

PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT IN THE CANADIAN LABOUR MARKET: A STATISTICAL PORTRAIT

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Workers across Canada are reporting widespread feelings of insecurity and with good reason. Canada's labour force is becoming more precarious with the growth of temporary and part-time wage work, own-account self-employment and other forms of employment that are not fully covered by labour laws and policies. At the same time, regardless of employment form, more and more workers are earning less money, working either too much or too little and have less control over their work. Many workers are also in precarious social locations because the growth of precarious employment is gendered and racialized.²

What is a precarious employment relationship and how does precarious employment status manifest itself in the Canadian labour market? In what ways do social locations, such as sex/gender, race/ethnicity and age exacerbate or mitigate precariousness? These are the questions we address in this article.

We begin by describing and evaluating terms commonly used to conceptualise and measure labour market insecurity. Our main

contention is that 'precarious employment' is the best concept available – preferable to 'non-standard work' – since it adds important nuances to the standard/non-standard employment distinction (Vosko 2003). Drawing on Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey (LFS) and General Social Survey, we then break down the standard/non-standard dichotomy into mutually exclusive classifications.³ This exercise gives greater definition to the category 'non-standard work' and provides a bridge to the concept 'precarious employment.' Next we examine the relationship between employment forms and dimensions of precarious employment, such as control, regulatory protection and income. Layering four forms of wage work with indicators of precarious employment, the typology gives way to a continuum that reveals how, and to what degree, various forms of wage work are precarious. Against this backdrop, we then explore how gender, race/ethnicity and age intersect with dimensions of

precarious employment using data from the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics. We conclude with a discussion of the continuum of precarious wage work sensitive to social location.

mediated compromise between the predominately white male,

CONCEPTUALISING PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT

Many workers in Canada engage in employment situations that differ from the normative or 'taken-for-granted' model of the standard employment relationship (Economic Council of Canada 1990). The standard employment relationship generally refers to a situation where the worker has one employer, works full-time, year-round on the employer's premises, enjoys extensive statutory benefits and entitlements and expects to be employed indefinitely (Fudge 1997; Rogers 1989; Schellenberg and Clark 1996; Vosko 1997). The standard employment relationship is the model upon which labour laws, legislation and policies, as well as union practices, are based. Norms or ideas about what is typical or 'normal' guide the making of laws and policy and thus shape labour relations. In this way, the standard employment relationship is a normative model of employment.⁴ However, norms do not reflect everyone's reality. The standard employment relationship emerged as the dominant model of employment in the post-World War II period. It resulted from a state-

that deviate from the standard employment relationship. The result is the persistence of a dichotomy – standard versus non-standard – that fails to paint an accurate portrait of precarious employment.

The most common measure of non-standard work used in Canada comprises four situations that differ from the norm of a full-time, full-year, permanent paid job (Krahn 1995): part-time employment⁵; temporary employment, including term or contract, seasonal, casual, temporary agency and all other jobs with a specific pre-determined end date⁶; own-account self-employment (a self-employed person with no paid employees); and multiple job holding (more than one job concurrently). Some researchers also include shift work in their definitions of non-standard work in an effort to measure the decline in the 9:00 to 5:00, Monday to Friday work-week (Sunter 1993; Galarneau 1994; Siroonian 1993) – the work

employees, suggesting that this form of employment is becoming more precarious in the context of broader labour market restructuring (Luxton and Corman 2001). These findings highlight the need to move away from grouping together situations united only by their deviation from the full-time full-year job.

These important differences are not captured in the definition of 'non-standard work' in part because the employment situations included in this broad measure are not mutually exclusive. This makes it difficult to determine whether certain forms of employment have grown, and if so, whether and how the growth has contributed to insecurity amongst workers (Vosko, Zukewich and Cranford 2003). For example, under the catchall 'non-standard work', part-time employment includes both employees and the self-employed (both own-account and employers) and any employed person can be a multiple jobholder. However, only employees can have a temporary job. In order to understand the nature and degree of labour market insecurity experienced by different groups of workers, there is a need to look inside the category of non-standard work to understand the various dimensions of precarious employment.

