



UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
Business School

Call for Papers for Special Issue in EJWOP on:

Precarious Employment and Work

Understanding the underlying psychological and social processes

(The special issue is also intended to be an important output of the same-called EAWOP SGM at University of Glasgow from 4-6 September 2023)

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Precarious employment and work refer to unstable, short-term, and often part-time work that does not consistently offer social and legal protections (Allan et al., 2021). Alarming, a recent study on precarious employment and work in Europe found that two out of three salaried workers are precariously employed (Matilla-Santander et al., 2019). Furthermore, precarious employment and work is more prevalent in Eastern and Southern Europe (Puig-Barrachina et al., 2014), and amongst women (particularly young women), migrants and those with low levels of education (Buckingham et al., 2020). Previous research across various disciplines has proposed multidimensional conceptualizations of both objective characteristics and associated subjective experiences (Kreshpaj et al., 2020; Seubert C. & Seubert L., 2023). More recent, emerging research has also begun to consider precarious employment and work in parallel with decent work, and there is considerable potential in this line of work (e.g., Blustein, et al, 2022; Seubert C. et al., 2021). The field of psychology has dealt extensively with single aspects of precarious employment and work (most notably, job insecurity), and their negative consequences for health and well-being (Cheng & Chan, 2008; De Witte et al., 2016; Sverke et al., 2019). However, a psychological research tradition investigating precarious employment and work as a multidimensional concept within (and outside) large-scale studies is lacking (Puig-Barrachina et al., 2014; Rönnblad et al., 2019).

This special issue provides an opportunity to showcase psychological research on precarious employment and work, in order to shift the dial within our discipline to understand and influence precarious working conditions. We call for papers that explore precarious employment and work in a variety of different ways, including conceptualisation, measurement, and integration with other psychological concepts. Psychological research can help uncover the implications of precariousness for workers and their organisations. There is also potential for greater understanding and conceptual clarity related to the dimensions of precarious employment and work, and how it is conceptualised. Drawing together new research on precarious employment and work in this Special Issue will enable discovery and identification of underlying processes of precarious employment and work and their embeddedness in specific social, economic, political, and ideological contexts. This in turn may shed light on how people experience their job subjectively and also demonstrate spillover consequences of precarious employment and work beyond the individual to families, organisations, societies, economies.

Relevance of topic for work and organizational psychology (WOP)

While there is growing evidence that precarious employment and work is associated with negative consequences for health and well-being (e.g., Rönnblad et al., 2019), little is known about the role of underlying psychological and social processes experienced by affected people. For example, Klug et al. (2020) found evidence that financial worries are more strongly associated with impaired mental health than factual low income. Moreover, material conditions under which one grows up impact personal and social identities in the long term (Manstead, 2018) hence, precarious employment and work may not only impact affected people but also their children's identity.

According to the “identity process model of precarious work” proposed by Selenko (2023), precarious employment and work restricts opportunity for enactment, sense making and social validation which threatens the development of a work identity and existing self-understandings. Consequently, the lack of a stable, positive work identity can undermine well-being, future action, and may affect beliefs and expectations, career goal setting as well as work performance, attitudes towards others etc. It is unknown if or to what extent precarious employment and work satisfies manifest (level of income) and latent (social status, belonging, purpose, structure, activity) benefits of work, given such working situations are associated with low levels of income, reduced social status, belonging, purpose, structure, and activity (Jahoda, 1981; Seubert L. et al., 2023). However, there are important insights to be uncovered about how workers experience precarious employment and work and what they

value about it, despite enduring hardship. For example, precariously employed migrant care workers who reported aspects of precariousness and exploitation also stated experiencing meaning, to be proud of making an important contribution to society and to be satisfied with their jobs (Hopfgartner et al., 2022). Furthermore, specific sectors and jobs that are very important for society but lack recognition are particularly prone to precariousness and exploitation (e.g., construction, cleaning, care, agriculture, food, hospitality, sex work; Lewis et al., 2015). To date we know little about processes of identity formation within precarious employment and work and seemingly paradoxical findings need to be contextualized to understand underlying processes of this complex and dynamic phenomenon.

Considering precarious employment and work in the wider economic and social context, people in precarious employment and work are more vulnerable to external shocks, such as economic or pandemic crises, which makes it difficult for them to escape poverty (Searle & McWha-Hermann, 2021). Indeed, the coronavirus pandemic further worsened the situation for precariously employed workers globally (Gunn et al., 2022; Matilla-Santander et al., 2021). Furthermore, precarious employment and work not only affects individual workers, but negative consequences occur also at organizational (e.g., injuries and occupational accidents; Koranyi et al., 2018) and societal levels (e.g., increased sickness absence; Oke et al., 2016).

