



# Qualitative Synthesis and Systematic Review: Precarious Employment, Pandemic, and Well-being

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**Abstract:** The concept of precarious employment has received considerable attention in light of the increase in flexible forms of employment in the last three decades. Studies show that individuals employed precariously can experience adverse health and well-being outcomes, with both physical and mental health indicators like depression, fatigue, etc. being affected. The pandemic and ensuing lockdowns and health scare has aggravated the lived realities of precarious employees with many of them falling through the fault lines. While researchers have attempted to study the influence of Pandemic on the well-being of precarious employees, a review of such information is not available. The purpose of the current study is to conduct a systematic review and qualitative synthesis on the lived experiences of individuals with precarious employment and related health and well-being consequences in the context of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Thematic synthesis has identified themes around the changing nature of work and resulting psychological outcomes. It is seen that the pandemic has exacerbated the experiences of precarious employment. Results can inform labor market policy making and organizational practices to improve employee well-being.

**Index Terms - COVID 19, precarious employment, qualitative synthesis, systematic review, wellbeing.**

## Introduction

While no single definition of precarious employment (PE) has generated a consensus among researchers, there is agreement on the multidimensionality of the concept. The conceptualization of precarious employment includes job insecurity, income inequality, and limited rights and protection as its core component (Vives et al., 2010). PE could also include lower work status, inadequate workplace support, greater occupational health hazards, and limited training opportunities (Benach et al., 2014). With globalization, rapid advancements in information and technology, and increased competition, there have been significant changes in the career profiles of employees and organizational structures (Briscoe et al., 2006). Temporary roles, contractual employment, and freelance gigs – all representing various forms of precarious employment, have become a primary tool for promoting organizational flexibility.

Relationship between Precarious employment and Well-Being A study using data from the Netherlands Working Conditions Survey (2008) proposed three pathways to explain the relationship between temporary employment and health and well-being of employees, which could be extended to our understanding of precarious employment and associated health and well-being (Wagenaar et al., 2011). The first pathway using the core-periphery structure suggests peripheral employees receive less attractive working conditions and wages, when compared to core employees as the former are considered easily replaceable. The second pathway, suggests that temporary employment is more likely to include adverse job characteristics - low control, limited feedback, high or low work demand, low support, high job insecurity. The third pathway implicates uncertainty, unpredictability and uncontrollability associated with job insecurity to employee well-being and also work-related attitudes (De Cuyper et al., 2009). Socio-economic deprivations, unsafe work environments, and poor safety standards have also been identified to act as pathways linking precariousness to adverse health outcomes (Quinlan et al., 2001).

Although there is evidence for positive effects of flexible employment for some employees including higher salaries, greater exposure and opportunities, these effects are moderated by the labour conditions of the particular country and the voluntariness of assuming such positions (Nätti, 1993). In most cases, studies have documented the relationship between precarious employment and negative outcomes professionally and personally, due to structural uncertainties including contractual uncertainties, poorer working conditions, and income instability (Kim & von dem Knesebeck, 2016). Precarious employment has also been related to physically heavy work and greater risk of accidents (Gash et al., 2007). A study by Benavides and colleagues (2000) also found a positive association relating backache, fatigue, and muscular pain with precarious employment, especially full-time precarious employment. Furthermore, the

health consequences of precarious employment, particularly mental health have been reported in several studies. Research using data from three waves of the European Working Conditions Survey (1995, 2000 and 2005) reported a negative relationship between contractual employment and mental health and psychological well-being of employees (Cottini and Lucifora, 2010). Further, precarious employment is associated with an increased likelihood of developing mental health problems like anxiety and depression, that require medical treatment. Moving from permanent to temporary contracts is also related to deteriorating mental health (Moscone et al., 2016).

A study exploring precarious employment in Spain also found consistent associations between precariousness and poorer mental health, higher workplace injuries and presenteeism (Vives et al., 2010). Further, employees in precarious work report poorer overall health and higher stress levels than other working Canadians (Lewchuck et al., 2013). In the same vein, temporary employment's influence on mental well-being is shown as a cyclical process in which every precarious assignment brings strain/activation that impacts the mental well-being of employees but also future experiences and perceptions (Bosman et al., 2016).

Negative relationship between health and having a temporary job (as against permanent jobs) was also found in a panel study using 12 waves of British household panel surveys for both men and women with lower levels of education. However, the health of highly educated men and women was found to be positively associated with being in a temporary position. More opportunities for highly educated employees in the labour market in comparison to employees with lower levels of education could be responsible for the same (Robone et al., 2011).

