Precarious work and PSR
—
Results from the EPRES-BE data and qualitative research

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The Quality of Work

Societal and socio-economic context

Work station/ Organisation

Work organisation (the 5th A)
- Task design (holistic, fragmented, task rotation, ...)
- Organisational designs (teamwork, ‘flat’; hierarchical, bureaucratic organisation; network structure; quality circles, ...)

Social relations
- Management style, organisational culture, formal/informal, ...

Characteristics of the environment
- Cold, dangerous, outside, different sites, ...

Economic position

‘Quality of Work’ (4A’s)

Work content (Arbeidsinhoud)
- Autonomy, Variation, Interesting work, Learning opportunities, Participation in decisions; Support, ...

Working conditions (Arbeidsomstandigheden)
- Physical and chemical hazards; Psychosocial demands; Emotional demands, Harassment, ...

Employment conditions (Arbeidsvoorwaarden)
- Contractual stability; Rewards; Training facilities; Working times; ...

Employment relations (Arbeidsverhoudingen)
- Collective representation and interpersonal relations
The Transformation of Work

Standard Employment Relation (SER):  
- Key term = **security** (Standing, 2011)  
  - Job security  
  - Security of income  
  - Security of rights and social protection  
  - Working time security  
  - Security of future employment/employability  
  - Security of representation (participation)

The SER became a “golden standard”... however, difficult to maintain ... and ‘under attack’:  
- Changing balance of power  
- Polarisation  
- Flexibilisation and de-standardising, most ‘harmful’ at the bottom
The Transformation of Work
Making Sense of the Transformation: Concepts

• Concepts to grasp into ‘flexibilization’ and ‘de-standardisation’
  • Employment quality:
    • ... a multi-dimensional construct, grasping into different features of the employment conditions and relations, including the stability and controllability of contracts, level and stability of wages, working hours (amount, timing, discretion), access to social rights, future employability, collective bargaining, interindividual relations (with hierarchy).
  • Precarious employment:
    • ... a situation of accumulated unfavourable ‘employment quality characteristics’ that is essentially due to the weak bargaining power of a worker
Making Sense of the Transformation: Measuring

• Using ‘pragmatic’ proxy-indicators
  • Type of contract, agency work, freelance, part-time
  • Advantages: readily available, common sense logic
  • Disadvantages: reductionist, fragmented view of reality, difficult to compare cross-nationally

• Subjective approaches (job/employment insecurity)
  • Confusion of cause and effect
  • Interference of preferences, personality, culture, ...

• Multi-dimensional approaches
  • Summed scales (see Lewchuk, 2016; Vives et al, 2011; Leschke et al. 2008)
  • Typological approach: constructing a typology (see Van Aerden et al, 2014)
Employment Quality and Precarious Work

- Stability
- Wages
- Rights and Benefits
- Enforceability of rights
- Working times
- Training
- Voice
- Vulnerability

Employment Quality

High Quality

Summed Scale Precarious Work (EPRES)

Low Quality – Precarious Work

Some references to this work...

- Specific EPRES-data collections:

- Analyses based on secondary data:

- Related, but alternative approaches:
    https://doi.org/10.1177/0730888420946436
Precarious Work and Mental Health

Employment quality

‘Direct’ mechanisms:

Psychosocial consequences related to insecurity, powerlessness, inequity, ...

Mediating factors

Adverse (psychosocial) work characteristics
Weak OHS-protection
Low income and lacking social protection

Moderating factors

Socio-economic & institutional context
Household context

Health and well-being

Empirical research: EPRES-BE study

Employment precariousness, psychosocial working conditions and material deprivation in Belgian domestic cleaners:

• First results based on EPRES-BE data (http://precariouswork.be – Du/Fr)
  • 1,115 female domestic cleaners included in the ‘Service Voucher System’ (taken from wider sample of 2,707 employees)
  • Recruited in spring-summer 2019 (with follow-up)
  • Cross-sectional results
• Measures
  • EPRES-BE (temporariness, disempowerment, vulnerability, rights, exercise of rights, low wages, flexible working times, lack of training) – 0-1 scale (1 = max. precariousness)
  • Outcome: WHO-5 mental health index
• PSR:
  • PSR – Work task-intrinsic characteristics: Quantitative demands, Task variation, Autonomy, Colleague-support (and Physical Demands)
  • PSR - Direct pathway: Subjective job insecurity, Perceived financial strain
• Statistical analyses:
  • Descriptives and OLS-regression analyses
Precarious work and Mental health

![Graph showing the relationship between precarious work and mental health scores.](image)

*Source: EPRES-BE, 2019*
Precarious work and Task specific PSR

![Graph showing the relationship between deciles of employment precariousness and mean scores on psychosocial and mental health scales. The graph includes lines for high quantitative demands, low task variation, low autonomy, low co-worker support, and high physical demands. The x-axis represents deciles of employment precariousness, ranging from 1 (highly precarious) to 10 (low precariousness). The y-axis represents mean scores on psychosocial and mental health scales, ranging from 0 to 1. Each line is accompanied by a p-value indicating statistical significance. The graph is sourced from EPRES-BE, 2019.]
Precarious work and Direct PSR

Source: EPRES-BE, 2019
## Regression results: Precarious work – PSR – Mental health

