rise in NSW and Australia (Australian Council of Trade Unions 2018), the research demonstrates that the impact of the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (COVID-19) pandemic on precarious employment, has exacerbated issues that precariously employed workers already face, while drawing in new workers into precarious employment (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2020b; Hayne 2020; Dimov et al. 2020; Wilkins 2020).

This paper discusses the complexity of measuring precarity and precarious employment, highlighting the many disparate approaches in the literature, demonstrating that different quantitative and qualitative measures reveal different aspects of precarity. It then moves on to identify and summarise the results of commonly used measurements of precarious employment in NSW and Australia. The paper then highlights that while precariousness is increasing in most industries and demographics, precarious employment disproportionately affects individuals who fit in one or more of the following demographics: lower-skilled; regional, rural and remote; women; migrants; First Nations people; and workers in particularly precarious industries (Proudfoot 2010; Fuller & Vosko 2008; Burrows 2013; Campbell, Whitehouse & Baxter 2009). Lastly, the paper gives conclusions and points towards their implications for NSW.

1.1 The Concept and Dimensions of Precarity

Buchanan (2018) outlines precarity as:

A state of being defined by its insecurity and vulnerability. It is an expansive concept, used to apply to a wide variety of situations in which people feel precarious, but it tends to be used to refer to people who are unemployed, underemployed or insecurely employed.

The idea of precarity has developed with the socio-economic changes that created the current configurations of labour markets in modern capitalist societies. As mass production and trade liberalisation undermined the ideal of full employment to substitute it with more flexible arrangements, the new working class started to face peculiar challenges (Millar 2017). In this regard, Standing's (2011) seminal work defines a new socio-economic group as 'The Precariat', capturing two main ideas in one definition: the erosion of working rights, which in

turn gives rise to economic uncertainty, and the distinct self-awareness of a new socio-political class. The latter idea, while often criticized for its reduction of various socio-economic realities into one single class (Millar 2017), provides a vantage point to understand precarity as a force with significant political implications. While labour takes the centre stage when defining precarity, it is important to add that precarity is often understood through its implications on vulnerability as a life condition. For instance, Ettliger (2007) takes a deontological approach in analysing the idea of precarity as an obstacle to everyday predictability, on which individuals usually base their multi-faceted social, political, economic and emotional strategies. Nonetheless, this concept of unpredictability and its repercussions on individuals' own perception of their daily life and future possibilities can be easily applied to dimensions of employment (Buchanan 2018). While it is nearly impossible to reach a single 'textbook' definition on precarity, there is a consensus that certain aspects cannot be excluded when discussing precarity; these will be further explored below.

1.2 Defining Precarious Employment

There is significant research that identifies the increasing prevalence of precarious employment as a key labour market trend. Nevertheless, there is still significant confusion on what precarity means, as there is no single, clear-cut definition of job precarity. While common metrics like unemployment present a simple, categorical 'yes or no' divide, such dichotomies cannot capture the varied dimensions of precarious employment. Questions remain as to whether employment precarity can be defined by a variety of employment factors, such as income threshold, and length or nature of contract. This literature reviews finds that many of these single-metric approaches are valid but incomplete; a range of quantitative and qualitative measurements need to be considered concurrently to properly understand the various facets of precarity.

Initially, labour data relied on a simple distinction between 'standard' and 'non-standard' forms of employment determine precarity (Louie et al. 2006). The idea of standard employment originated in the post-war economic boom with the rise of regulatory regimes, which set institutionalised rules and frameworks for jobs, such as defining a working week and minimum wages (Burgess & Campbell 2018). This division has become outdated and simplistic, as it rests on socially constructed notions of gendered divisions of labour (Burgess & Campbell 2018) and deviancy of precarious workers (Kretsos 2010). Moreover, it fails to account for precariousness as a phenomenon that can impact all kind of workers. Subsequent studies, therefore, tried to capture the idea of precarity through multiple perspectives, and developed more nuanced sub-divided measurements of precarious employment.

Research has since identified several facets to job precarity including: the level of pay, the capacity to choose working hours and conditions, the time-horizon of the employment relationship, the presence and level of union or social protection, the existence of a welfare safety net, economic stability and the nature of the relationship between employer and employee (Burgess, Connell & Rasmussen 2005; Rodgers & Rodgers 1989; Bouwhuis et. al. 2018; Campbell & Price 2016; Ervasti & Virtanen 2019). From these, it follows that precariousness is usually thought of as a dynamic that involves shifting most, if not all, the financial risk to employees rather than employers, preventing the employee from possessing stable and sustained employment. Precariously employed individuals are then vulnerable on three fronts: on the job level, if they cannot support themselves with their income; on the employment level, if their employment relationship isn't well defined, protected or long-term; and on the institutional level, if there is little social security to support them should they lose their job (Olsthoorn 2014).