While the global pervasiveness of precarious employment and work is clear, the rising prevalence in countries of the Global North is mirrored in increasing reference to precarious employment and work topics in the public and scientific discourse (Betti, 2018). This discourse positions precarious employment and work as a relatively new phenomenon that emerged as a result of the depletion of welfare systems in Western economies and the spread of atypical employment relationships. However, such a position has been criticized for ignoring the fact that precarious employment and work has always been the norm in the Global South (Betti, 2018; Seubert L. et al., 2023). Moreover, within social welfare systems of Western Europe, secure and stable jobs with full integration into social security systems (standard employment relationships) could only be realized because of the historically gendered nature of unpaid care and housework (Mitropoulos, 2005; Suliman & Weber, 2019). There may therefore be much more we can learn from different social (e.g., indigenous communities) and economic contexts (e.g., informal work) about the nature of precarious employment and work.

Objectives and scope of special issue (SI)

This SI on precarious employment and work will constitute a vehicle to bring this pressing issue to greater attention within the field of work and organizational psychology (WOP). We anticipate research contributions that explore the phenomenon as a multidimensional concept and thus extend the understanding of precarious employment and work beyond job insecurity, to consider as a multilevel concept, positioned within individual, social, economic, political, ideological and societal context(s). In doing so, the SI also addresses recent calls from WOP and related fields to investigate precarious employment and work with a psychological lens (Allan et al., 2021; Seubert C. et al., 2019).

This SI seeks to explore the complex intertwining of precarious forms of employment and work and their subjective experiences in various jobs, organizations, industries, countries, and societies. We aim to apply a global perspective on precarious employment and work, inviting perspectives on and from both Western welfare systems of the Global North (e.g., Europe) and developing and emerging economies of the Global South, shedding light on how precarious employment and work manifests and how subjective experiences vary in different contexts. We therefore encourage submissions from various disciplinary fields able to inform a psychological perspective on precarious employment and work. The SI aims to shed light on the antecedences and contextual factors leading to precarious employment and work at micro (e.g., gender, migration), meso (e.g., specific industries, sectors prone to precariousness and exploitation), and macro (e.g., social security systems and lack of thereof) levels to enhance the means of mitigating and preventing precarious employment and work. Studies may describe any job, occupation, industry, country, or geographical region. High-quality conceptual papers and rigorous empirical (quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods) papers that meet the journal's requirements (no student samples, no paper solely relying on cross-sectional self-report data) are welcome. We particularly invite studies that apply a critical perspective (e.g., underrepresented populations in WOP; non-Western perspectives, examining contexts, underlying processes/ideologies).

Example research questions for the SI

This SI will develop novel conceptual, empirical, and methodological contributions to advance our understanding of precarious employment and work with a psychological lens through addressing the following questions (being exemplary but far from exhaustive):

- How can precarious employment and work be conceptualized and operationalized within the context of psychological research?

- Which objective and subjective dimensions of precarious employment and work are relevant under which conditions?
- How do workers perceive and experience precarious employment and work, including critical contextual factors?
- What are the reasons why workers endure the hardship of precarious employment and work? Despite enduring hardship, what do precariously employed workers value at their jobs (e.g., experiencing meaning, positively contributing to society)?
- What are the manifold (individual, family, organisational, societal) consequences of precarious employment and work?
- What are the underlying processes (e.g., ideological premises)?
- What are the micro processes that contribute to or ameliorate taking up precarious employment and work? Which additional mechanisms may play a role?
- What are the organizational factors and processes that contribute to or mitigate precarious employment and work?
- What role do Human Resource Management policies and practices and other contextual factors play in amplifying or reducing precarious employment and work?
- Which policies and practices can help and what are the factors that could stop the “slippery slope” of keeping precariously employed workers entrapped in poverty?
- What strategies can be employed at micro, meso and/or macro levels to address and reduce precarious employment and work?

Editorial and review procedure

Lisa Seubert, Ishbel McWha-Hermann, Christian Seubert, Rosalind Searle will serve as guest editors for the double-blind review process of the SI. Each submission will first be reviewed by the guest editors who decide if the submission fits within the scope of the SI. Rigorous, high-quality papers that meet the SI objectives and scope will be forwarded to at least two independent experts for peer review. All SI submissions must go through the independent review process.

Proposed timeline

We propose full paper submission (following the journals’ guidelines regarding formatting and word limit) by **April 30th, 2024**. We anticipate this would mean **mid 2025 publication for the SI**.

(0) Submission deadline for full papers: April 30th, 2024

(1) Reviews + decision round 1: July 31st, 2024

- (2) Resubmission deadline: October 31st, 2024
- (3) Reviews + decision round 2: February 29th, 2024
- (4) Final submission round 3: May 31st, 2025
- (5) Publication of the Special Issue by June 2025

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