Evidence suggests that the study of the relationship between precarious employment and health is also influenced by the bi-directionality of the relationship between two variables. Employees with poor health are more likely to work less and leave the job market (Stradh, 2000; Urbanviciute et al., 2019). Individuals with mental health issues are less likely to be in employment, have lower pay than others and relatively lower productivity, more absenteeism than employees without mental health issues (Frijters et al., 2014), resulting in greater difficulty to find stable work. There is also a stream of research that finds no relationship between precarious employment and health outcomes. One study using data from 18 waves of British Household panel surveys (1991-2008), while reporting higher levels of psychological distress and greater life dissatisfaction for temporary employees in comparison to permanent employees also found evidence suggesting mental health not being significantly lower for temporary employees as compared to permanent employees (Dawson et al., 2015). There is also evidence from some studies suggesting no long-term effects of precarious employment on mental health (Bardasi & Francesconi, 2004).

While precarious employment has been related to a negative impact on employees' physical and mental health, it could also be related to absenteeism, lower organizational productivity, unemployment at the end of contract period. Another related problem of presenteeism or systemic problems like lack of leaves, can encourage presence of employees in workplace despite symptoms which would increase the risk of workplace transmission of COVID-19 cases.

### ***The Pandemic and the Precariousness***

The first reported cases of COVID-19 can be traced to late 2019 in Wuhan, China (ProMED, 2019). While different nations adopted different strategies to counter COVID-19, the impact on health and infrastructure facilities, and national economies have destabilized many societies. The adverse consequences of COVID-19 on the economies across the world and the increased vulnerability of the poor and members of marginalized societies is now acknowledged. However, structural factors have resulted in different consequences for different groups, with individuals who are precariously employed experiencing a greater sense of uncertainty. While the Pandemic is still ongoing, it is imperative for policy makers to explore the impact of the pandemic on employees in precarious working conditions. This becomes even more important as people in precarious working conditions are more likely to belong to vulnerable sections (e.g., females, aged, racial or ethnic minorities, those with limited language proficiencies, those in high-risk occupations, etc). As is the nature of precarious employment, employees in these roles might find it difficult to avail leaves in case of symptoms due to fear of loss of pay or even loss of job, increasing the risk of transmission.

While meta-analysis has been commonly used to combine results of primary studies in quantitative research, interest in synthesis of qualitative research has been increasing in the recent years with the first work using the method being as recent as in 1988 (Noblit & Hare, 1988). A qualitative synthesis systematically searches for research on a topic, and draws findings by pulling insights from individual studies together (Seers, 2012). It can bring together data from different contexts, identify gaps in literature, develop new theoretical or conceptual models, and generate evidence for development, monitoring, and evaluation of assessments (Tong et al., 2012). 'Going beyond' the content of original studies is considered critical to separate it from literature sources (Sandelowski et al., 1997). The current research has reported the method informed by the ENTREQ framework (Enhancing Transparency in reporting the synthesis of Qualitative research, Tong et al., 2012). The 21 items of the framework have been classified under 3 categories for sake of convenience: (i) Systematic Review (ii) Critical analysis of papers; and; (iii) Thematic synthesis.

## **I. METHOD**

While meta-analysis has been commonly used to combine results of primary studies in quantitative research, interest in synthesis of qualitative research has been increasing in the recent years with the first work using the method being as recent as in 1988 (Noblit & Hare, 1988). A qualitative synthesis systematically searches for research on a topic, and draws findings by pulling insights from individual studies together (Seers, 2012). It can bring together data from different contexts, identify gaps in literature, develop new theoretical or conceptual models, and generate evidence for development, monitoring, and evaluation of assessments (Tong et al., 2012). 'Going beyond' the content of original studies is considered critical to separate it from literature sources (Sandelowski et al., 1997). The current research has reported the method informed by the ENTREQ framework (Enhancing Transparency in reporting the synthesis of Qualitative research, Tong et al., 2012). The 21 items of the framework have been classified under 3 categories for sake of convenience: (i) Systematic Review (ii) Critical analysis of papers; and; (iii) Thematic synthesis.

## 2.1. Systematic Review

The aim of the present study is to report the results of a systematic review and qualitative synthesis on the lived experiences of individuals with precarious employment and related health and well-being consequences in the context of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Precariousness here includes challenges of insecure job contract, low wages, lack of rights or inability to exercise the given rights, low access to training and/or career opportunities, etc.). The broad aim allows themes to emerge organically as the review of qualitative research progresses.