More recent studies have advocated for a definition of precariousness that focuses on the lived experience of insecure work, with its impacts and implications for poverty as well as physical and mental health (Campbell & Price 2016). These approaches add complexity, but arguably ensure more accuracy, including by excluding from measurement of precarious employment, jobs that are considered 'non-standard' in theory but are nevertheless secure. For example, workers in certain industries, such as finance, may opt for a precarious contract by choice, as they may negotiate or receive higher pay and better opportunities as a contracted worker (Olsthoorn 2014).

From this analysis, it follows that definitions of precarious employment have increasingly become more nuanced to recognise the complexity of the issue, and to try to capture the different economic, social and psychological dimensions associated with job insecurity. Most approaches focus on how jobs can be subdivided into a variety of different and overlapping categories. Some studies choose to focus on specific features of labour contracts to measure job precarity, including individual economic factors like wages and hours worked, or institutional elements such as union membership and social protection, or both. Other studies prefer to consider the experience of precarious employees, by defining precarity from workers' personal perceptions, either by considering discrepancies between their preferences on working contracts and reality, or by analysing self-reported satisfaction surveys.

2. Existing Measurements of Precarious Employment

Statistical labour measurements have been used extensively to determine precarious employment, not only by Australian institutions and state governments, but by institutions worldwide. Typical measurements include: employment type (that is, whether work is full time, part time, or casual), underemployment, and self-reported job satisfaction (including fear of job loss and lack of negotiating power). This section outlines the main measurements of precarious employment and considers their usefulness.

2.1 Employment Type

Full-time employment is used as a population-wide indicator of precariousness. A decline in full-time employment means more Australian workers are not employed under formal standard employment contracts with full entitlements such as paid leave, superannuation, training and worker's compensation (Carney & Stanford 2018). Only 75.6% of Australian employees have access to either paid leave entitlement or a permanent contract (Gilfillan 2020). Part-time workers are employed for guaranteed hours, which are not to be more than 30 hours per week (Alexander 2019; Cassells et.al. 2018). Most part time workers in Australia are employed as casuals rather than as permanent part time staff, and so lack a degree of employment protection (Carney and Stanford 2018). Furthermore, casual work does not have a guarantee of hours per week, leaving casual workers further under protected (Carney & Stanford 2018; Cassells et al. 2018). In August of 2019, 24.4% of all Australian employees and 24.1% of NSW employees were engaged in casual employment (Australian Council of Trade Unions 2019).

In the post-global financial crisis economy, firms have replaced many of their permanent full-time positions with less stable ones, such as fixed term contracts, and daily or hourly rate contracts (OECD 2019; Alexander 2019). Fixed term contracts are usually made between individuals and a hosting firm, with all the protections of permanent employment, but for a limited time (Alexander 2019). Day rate or hourly contracts are usually made between individuals and a third-party labour hire organisation, with a triangle type relationship in which the contractor has limited access to benefits or protections (Alexander 2019).

Government departments and agencies are the main employers of temporary, contractor, and part time positions (Australian Council of Trade Unions 2012). One limitation of examining precarious work purely through a contract type basis is that many individuals that enter into non-permanent contracts do so by choice, as the pay for a day rate or hourly contractor may be substantially higher, especially in professional services (Tadros 2019).

2.2 Underemployment

At the beginning of 2020, underemployed people made up 8.4% of the labour market in NSW compared to 8.6% across Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2020a). These figures may be inaccurate, as they do not measure the extent to which workers' preferences are satisfied, for hours of work, qualifications, and skills to be utilised in employment (Vanderbroak 2018). Some research calculates 'time-related underemployment', which considers how many hours employees desire to work compared to the number of hours they are given (Vanderbroak 2018). Though useful, it does not account for the underutilisation of skills and labour which many workers consider to be essential factors of underemployment. Underemployment is predominantly estimated on the basis of self-reported surveys, so the actual number of underemployed individuals could be higher. An approach that compares employment preferences with actual employment status could deliver more accurate measurements.