Dimensions of Precarious Employment

Rather than focusing on employment forms, such as part-time and temporary employment,

and work arrangements, such as shift-work, researchers in Europe increasingly examine dimensions of precarious employment. Gerry Rodgers (1989, 35), for example, identifies four dimensions central to establishing whether a job is 'precarious'. The first dimension is the degree of certainty of continuing employment; here, time horizons and risk of job loss are emphasised. The second dimension is control over the labour process – this dimension is linked to the presence or absence of a trade union and, hence, control over working conditions, wages and pace of work. The third dimension is the degree of regulatory protection – that is, whether the worker has access to an

Vosko 2001a; 2001b), these employment forms (as well as work arrangements) will be linked to precarious employment. A more complete portrait of insecurity in the Canadian labour market must therefore consider the relationship between employment forms and dimensions of precarious employment.

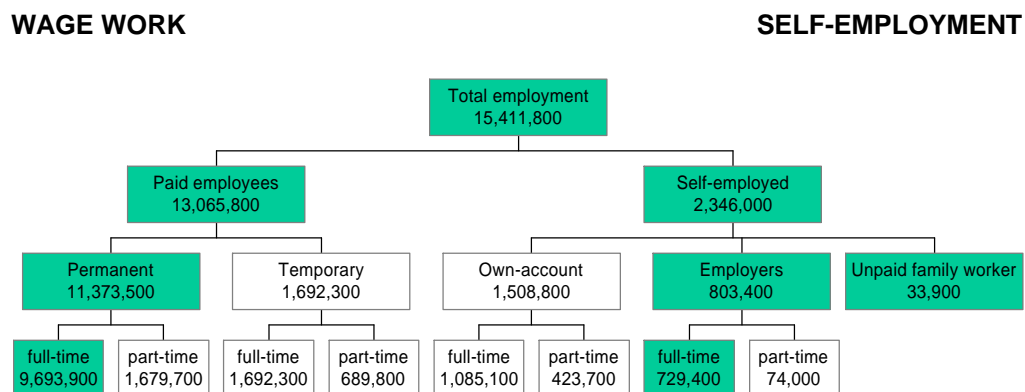
A PORTRAIT OF PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT

Mutually Exclusive Employment Forms
 Breaking down total employment into mutually exclusive classifications offers a bridge between the concepts ‘non-standard work’ and ‘precarious employment’. It gives greater definition to the employment forms grouped under the category ‘non-standard’ work and elevates key dimensions of

precarious employment.

Figure 1 classifies mutually exclusive employment forms (Vosko, Zukewich and Cranford 2003). The classifications first differentiate employees from the self-employed. This distinction relates to a key dimension of precarious employment — degree of regulatory protection — as many self-employed are excluded from coverage under collective bargaining law and employment standards legislation (Fudge, Tucker and Vosko 2002). The self-employed are further distinguished by whether or not they have employees, since those without employees (i.e., the own account self-employed) are arguably in a more precarious position than self-employed employers (Hughes 1999; Fudge, Tucker and Vosko 2002). These classifications also address the degree of certainty of

Figure 1: Classifications of Mutually Exclusive Employment Forms, Canada 2002



continuing wage work by categorising employees by job permanency. It also breaks down each employment form by part-time and full-time status. Including part-time/full-time status is important because eligibility for certain statutory entitlements associated with the standard employment relationship (e.g., Employment Insurance) is based upon hours worked (Vosko 2002). The mutually exclusive classifications of employment allows for an examination of which employment forms are contributing to the growth of 'non-standard work'.