Thematic synthesis was used for qualitative synthesis as it is a tried-and-tested method to ensure an explicit link between conclusions and primary studies (Thomas & Harden, 2008). It involves systematic coding of data, followed by descriptive and analytical theme generation to generate higher order themes (Thomas & Harden, 2008). Further, a pre-planned comprehensive search strategy was used to seek all available studies in the area. Electronic databases like PsycInfo, Google Scholar, COVID research were scanned to locate papers using qualitative methods to investigate precarious employment in the light of the Pandemic. Search string included precarious employment, flexible employment, pandemic, COVID 19, health, well-being; and Boolean logic was used to locate relevant papers. Titles and abstracts were used to longlist studies, while a full text review was done to shortlist the papers for synthesis. The following criteria was kept in mind while shortlisting the final research papers for inclusion in the study:

- a. Only papers using qualitative research methods to study precarious employment in the context of COVID 19 were included.
- b. The years of publication of studies were limited to 2020 and 2021.
- c. Papers should have been available in English.
- d. Studies could be done in any geographical location. While qualitative research encourages contextualizing of studies, the nascence of the concept required this openness.
- e. Sample could be females, males, or others.
- f. The age group would be limited to 18-65 years old individuals keeping in mind the typical age of employment.
- g. Sample could be migrant or non-migrant workers
- h. Sample should have been precariously employed even before the pandemic

Since a pre-planned strategy was used, papers appearing in the first 10 pages of these databased were analyzed. Exclusion criteria also included: (a) chapters or books, as well as master's theses or dissertations; (b) research that was not peer-reviewed; (c) secondary analyses of previous studies. The studies selected for final analysis have been included in Table 1.

## 2.2. Appraisal Process

Quality of research needs to be assessed to ensure reliable conclusions. While standardized forms like Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP, 2002) can be used for quality appraisals in qualitative research, the present study has not excluded studies on the basis of the checklist as the number of studies in the area was very limited. The papers were however monitored for their methodological structure. The studies were classified in categories A and B on the basis of the following 10 criteria: (i) clear, justified objective; (ii) suitable methodological design as per objectives; (iii) discussion of methodological procedures; (iv) purposeful sample selection; (v) adequate description and presentation data collection instruments and saturation process; (vi) consideration of relationship between researcher and participant; (vii) adherence to ethical guidelines; (viii) careful analysis of data; (ix) discussion of results considering concerns around triangulation (x) discussion of limitations of the study as well as its implications. Category A studies met at least 9 of 10 proposed standards and had a low risk of bias while Category B studies meet at least 5 of the 10 categories (Espindola & Blay, 2009). Appraisals were conducted independently by the researcher. The flowchart for the review has been presented in Fig 2.

## 2.3. Thematic Synthesis

The present study used entire results of the study reported as 'results' or 'findings' for the analysis. Coding and analysis were done independently by the researcher. Line-by-line coding was done to find the meaning and context of each sentence and both similarities and differences were drawn together. Study comparisons were made within and across studies. The researcher tried to 'translate' themes and concepts from one context into another as suggested by Sandelowski and colleagues (1997).

## II. RESULTS

Findings from the present study indicate an exacerbation of the experience of precarious employment during the pandemic. Thematic synthesis has yielded six themes emerging from changes in the nature of work and six themes as psychological outcomes of the experience. The results have been summarized in Table 2.

### 3.1. Changes in the nature of work

COVID-19 transformed the world of work for employees. For precariously employed individuals, the onset of pandemic was associated with a myriad of changes in their world of work, ranging from job insecurity to greater exposure to physical hazards.

#### 3.1.1. Heightened sense of financial insecurity

An increased experience of financial insecurity was one of the most prevalent themes across the examined studies. Precariously employed individuals reported a heightened sense of vulnerability associated with an involuntary loss of pay due to losing of jobs or even a perceived threat of loss of job as economies around the world suffered the repercussions of lockdowns. Study 1, for instance, includes a diary entry from a precariously employed educator in Ireland (Whelan, 2021) which expresses anxiety around a contract that is about to lapse and questions around whether it would be renewed. The diary entry suggests a sense of anxiety around one's future due to the threat of loss of job.