2.3 Self-Reported Job Satisfaction

Self-reported job satisfaction is a newer and less used indicator of precarity, though it is a useful one (Cassells et al. 2018). Lower-level job satisfaction tends to indicate precarious employment in terms of job security, level of control over employment arrangements, ability to balance workload, and preference for hours (Cassells et. al 2018). One large indicator of job satisfaction is stable pay, with 25% of employees reporting fluctuation in their income between pay cycles, mainly because their wages are tied to their employer's financial performance (Australian Council of Trade Unions 2012). Self-reporting data reveals the reasons behind a person's employment status, which allows for a more nuanced understanding of precarity. For instance, caregivers or students may choose part-time employment due to their need for greater flexibility. One drawback of this measurement is its subjective nature, as the information collected is often, in various ways, incomplete, difficult to collect, and difficult to make comparisons. Thus, it is helpful to consider self-reported job satisfaction in combination with other measures of precarious employment.

2.4 Structural Unemployment

Unemployment, and an underemployed labour force, means there are less jobs on offer compared to labour supply. This contributes to job seekers' acceptance of precarious work, including by pushing them to lower their wage expectations. One third of the Australian workforce is engaged in part-time employment (Department of Jobs & Small Business 2019). Recent studies found that over 15% of the Australian labour force could not find paid labour,

or worked less hours than they desired (Australian Council of Trade Unions 2019; Alexander 2019). Young people, even those with tertiary degrees, make up 40% of casual workers, due to the scarcity of full-time employment after graduation (Australian Council of Trade Unions 2012). In 2012, Australia had the highest share of temporary employment among OECD nations (Onselen 2018).

2.5 The Gig Economy

Employers have harnessed technological developments to increase labour productivity, and open global markets have encouraged minimal regulation of these new working arrangements (OECD 2019; Stanford 2018). The gig economy has emerged as a new form of work in which digital platforms are used to facilitate on-demand, piece-work tasks that connect workers and clients in real time. Though they are considered 'self-employed', many workers in the gig economy are still vulnerable to dismissal by the platform providers, for example if they receive negative consumer feedback, and because there is a lack of regulation regarding their minimum pay (Stanford 2018). The major platforms that facilitate services in the gig economy are: Airtasker (34.8%), Uber (22.7%), Freelancer (11.8%), Uber Eats (10.8%), and Deliveroo (8.2%). NSW has the largest concentration of workers in the gig economy of any Australian state, with 7.9% of NSW survey respondents engaging in these services (McDonald et al. 2019).

2.6 Impacts of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has induced major changes to the shape of precarious employment in NSW and Australia, some of which remain to be fully understood as more reliable research figures are released. The number of people classified as underemployed by the ABS increased by 50% between March 2020 and April 2020, reaching a total of 1.81 million people (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2020a; Hayne 2020). In ABS surveys conducted in late March 2020, a quarter of businesses reported having reduced the hours of their staff (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2020a). In August 2020, underemployment was 3.9% higher than the same period last year for men, and 2% higher for women (Duncan, Cassels & Dockery 2020).

However, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on precarious employment are obscured by the JobKeeper payment. Some employees who would otherwise have moved into the category of precarious employment – for example by involuntarily having their hours reduced or their employment contracts changed – retained their pre-pandemic employment contracts, because their wages were or are being subsidised. Meanwhile, employees who were already

precariously employed before the pandemic may have become unemployed or left the workforce entirely. It is important to note that unemployment and underemployment affects approximately 1 million short-term casual workers, who are excluded from eligibility for the JobKeeper scheme (Cassells & Duncan 2020).

The Reserve Bank of Australia has introduced a new measure of 'zero hours' contracts in order to capture the growing number of workers who are still officially employed, but without substantial work to complete (Richardson & Dennis 2020, p. 3). From these figures we might identify a new 'JobKeeper class' of precariously employed workers whose jobs will cease to exist when JobKeeper is withdrawn.

Other analysts prefer to consider actual hours worked, rather than the headline employment rates (Richardson & Dennis 2020). However, it is nevertheless true that many employers were able to keep employees working regular hours despite slow business, because the JobKeeper payment had to be paid to employees in full, regardless of shift lengths.

3. Precarious Employment by Demographic

This section outlines demographics in which there is a high prevalence of precarious employment and examines the impact of COVID-19 on their employment. It must be noted that demographic categories are not discrete and independent, but porous and interrelated. This section is not an exhaustive study of demographics, but summarises some of the literature on the most severely impacted groups: women, migrants, young people, First Nations people, and certain industries.