The overall share of employed people with a non-standard form of employment stabilized in the latter 1990s. Yet the relatively more precarious forms of non-standard work – temporary jobs and own-account-self employment – became more prevalent (Vosko, Zukewich and Cranford 2003). The rise in 'non-standard work' in the early 1990s was fuelled by increases in own-account self-employment and full-time temporary wage work. Self-employment grew in the 1990s, peaking in the latter part of the decade, and it began to fall in 1998 due largely to a decline in the prevalence of self-employed employers, the least precarious type of self-employment. In contrast, own account self-employment grew from 7% to 10% between 1989 and 2002. The share of employed people with temporary jobs rose steadily throughout the 1990s, a trend fuelled

by full-time but temporary jobs, which rose from 4% in 1989 to 7% in 2002 (Table 1). The proportions of the employed with part-time temporary or part-time permanent jobs remained steady during this period (Table 1). Although employees with full-time permanent jobs still account for the majority of employment, this kind of work became less common, dropping from 67% in 1989 to 63% in 2002 (Table 1).

How does social location relate to these trends? Specifically, how has the spread of more precarious forms of 'non-standard' employment affected women and men?

Even though increases in full-time temporary wage work and own-account self-employment were observed for both sexes, their growth affected women and men differently (Vosko, Zukewich, Cranford 2003). Overall, while the absolute decline in full-time permanent wage work was slightly greater for men, men were still more likely than women to have this form of employment in 2002 (66% versus 59%, see Table 1). The share of men who were own-account self-employed increased while the share of men that were self-employed employers declined (Table 1). However, unlike female self-employment, most male self-employment is full-time, and hence, less precarious. The widely documented over-representation of women in part-time jobs is true of both employees and the self-

employed. In 2002, 44% of own-account self-employed women worked part-time, compared with just 18% of their male counterparts. The work of female part-time employees also became more precarious as the share with

Vosko and Zukewich 2003).

Precarious Forms of Wage Work

What is the relationship between forms of employment, defined by hours and permanency, and other dimensions of precarious employment?

In this section, we address this question by layering the four forms of wage work – full-time permanent, full-time temporary, part-time permanent and part-time temporary – with three indicators of precarious employment – firm size, union status and hourly wage. Firm size is a good indicator of degree of regulatory protection since labour legislation and regulations are ill enforced in small firms (Fudge 1993; O’Grady 1991; Rodgers 1989). Union-status is a good indicator of control over the labour process since unionised workers have a higher degree of control over the conditions under which they labour (Rodgers 1989; White 1993). Hourly wage is also a suitable indicator of precarious employment since it makes up an important part of income.

By layering indicators of precarious employment on the forms of wage work the mutually exclusive classifications give away to a continuum. All three dimensions of precarious employment increase along the continuum in the following order: full-time permanent as the least precarious followed by full-time temporary, then part-time

permanent and part-time temporary as the most precarious (Table 2). While full-time permanent employees are the least precarious, there are important differences between the temporary and part-time forms of employment that are masked by analyses of the standard/non-standard dichotomy.

Along the dimension of regulatory protection, full-time permanent employees are much less likely to labour in small firms than the three other forms of wage work. At the same time, in 2002, full-time temporary employees were less likely to labour in small firms than part-time temporary employees (26% vs. 29%). Part-time/full-time status also structures inequalities between permanent employees so that part-time permanent employees were considerably more likely to labour in small firms than full-time permanent employees (28% vs. 17%) (Table 2).

In terms of control over the labour process, again full-time permanent employees are the least precarious but here we find greater differences between the forms of wage work often lumped together in the ‘non-standard’ category. Part-time permanent employees were more likely to be covered by a union than part-time temporary employees (26% vs. 22%), but they were still less likely to be covered by a union than full-time permanent employees (34%) (Table 2). For hourly wages, the dimension of income considered here, the superior situation of full-

Table 2: A Continuum of Precarious Wage Work, Employees in Canada, 2002

Form of Wage Work	Total Employees* Estimate (000s)	Firm Size Less than 20 Percent of Employees	Union Coverage	Hourly Wages	Hours per Week Mean
Full-time Permanent	9,693.9	17	34	\$19.23	40
Full-time Temporary	1,002.5	26	31	\$14.84	40
Part-time Permanent	1,679.7	28	26	\$12.73	18
Part-time Temporary	689.8	29	22	\$11.61	15
Total					

time permanent employees compared to all others, alongside significant inequalities between the part-time and temporary forms, is the clearest pattern. Full-time permanent employees earned over \$4 an hour more than full-time temporary employees. At the same time, full-time temporary employees earned \$2 an hour more than part-time permanent employees who in turn earned nearly \$1.00 an hour more than part-time temporary employees (Table 2).