Lack of government support and unemployment benefits was also identified as one of the reasons for the experience of financial insecurity. An employee interviewed in Study 7 (Cook et al., 2021) communicated the difficulty in accessing governmental support by stating that the process could not have been made more challenging even if they had designed it to be so. Financial insecurities were also experienced more deeply as precariously employed individuals sensed a lack of alternate opportunities elsewhere and in some cases also reported difficulty in accessing the available opportunities because of restrictions, halt in business operations and



limited options for travel. The implications of the same on the mental health of the participants can also be seen in this text from Study 2 which represents a seafarer's experience of pandemic where the employee anticipates a negative impact on their 'psyche' (Slišković, 2020).

Precariously workers, in some cases, however found some comfort as they were offered some financial help from their family or larger communities, they were part of. Some also moved to their family homes to cut costs (Duijs et al., 2021; Cook et al., 2021).

### 3.1.2. Increased workload

Precariously employed individuals who had an opportunity to retain their jobs experienced changes in the nature of their work modalities. Many expressed that their jobs switched to remote working remote working overnight. Others reported that their work was deemed 'essential' with addition of responsibilities to their original job description. This was at times motivated by the management accommodating the staff shortage as regular employees took leaves to protect themselves from exposure the virus.

Many also referred to an increase in the emotional labour associated with their roles. In service industries with customer-facing roles, precariously employed individuals had to put in greater work on the management of their emotions as they constantly tried to balance irate customers who did not want to wear masks and anxious customers who were scared for the safety of their own selves and their families. As the pandemic pushed people to an edge, employees had the added challenge of interpersonal emotional management. Many a times, it was the precariously employed individuals who were also burdened with the responsibility of adhering to safety protocols which required constant hand sanitization, wearing of masks and ensuring that others were doing the same.

### 3.1.3. Remote silos

This theme emerged particularly with individuals who had to begin working from their homes. Due to the isolated nature of work, employees experienced a lack of socio-capital resources. Study 6 captured a respondent's anxiety around presenting their best image in front of the interviewers as they could not express themselves freely or understand the energy of the space without seeing the non-verbal cues of others (Nardon et al., 2021). Employees also expressed a sense of missing out on the irreplaceable aspect of "humanness" as they started working alone online. Whelan (2021) in Study 1 talks about missing the 'humanity' of being in same space as the students and engaging in the teaching-learning process. Another employee in Study 3 spoke of the experience of alienation due to the social isolation and referred to the toll it had taken on them.

### 3.1.4. Greater exposure to physical hazards

Owing to the nature of employment, precariously employed individuals experienced a greater exposure to physically hazardous working conditions. As 'essential' workers, their jobs in most cases involved greater exposure to people, thereby increasing the probability of them getting exposed to the virus itself. Employees in some sectors experienced a paradoxical situation wherein the only opportunities available to some were working in situations where there would be a greater or even definite exposure to the virus. For instance, one freelance eldercare employee in Study 7 mentioned, how clients offering them jobs mentioned that they were infected with COVID-19 only at the very end (Duijs et al., 2021).

Further, due to the limited opportunities available, gig workers felt compelled to take jobs that seemed dangerous for sustenance. Cook and colleagues (2021), for instance, includes a narrative which describes an employee taking a job that she was not comfortable with due to lack of opportunities elsewhere.

### 3.1.5. Systemic indifference

Another prominent theme across studies revolved around the indifference of authorities, both organizational and governmental toward the precariously employed individuals. With respect to organizations, employees reported a lack of organizational support in terms of policies, and making even essential resources like masks and PPE kits available to the workers. Employees also reported a lack of clear organizational communication vis-à-vis their roles and future in the organizations. A precarious worker in Study 2 communicated their lack of trust in organization and even unions regarding their position in the organization, and mentioned that the primary focus of the organizations was on their own profits (Slišković, 2020).

Employees also described their challenging experiences in the absence of any kind of support or benefits from the government after losing jobs. Employees in different situations experienced structural and verbal abuse without any protection either from their organizations or the governments. In Study 8, Loustaunau and colleagues (2021) draw on the experience of a retail worker who described being constantly harassed and abused by customers who yelled and even coughed at the employees and other customers. Another foreign domestic worker reiterated the concerns around verbal abuse in Study 6 while referring to the lack of safety even in spaces that are supposed to be safe spaces for them (Kaur-Gill et al., 2021). The condition heightens due to the lack of access to social support networks or guidance.

A few employees however mentioned the support of their management in dealing with situations where they were at risk. Study 7 (Cook et al., 2021) for instance, includes an account where the manager came in support of a precarious worker as they insisted that one customer follow the safety protocols, supporting the employee.