Before examining these groups in detail, it is worth noting that educational attainment and geographical location are key indicators of precarious employment, which cut across these demographic groups. Education is a key determinant of whether a person can obtain secure work, with less-educated individuals facing a higher probability of unemployment or underemployment (OECD 2019). However, educational attainment does not always guarantee an ability to gain secure employment, especially for marginalised groups. Educational attainment also influences vulnerability to COVID-related employment shocks. Wilkins (2020) found that of various industries affected by COVID, 'nearly 60% of workers in directly affected industries have no post-school qualifications, compared with 34% of workers in secondarily affected industries, and 28% of workers in the less affected industries'. As a corollary, people in COVID-affected industries also tended to have lower incomes. Geographically, urban areas outside of major capitals have relatively high proportions of

workers in industries directly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, including urban NSW outside of Sydney (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2020a; Wilkins 2020). Geographical disadvantages are particularly pronounced for Aboriginal people living in remote areas.

3.1 Women

Women's participation in the Australian labour market rose to 59.9% in 2020 (Workplace Gender Equality Agency 2020a). The Howard Government's economy arguably cemented the male bread winner model, placing women as secondary income earners and primary caregivers, which prevented women from obtaining full-time employment (Campbell, Whitehouse & Baxter 2009). While women represent 47.1% of all employed persons, they comprise 67.9% of part time workers (Workplace Gender Equality Agency 2020a), and 60.1% of total underemployed workers (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018).

For women, educational qualifications may be associated with higher levels of underemployment. Prior to the pandemic, 61.4% of the workforce held post-secondary school qualifications (Department of Jobs and Small Businesses 2019). Among young people, 91.1% of women aged 20-24 have completed their final year of secondary school or above, compared to 88.8% of men (Workplace Gender Equality Agency 2020a). Yet the underemployment rate in Australia is currently 11% for women, compared to just 6% for men. Research attributes these disparities to continued gender discrimination and bias, as well as workplace inflexibility to carer and domestic labour (Workplace Gender Equality Agency 2020a). Qualitative interviews of young women's experiences in the labour market suggest that women feel they need higher levels of qualifications for jobs, which forces them into precarious work situations for longer periods of time (Burrows 2003; Chesters & Wyne 2019).

Some measures suggest that women's employment fared better than men's employment during the pandemic. Workplace Gender Equality Agency (2020b) found that 'between mid-March and mid-July, payroll jobs and total wages decreased. Payroll jobs held by women saw a decrease of 5.5% and total wages paid to women decreased by 2.4%; whereas, payroll jobs held by men decreased by 5.8% and men's wages decreased by 6.6%'. However, the smaller fall in women's wages may be partly explained by the fact that women who moved onto the JobKeeper payment faced less of a pay cut than men, because men generally had higher average weekly earnings than women prior to the pandemic (Workplace Gender Equality Agency 2020b).

Hours worked may be a better indicator of the potentially gendered impacts of the pandemic on precarious employment. The literature agrees that women have lost more hours of work

than men during the COVID-19 pandemic. The proportion of employed women working zero hours in April 2020 was 8.1% higher than in April 2019, while for men this rise was only 5.1% (Richardson & Denniss 2020). The literature suggests different reasons for these findings. Some reports argue that women are more likely to work in the affected industries compared to men (Coates et al. 2020; Wilkins 2020). By contrast, the Australia Institute suggests that reasons for the greater loss of working hours among women than among men, could include employer gender discrimination, and the increased caring responsibilities placed disproportionately on women (Richardson & Denniss 2020). Women's unpaid work increased by 3.5 hours compared to 2.5 hours for men (Workplace Gender Equality Agency 2020b). The confluence of a widespread shift to working from home, and the closure of many childcare institutions such as pre-schools and schools, resulted in 40% of parents reporting difficulty in maintaining work productivity (Australian Institute of Family Studies 2020). Women endured more of this impact (Australian Institute of Family Studies 2020).

Women are historically more susceptible to be underemployed and precariously employed than their male counterparts. By considering measures such as hours worked, we can see that this trend has continued through the COVID-19 pandemic. Research into employer discrimination during the pandemic is not yet well developed, but we have good evidence suggesting that existing inequalities in unpaid caring labour have been exacerbated.

3.2 Migrants, Refugees, and International Students

Workers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds – such as temporary visa holders, economic migrants, international students, refugees and working holiday makers – are vulnerable to precarious employment due to the temporary nature of their residency in Australia (Fuller & Vosko 2008; Shannon 2010). Precarious employment situations such as the gig economy appear to be used more by those from non-English speaking backgrounds, with 13% of non-English speakers having worked via a digital platform compared to 5.6% of native English speakers (McDonald et al. 2019). COVID-19 has also severely impacted the precarity of temporary migrant workers and refugees (Clibborn & Wright 2020; Kooy 2020).