Precarious Wage Work and Social Locations

How do the social locations of sex/gender, race/ethnicity and age intersect with dimensions of precarious employment?

The social location of sex/gender extensively shapes who is employed in the precarious forms of employment. For example, 19% of women are part-time permanent employees compared to 8% of men; and 11% of women are part-time

temporary employees, compared to 7% of men (Figure 2). These are the most precarious forms of employment along the continuum (Table 2). Men are more likely than women to be employed in full-time temporary wage work. Men are also considerably more likely to have the least precarious form of wage work; 72% of men are full-time permanent employees, compared to 60% of women (Figure 2).

The social location of 'race' intersects with that of sex/gender to shape workers' position in precarious wage work. White men are the least likely to be employed in the more precarious part-time temporary and part-time permanent wage work (Figure 3). There are also sex/gender differences within the categories 'visible minority' and 'non-visible minority.'¹⁷ Like white women, women of colour are less likely to have full-time permanent jobs than their male counterparts and more likely to hold part-time

Figure 2: Forms of Wage Work by Sex*, Canada 2000

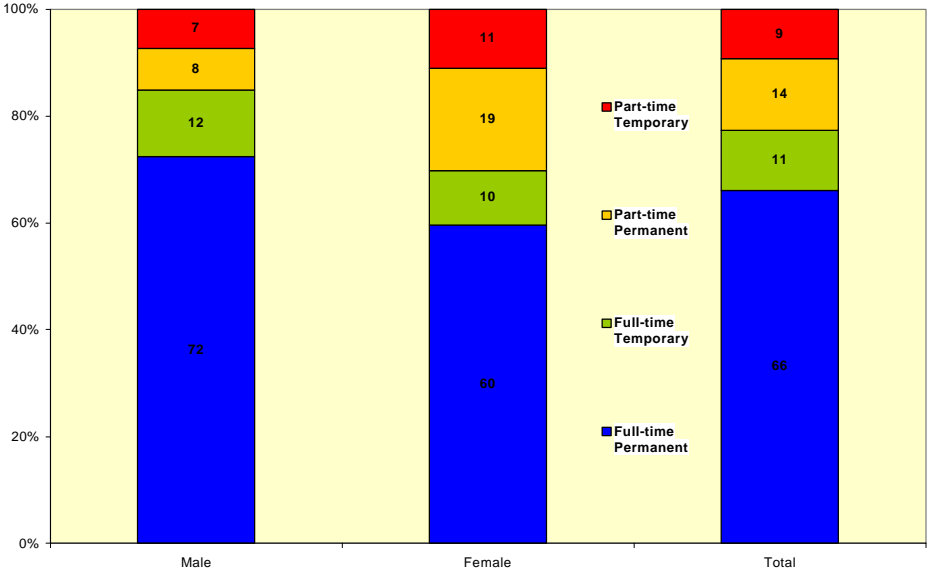


Figure 3: Forms of Wage Work by Sex and 'Visible Minority' Status*, Canada 2000

permanent jobs. The sex/gender difference across the form, however, is not as great as it is for white employees since men of colour are more likely than white men to engage in the part-time forms of wage work. Despite important differences between women, it is essential to compare women of colour to the most privileged group in the labour market – that is, white men – in order to avoid underestimating the insecurity of racialized women (James, Grant and Cranford 2000). While 10% of women of colour are in part-time temporary jobs and 17% are in part-time permanent jobs, only 7% of white men are in these precarious forms of wage work (Figure 3). We also know that there are considerable differences among

people of colour.