### 3.1.6. Increased conflicts

Working in the pandemic has also been fraught with more conflicts both internal and external. Internal conflicts revolve around dilemma of choosing between health or money as precariously employed individuals received disproportionately greater number of opportunities that involved exposure to hazardous health conditions while at the same time being concerned about taking the virus to children or senior citizens back home. One respondent in Study 7 (Cook et al., 2021), reported they were extremely anxious about infecting their family members as they did not know where their customers had been. The lack of safety equipment and the greater exposure to the virus placed many precariously employed individuals in front of a dilemma involving paid work or safety of their family members. Participants who could afford to leave their income also at times decided to leave their job to ensure health of their families like in the case of an eldercare worker in Study 3 who discussed the dilemma in context of her asthmatic child and decides to leave her job but lives in constant guilt of not being at work where they need her (Duijs et al., 2021). The challenge of making the harsh choice was a recurrent theme for employees working as 'essential' workers.

Due to the uncertainty of times, customers also spoke of an increase in the number of external conflicts between managers and employees. For instance, Study 8 (Loustaunau et al., 2021) reports how management enforced more stringent rules for workers where

workers lost their pay while being forced to take a leave when sick while the same rules did not apply to managers. Any questioning of the discrepancy in enforcing rules was met with a threat of lay-offs. Similar incidents added a layer of precarity to their already precarious roles as they now also ran the risk of contracting sickness at work. There were also a larger number of incidents involving rude customers.

Changes in the nature of work associated with the pandemic were associated with the following psychological outcomes.

### 3.2.1. Sense of uncertainty and hopelessness

Precariously employed individuals reported a sense of uncertainty related to their work and health of the family. Emotions like anxiety, stress, worry, and fear found recurrent mentions in the results of the studies analyzed. Study 2 (Slišković, 2020) for instance, includes verbatims depicting emotions of a precarious worker who experiences a sense of uncertainty about the income and his future. Many employees also expressed a sense of loss of agency with respect to their life trajectories during the pandemic. One participant in Study 8 (Loustaunau, 2021) communicated the extent of stress experienced due to a lack of sense of control in their workplace. The sense of hopelessness among employees also came from a perceived lack of control on exposure to virus or resulting illness. Precariously employed individuals also experienced a sense of hopelessness because they believed they had no voice for claiming rights and protection. Some respondents also voiced a sense of feeling trapped in one's routine with no way out. A respondent in study 7 (Cook et al., 2021) spoke of her sense of hopelessness with respect to her job while wondering whether her efforts amounted to anything and questioned whether there is an element of 'insanity' in her doing things repeatedly while expecting different results.

### 3.2.2. Sense of dehumanization

Precariously employed individuals also expressed a sense of dehumanization due to a range of instances, that varied in its severity. Some employees discussed a sense of being 'disposable' even as they were deemed essential workers because of the manner in which the organizations and public treated them. Besides verbal and physical abuse (Study 5, Kaur-Gill, 2021), precarious workers also expressed unfair treatment by management and organizations in making them feel dehumanized. This included being given riskier shifts, not being given masks and PPE kits, and a general disregard for their mental and physical well-being by the organizations. Whelan (2021) regarding mails from his place of work expresses anger regarding not getting job security from the same organization that keeps sending the employees mails around their concern for employee well-being. A hospitality worker in Study 8 (Loustaunau, 2021) communicates the disregard of the management around worker safety. The organization did not attempt to protect the workforce in most cases by enforcing rules and the responsibility fell largely on employees themselves.

### 3.2.3. Loss of sense of self

Many employees voiced concerns around losing their sense of self and identity in their precarious roles. Much of the dissonance in their identities found its roots in precarity-induced moral dilemmas. Study 3 (Duijs et al., 2021), for instance, includes a narrative from an elder care worker who expresses the discomfort in having to engage in actions not consistent with their self-concept, when they express their inability to send money back to their families as they can't afford it right now and feel selfish for only taking care of their own basic needs. With increase in time spent on precarious roles, employees also reported a sense of failure as they believed that they were unworthy of stability.

### 3.2.4. Sense of exhaustion

Precarious workers also routinely expressed that they felt they were overworked and underpaid. A sense of exhaustion both physical and mental was mentioned by the employees using various terms including tiredness, fatigue, weakness, lack of concentration, loss of motivation, and mood swings. A seafarer in Study 2 (Slišković, 2022), for instance, describes feeling constantly depressed and not being able to concentrate at work.