Since temporary migrant workers and refugees were also excluded from the JobKeeper package, there has been a significant increase in their unemployment (Clibborn & Wright 2020; Kooy 2020). Their precarious employment is on the rise, too. Kooy (2020) estimates that for humanitarian migrants on temporary visas who remain employed, 'wages could fall by an average of \$90 per week, with 92% of workers earning less than the minimum wage'. The situation is similar for international students, who are another group not eligible for social

security payments, and highly concentrated in affected industries. One large-scale survey found that only 39% of international students have kept the jobs they held prior to COVID-19, and 63% of these students who have kept their jobs have had their working hours reduced (Morris et al. 2020, p. 82).

3.3 Young People

In 2018, the disparity between regional and urban employment widened, with almost 29% percent of unemployed youth (aged 15-24) located in regional areas (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020). The Australian economy is moving from a manufacturing economy towards a service-based economy, with General Sales Assistant, General Clerks, and Registered Nurse representing the largest number of jobs. 40% of sales workers are young people (Department of Jobs and Small Business 2019). The fluctuating labour demand of these jobs means most of these roles are filled by temporary contractors, part-timers, and casual staff. Youth aged 15-24 comprise 46% of the short-term casual workforce (Gilfillan 2020). Burrows' (2013) interviews with Illawarra youth (aged under 25) demonstrate how it is a social norm among youth to work precarious hours, for unsubstantial pay, and/or in unsatisfactory conditions. These youth consider precarious work as normal steps on their career paths (Burrows 2013). These types of interview responses are supported by available quantitative data: 54.3% of young Australian's aged between 15-24 work without access to leave entitlements (Gilfillan 2020).

Educated youth face less precarity in employment, but higher education does not always lead to secure employment. Almost 50% of workers under 35 years old hold a tertiary degree but only 38.9% of Australians under 30s held full time employment, either temporarily or permanently (Carney & Stanford 2019). Individuals with a bachelor's degree were a third more likely to be in the field that they studied, and those with VET qualifications were 2.5 times more likely to have a permanent job than those with a master's degree or PhD (Chesters & Wyne, p. 677). Even individuals with five years' work experience and a master's degree were still engaging in precarious employment (Chesters & Wyne 2019; Woodman 2012). Furthermore, graduates may have to spend 5 years in precarious employment before being considered 'skilled' enough for permanent employment. Precarious employment has become a prevalent norm among young Australians, and they even compete for it in order to gain work experience.

Young Australians are turning to new forms of work. In one recent study, 11% of surveyed respondents aged 18-34 years had engaged in digital platform work, compared to 8.4% for respondents aged 35-49 years, and 3.5% for respondents aged 50-64 years (McDonald et al.

2019). While this may be indicative of younger people's comfort with digital platforms, it nevertheless means a significant proportion of them lack robust employment protection. Digital platforms demand varying skill levels: from relatively lower skilled tasks (for example, facilitated through Uber and Airtasker), to higher skilled tasks, such as financial market trading, web design and software development services (Cassells et.al. 2018). The imminent recession may cause an increase in these types of services because of job scarcity and employers' potential preferences for short term employment contracts.

Young workers represent half of the workforce in industries directly affected by COVID-19 (Dimov et al. 2020; Wilkins 2020). They also made up 46% of the short-term casual employees who were ineligible for JobKeeper in August 2020, despite comprising only 17.4% of all employees (Gilfillan 2020). It is therefore likely that many young people who were in precarious employment prior to the crisis were soon classified as unemployed, or not actively looking for work.

3.4 First Nations People

First Nations people are a vulnerable sector of Australian society and, prior to COVID-19, were already identified as a precariously employed group (Markham, Smith & Morphy 2020). Internationally, other countries with indigenous populations, such as Canada and Sweden have released more comprehensive data on the precarity and forecast of employment for their respective indigenous populations (Proudfoot 2010; Fuller & Vosko 2008). In Australia, however, this data is severely lacking, with only one report from Australian National University's Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research measuring the employment precarity of only indigenous Australians (Markham, Smith & Morphy 2020). This report found that indigenous Australians are more likely to become unemployed due to the effects of COVID-19, as many live within rural communities and mostly take on casual and low-skilled jobs (Markham, Smith & Morphy 2020). Further, 16.9% of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders have worked via a digital platform, compared to 6.8% of non-Aboriginal people (McDonald et al. 2019). Some argue that measurements of employment among First Nations people tend to be quite binary, as either employed or unemployed (Nash 2010). Such measurements would fail to capture the different aspects of precarious employment detailed in section 1 of this paper.