Breaking down the category 'visible minority' into groups reveals important differences both among people of colour and between people of colour and white employees.⁸ Black and South Asian employees are less likely than white employees to have full-time permanent wage work. However, Chinese and Filipino employees are more likely than white employees to have full-time permanent work. South Asian employees are substantially more likely to be in full-time temporary wage work than all the other groups, while Black employees are substantially more likely than the other groups to be in part-time permanent wage work. West Asian and North African employees have a greater proportion

Figure 4: Forms of Wage Work by 'Visible Minority' Group*, Canada, 2000

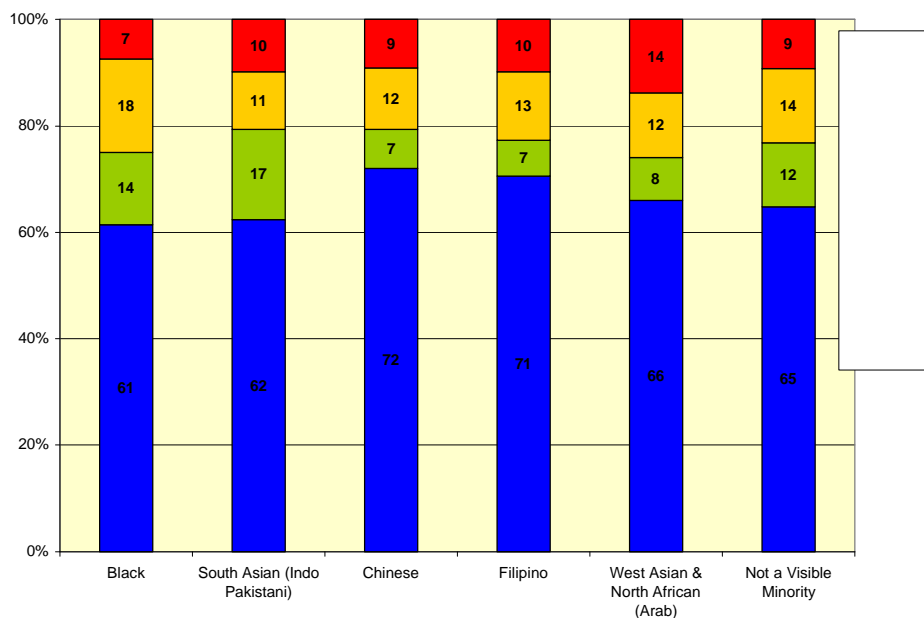
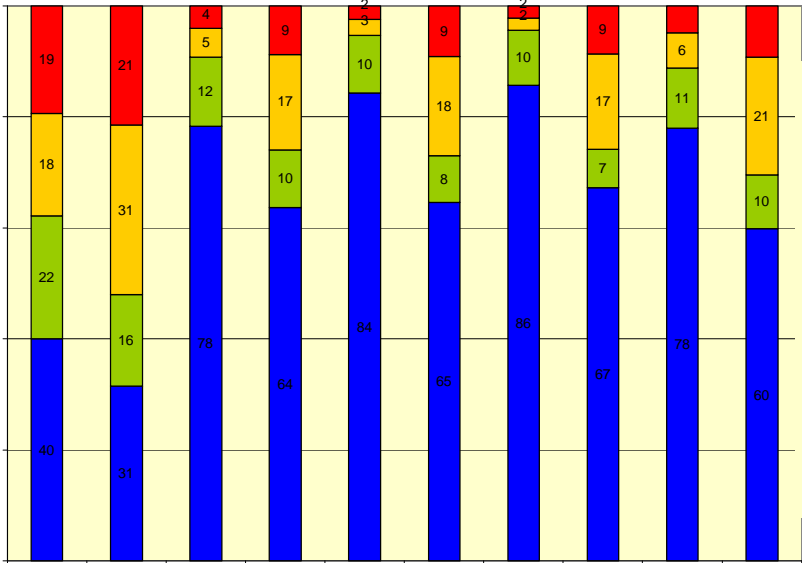


Figure 5: Forms of Wage Work by Sex and Age*, Canada 2000



than all the other groups in part-time temporary wage work and the proportions of South Asians and Filipinos in this most precarious form of wage work are slightly higher than those of white employees (Figure 4).