For a few participants however, pandemic gave an opportunity to take a break and regroup themselves as in the case of an employee in Study 7 (Cook et al., 2021), who mentions being more 'Zen' at work and less stressed, suggesting a positive impact of the pandemic on those who were privileged to use the time to reassess their plans and come back calmer.

### 3.2.5. Work-life imbalance

Due to a larger exposure to physically hazardous situations and greater responsibilities, some employees mentioned an inability to take care of family members, whereas others spoke of not taking a job because of the risk involved. Issues around managing their children without the assistance of childcare facilities, inability to take some jobs because it would put the family at risk were routinely discussed. Nardon and colleagues (2021) include a narrative from retirement support worker in Study 6, that describes how the employee is doing more work for longer hours and is not left with any times for self-care or even basic studies. A combination of factors including precariousness of work, and lack of paid leave makes work-life balance difficult for the respondent here. A few employees however were also grateful for the time they got to spend at home with their family members.

### 3.2.6. Sense of discontentment

Pandemic was associated with a renewed awareness of dissatisfaction with current life positions for some employee. They believed that it was a much-needed wake-up call that gave them a renewed energy or motivation to move out of jobs not in their career trajectories. For instance, Study 7 (Cook et al., 2021) includes an account of an employee who speaks of regaining focus and having got a push to reassess their future goals.

## IV. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this systematic review and qualitative synthesis was to explore the relationship between precarious employment and well-being in the context of the pandemic. Analysis and synthesis of literature indicates that the pandemic has aggravated the experience of precarious employment due to changes in the nature of work and has generally not been associated with a sense of well-being among most precarious employees sampled in the analyzed studies. The precarious workers studied were employed in

different professions across the world and have reported psychological outcomes including a heightened sense of uncertainty, hopelessness, dehumanization, exhaustion, discontentment, and loss of sense of self.

While there is some evidence on positive perception of precarity during the pandemic, especially when finances were taken care of, reports of these experiences were limited. Employees in these cases expressed a sense of gratitude around having the opportunity to enjoy family time, getting a much-needed break or simply the privilege of still having a job as others around them were losing theirs. Voluntary choice of precarious employment in some cases is based on the promise of capitalism as it brings about an opportunity to engage in meaningful work, provides employees with a sense of autonomy, while at the same time ensuring freedom from organizational practices (Nätti, 1993). However, dysfunctional structures have heightened vulnerabilities and degraded quality of jobs for employees who are precariously employed.

Precariously employed individuals who are also deemed as 'essential' are experiencing hazards around both health as they are continuously operating out of a public space, and financial insecurity due to loss of income or a threat of loss of income. The findings are consistent with the results of a rapid scoping review (McNamara et al., 2021) where they identify the 'double-burden' imposed due to health and financial problems among precarious workers. Our findings also suggest increased negative mental health implications of the precarious experience, as marked by increased sense of uncertainty, hopelessness and discontentment. Increased reporting of experiencing guilt, shame, and anxiety around health and financial vulnerabilities during the pandemic also indicate how dilemmas are being individualized by many precarious workers. Negative mental health implications generated by the pandemic have been evidenced in other studies as well (Oswald et al., 2021; Matilla-Santander et al., 2021).

The results have also highlighted differences in the experiences of those precariously employed. In line with existing research, the analysis has highlighted the role of race, citizenship, and gender as important factors in influencing the intensity of impact with the risk of exposure being greater among populations that are already vulnerable – young employees, migrant workers, low-skilled workers and females (Gray et al., 2021; McNamara et al., 2021). Racial 'superiority', a lack of caregiving responsibilities, higher level of education seems to serve as buffers for reducing the impact of precariousness. For instance, in Study 1 Whelan (2021) while writing about the uncertainty of his contract does not express concern around finances. These varying dimensions of vulnerability need to be addressed while designing and implementing policy interventions. Many of the precariously employed reported limited access to health care, and childcare while also have unstable incomes and unpredictable schedules. This compels many to make impossible choices as they navigate uncertainties in work.

The findings are also in line with the core-periphery model (Ferrie et al., 2008) wherein, the permanent employees form the core surrounded by precarious employees in the periphery. The employees at the periphery are treated as almost 'second-class citizens' with limited access to protective gear and requisite safety protocols (Schneider & Harknett, 2020) consistent with the idea of 'disposable' workers, as emergent in the analysed studies.