Aboriginal people's employment is likely to be disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. This is because they are overrepresented in casual and low-skilled jobs, which we know are more

at risk to losing working hours (Dinku 2020, p. 2). Those in areas classed as 'remote' or 'very remote' are especially at risk of losing working hours.

3.5 Industries with High Precarity

The industries with the highest number of secondary job holdings are administrative and support services, health care and social assistance, and education and training (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2020c). The literature is unclear about why these industries have such a high rate of secondary jobs holdings. One partial explanation might be that these industries are dominated by women, who are overrepresented in underemployment rates and earn less than men for the same work; so the statistics could be partly indicative of gender inequality.

Industries that have close to or more than half of their workforce contracted as casuals are: food and beverage services (64.4%), sports and recreation activities (51.4%), food retailing (44.3%), accommodation (44.3%), motion picture and sound recording activities (43.2%), agriculture (41.8%), building cleaning, pest control and other support services (41.6%) (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2020d, Table 2). The three industries that have less than 10% of their workforce in casual employment contracts are computer system design and related services (4.9%), public administration (8%) and finance (9.7%) (Ibid.). Moreover, it is the industries of accommodation, food services, art and recreation services, and retail trade that report the highest levels of underemployment (Australian Council of Trade Unions 2012; Alexander 2019).

The impacts of COVID-19 have been unevenly distributed across industries. One report, from the Grattan Institute, uses estimates of how social distancing requirements affect different industries in order to estimate the differing impact on unemployment rates, of the JobKeeper payment across industries (Coates et al. 2020). The report argued that increases in unemployment would be most concentrated in industries already characterised by high levels of casualisation. On these measures, the worst-affected industries are hospitality and food service; retail; and arts and recreation (Coates et al. 2020). An estimated 50% of jobs in the hospitality industry have been lost (Coates et al. 2020, p. 19).

The tertiary education sector has also been impacted by COVID-19. However, unlike many other industries where Jobkeeper was provided, public universities, which rely heavily on international student revenue, were not granted any funding government packages or Jobkeeper (Batten, Nicolls & Griggs 2020). This has exacerbated the precarious position of many casually employed academics. A survey investigating the impact of COVID-19 on casually employed academics at the University of Sydney, found that 77% were concerned

about losing their job due to COVID-19, 82% reported that they completed unpaid work due to the pandemic, and 75% reported an increase in workload due to the pandemic (Batten, Nicolls & Griggs 2020, p. 3). 60% indicated that they would permanently leave the tertiary education sector if they lost their job, and 14% reported that they had already been told they will no longer have a job. These results were similar to those of another survey conducted at the University of New South Wales (Batten, Nicolls & Griggs 2020).

Both reports are a good indicator of the employment impacts that would transpire in the absence of the JobKeeper scheme. However, they do not take into account the 'second-wave' economic impacts of COVID-19, which may continue to produce further unemployment, due to a general decrease in consumption, especially by workers in directly impacted industries.

4. Conclusion

The measurements of precarious employment examined in this paper appear most useful when considered together. Measurements such as employment type, underemployment rate, unemployment rate, are useful for a general overview of precarious employment, and perhaps for understanding how regulation and legal mandates help safeguard against, or engender, precarious work. Self-reporting indicators, such as job satisfaction, compiled through surveys and interviews, help to qualify and nuance the implications of headline indicators, by illuminating the lived experiences of precarious workers. Furthermore, these indicators do not exist in a vacuum, but are embedded within webs of social and political relations, including property and employment law, and now, with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, public health measures.

The literature suggests that workers who are lower-skilled; regional, rural and remote; women; migrants, refugees, and international students; First Nations people; and workers in particular industries, are more vulnerable to precarious employment, and to the negative employment impacts of COVID-19. These demographic categories are porous and cumulative, and need to be assessed using an intersectional approach. For example, most young people will be exposed to precarious employment. However, their gender, race, educational level and industry are importantly indicative of whether this precarity will entail simply a lack of secure employment (contract employment), or will also be accompanied by low wage, irregular hours, poor conditions and low job satisfaction. It also appears that neoliberal normative discourse may be encouraging people to internalise their perceived failure to attain secure work.

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