The social location of age also intersects with that of sex/gender to produce unique outcomes for young, middle-aged and older women and men (Cranford, Vosko and Zukewich 2003). The young are less likely to have full-time permanent wage work than the middle aged or older age groups (Figure 5) and this likelihood has dropped considerably since the end of the 1980s. However, young men

are significantly less likely than young women to be employed in part-time permanent wage work. In fact, the greater concentration of women in part-time permanent wage work remains across all of the age groups. In all of the age groups, women are also more likely to be employed in part-time temporary wage work, although the sex/gender difference is small among the young (Figure 5).

CONCLUSION

Precarious employment is the best concept presently available for devising a portrait of labour market insecurity in Canada attentive to

social location and social context. It replaces a conception of labour market insecurity based mainly on deviation from the standard employment relationship with a mutually exclusive classification of employment forms. By allowing us to look inside the category 'non-standard work,' these classifications open up new ways of exploring the relationship between employment forms (including wage work and self-employment) and other dimensions of precarious employment.

Breaking down total employment into a mutually exclusive typology reveals that the growth in 'non-standard work' between 1989 and 2002 was fuelled by increases in own-account self-employment and full-time temporary wage work, two forms of employment that lack regulatory protection. Increases in full-time temporary wage work and own-account self-employment were observed for both women and men. Full-time permanent wage work still accounts for the majority of employment but this kind of work became less common. Nevertheless, men are still more likely than women to have full-time permanent wage work.

Layering four forms of wage work with indicators of regulatory protection, control and income reveals a continuum of precarious wage work. Full-time permanent employees are the least precarious, followed by full-time temporary, then part-time permanent and part-

time temporary as the most precarious. While full-time permanent employees are by far the least precarious along these three dimensions, there are also significant differences between the other forms of wage work. Furthermore, there are differences along lines of social location even within full-time permanent jobs. For instance, women in full-time permanent wage work do worse than their male counterparts along all three dimensions of precariousness.

Examining the relationship between precarious employment and social locations, such as sex/gender, race/ethnicity and age, also improves upon analyses based on the standard/non-standard dichotomy. The continuum of

the continuum. Nevertheless, this form of wage work is becoming less common for all in the labour market.

Further analysis that considers aspects of immigrant status such as year of arrival, as well as educational attainment in relation to the social locations of age, sex/gender, race/ethnicity, would reveal more fully how precarious employment is gendered and racialized. There is also a pressing need to examine dimensions of precarious employment among the self-employed. Finally, we know little about which dimensions of precarious employment are most common in various industries, occupations and geographical locations. Mapping precarious employment across multiple dimensions, social locations and social contexts would add considerably to our understanding of labour market insecurity in Canada.

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6. With the 1989 GSS, Krahn was able to measure part-year work, defined as a main job that typically lasts nine months or less per year. This question was not asked on the 1994 GSS. However, most employees whose jobs 'typically' last less than nine months per year, such as seasonal workers, are included in the definition of temporary employees.
7. In presenting the data, we use the term 'visible minority' to avoid confusion over which groups are included in the measure. Following the Employment Equity Act, Statistics Canada defines 'visible minority' as persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour. (www.statcan.ca/english/census2001/dict/pop127.htm). However, racial and ethnic categories, including 'visible minority' as well as 'Black', 'South Asian' and 'White' are socially constructed through processes of racialization embedded in daily interactions, ideologies, policy and social relations in core institutions. This has led some scholars to call for the abandonment of the term race as well as racialized identity categories (Miles 1987). At the same time, people's continual experiences with racism as well as the importance of different identities to community organising, in Canada and elsewhere, leads many scholars and activists to continue to use terms such as 'Black', 'people of colour' or 'women of colour' (Mensah 2002; Das Gupta and Iacovetta 2000). Following these scholars, we also use the term 'people of colour' to emphasise racialized social locations. When we refer to 'people of colour' in the analysis of the data, we are referring to the groups measured by Statistics Canada as 'visible minorities'.
8. The sample sizes for estimates produced from the SLID are too small to examine sex/gender differences within these groups. Sample sizes from the Census would be adequate yet the Census does

not include a question about job permanency

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