Studies analysed have called for better systemic practices for promoting mental health of precarious workers. This includes investment in better psycho-social capital, respect for employees, honouring their allotted leaves, open communication channels, ensuring access to social support (Kaur-Gill et al., 2021; Cook et al., 2021). Paying employees their due, considering the zeitgeist of the times has also been recommended with higher wages, benefits, hazard pay, paid time off, and government assistance to those precariously employed (Loustaunau et al., 2021).

The current study while making important contribution toward the literature on the relationship between precarious employment and well-being during the pandemic, is not without limitations. Firstly, selection, coding, and analysis has been done by a single author. Multiple authors would have created a greater scope for critical review. Exclusion of non-English literature, and gray literature has placed some limits on the breadth of information covered. Further, only a small sample of studies were identified and analysed. Future research in the area can investigate the role of education, gender and income in experiences of precarious employment during the Pandemic and its relationship with subjective well-being.

While the pandemic had transformed the world of work for employees everywhere, the impact on precarious employees has been worse due to their positioning in the system. Without adequate pay, job security, and limited rights including lower number of leaves and insurance, their well-being has been disproportionately affected. More high-quality research is required to drive policymaking that creates better working conditions for those precariously employed.

## Tables

Table 1: Summary of Study Characteristics

S.No	Title	Authors	Study Location	No of participants	Area of work	Method of data collection	Analysis	Categorization
1	Tales of precarity: A reflexive essay on experiencing the COVID pandemic as a social work educator on a precarious contract	Whelan	Ireland	N=1	Academia	Jounaling, Archival Records	Autoethnography	B
2	Seafarers' well-being in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic: A qualitative study	Slišković	Multinational	n= 752	Seafarers	Questionnaires	Thematic Analysis	A
3	Pushed to the Margins and Stretched to the Limit: Experiences of Freelance Eldercare Workers During the Covid-19 Pandemic in the Netherlands	Duijs, Haremaker, Bourik, Abma, Verdonk	The Netherlands	n = 23	Freelance Eldercare workers	Semi-structured interviews	Thematic analysis, Intersectional analysis	A
4	Public perceptions and experiences of social distancing and social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic: a UK-based focus group study.	Dienes	UK	n = 27	Varied	Online FGDs	Thematic analysis, iterative	A
5	Negotiating Mental Health During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Performing Migrant Domestic Work in Contentious Conditions.	Kaur-Gill, Qin-Liang & Hassan	Singapore	n = 32	Migrant Domestic Workers	In-depth interviews	Grounded Theory	B

6	Skilled immigrant women's career trajectories during the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal.	Nardon, Hari, Zhang, Hoselton, Kuzhabekova	Canada	n=50	Migrant women, varying skilled professionals	In-depth questionnaires	Grounded Theory	B
7	Youth, Precarious Work and the Pandemic	Cook, Threadgold, Farrugia & Coffet	Australia	n = 32	Hospitality	Interviews, digital methods	Flexible coding, thematic analysis	A
8	No Choice but to Be Essential: Expanding Dimensions of Precarity During COVID-19. Sociological Perspectives.	Loustaunau, Stepick, Scott, Petrucci & Henifin	USA	n=52	Low wage service workers	Interviews, worker testimonies on retail union social media and a public agency listening session	Thematic analysis	A

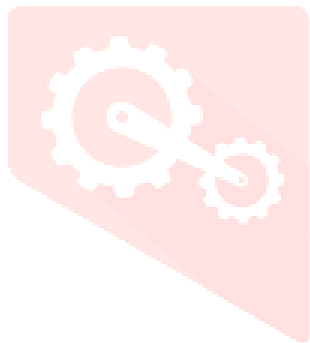




Table 2: Emerging themes around experience of precarious employment during the pandemic

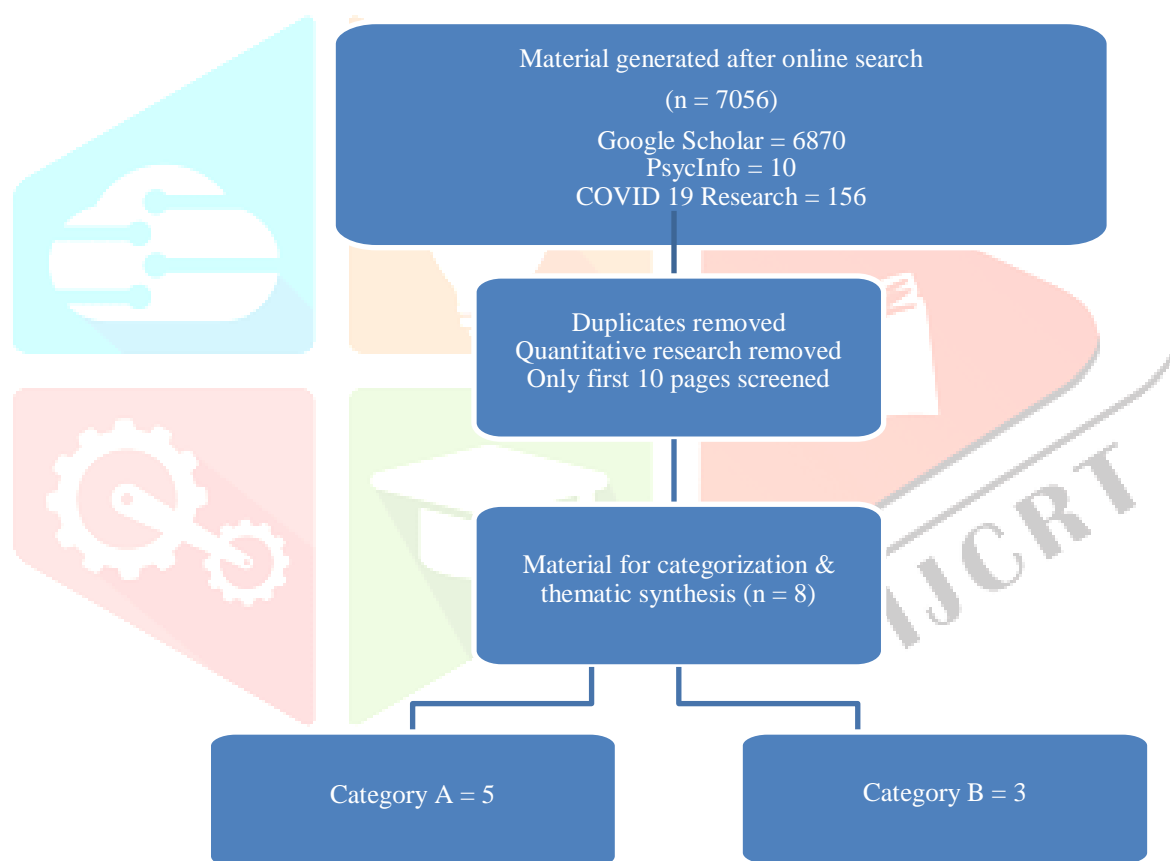
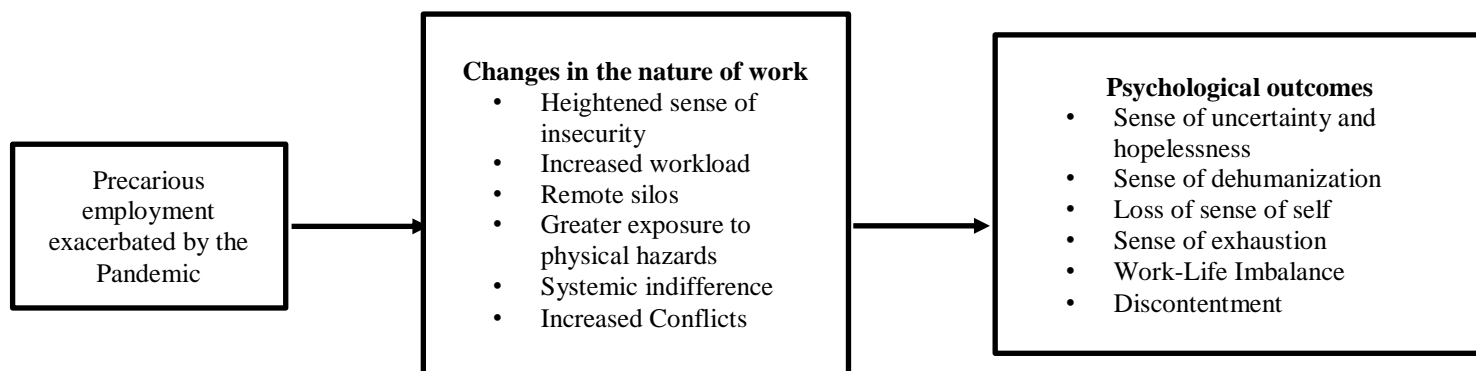


Figure 1: Flowchart showing appraisal process

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