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complete case analyses</th>
<th>Model 0</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
<th>Model 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beta (S.E.)</td>
<td>Beta (S.E.)</td>
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<td>Beta (S.E.)</td>
<td>Beta (S.E.)</td>
<td>Beta (S.E.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constant</strong></td>
<td>0.251 (0.037)**</td>
<td>0.002 (0.042)</td>
<td>0.101 (0.036)**</td>
<td>0.222 (0.041)</td>
<td>-0.062 (0.044)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>under 25</td>
<td>0.134 (0.045)**</td>
<td>0.113 (0.045)*</td>
<td>0.078 (0.041)</td>
<td>0.081 (0.041)</td>
<td>0.125 (0.048)</td>
<td>0.063 (0.043)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>0.081 (0.028)**</td>
<td>0.054 (0.029)</td>
<td>0.024 (0.027)</td>
<td>0.042 (0.027)</td>
<td>0.057 (0.032)</td>
<td>0.020 (0.029)</td>
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<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>0.066 (0.027)**</td>
<td>0.057 (0.028)*</td>
<td>0.033 (0.026)</td>
<td>0.039 (0.026)</td>
<td>0.063 (0.032)*</td>
<td>0.024 (0.028)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>0.046 (0.027)*</td>
<td>0.033 (0.027)</td>
<td>0.015 (0.025)</td>
<td>0.022 (0.025)</td>
<td>0.032 (0.031)</td>
<td>0.004 (0.027)</td>
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<tr>
<td>55+</td>
<td>ref</td>
<td>ref</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Household status</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0.036 (0.033)</td>
<td>0.054 (0.033)</td>
<td>0.033 (0.030)</td>
<td>-0.011 (0.031)</td>
<td>0.065 (0.037)</td>
<td>-0.002 (0.033)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single with children</td>
<td>0.061 (0.031)**</td>
<td>0.055 (0.030)</td>
<td>0.039 (0.028)</td>
<td>-0.009 (0.028)</td>
<td>0.057 (0.034)</td>
<td>0.004 (0.030)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Couple</td>
<td>ref</td>
<td>ref</td>
<td>ref</td>
<td>ref</td>
<td>ref</td>
<td>ref</td>
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<tr>
<td>Couple with children</td>
<td>0.024 (0.025)</td>
<td>0.011 (0.025)</td>
<td>0.008 (0.023)</td>
<td>-0.004 (0.023)</td>
<td>0.020 (0.027)</td>
<td>0.005 (0.024)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precarious emp.</td>
<td>0.553 (0.067)**</td>
<td>0.522 (0.067)***</td>
<td>0.198 (0.068)**</td>
<td>0.355 (0.063)***</td>
<td>0.492 (0.075)***</td>
<td>0.162 (0.072)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative demands</td>
<td>0.401 (0.032)***</td>
<td>0.271 (0.037)***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.166 (0.041)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical demands</td>
<td>0.320 (0.036)***</td>
<td>0.118 (0.039)***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.107 (0.042)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Variation (low)</td>
<td>0.180 (0.031)***</td>
<td>0.124 (0.029)***</td>
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<td></td>
<td>0.118 (0.031)***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Autonomy (low)</td>
<td>0.283 (0.030)***</td>
<td>0.120 (0.032)***</td>
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<td></td>
<td>0.087 (0.035)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial strain</td>
<td>0.430 (0.030)***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.387 (0.031)***</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.274 (0.034)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Insecurity (high)</td>
<td>0.154 (0.030)***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.087 (0.030)**</td>
<td>0.041 (0.027)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: EPRES-be 2019 survey (own analyses); *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001;
Model 0: Bivariate models for all variables included separate; Model 1: Socio-demographics, Precarious employment; Model 2: Socio-demographics, Precarious employment and intrinsic job quality; Model 3: Socio-demographics, Precarious employment, Financial strain; Model 4: Socio-demographics, Precarious employment, Job insecurity; Model 5: Socio-demographics, Precarious employment, Intrinsic job quality, Financial strain, Job insecurity.
Empirical research: Evidence from qualitative studies

In-depth interviews with temporary agency workers and domestic cleaners (service voucher system) in Belgium and Canada

• Phd-Research of Kim Bosmans
• EU 7th Framework SOPHIE-project (www.sophie-project.eu)
• Key references:
Qualitative evidence: Direct psychosocial effects

• Powerlessness:
  • “You feel like you’re being toyed with and things are out of your control. You have to do temporary work in order to survive . . . Sometimes it does happen that you feel good in a company and you want to stay there and build a career, but [cynical laugh] after a while you don’t know what to think anymore . . . You’re put aside so easily, while maybe the job could’ve been a step up for you.” (Emma, 35, social sector)

• Injustice:
  • “Permanent employees got everything they wanted, but the agency workers . . . Once, I asked them for half a day off because I really needed it, and they said “No, permanent workers have priority.” (Mia, 49, retail)

• Uncertainty:
  • “My agency says, “Here and there, here and there”. It’s a dog’s life now. When we get up in the morning we have to think, “I hope that the agency calls us”. We have to stay in the house and wait for the call. We pray every day that they will call us.” (Victoria, 33, manual worker)
Qualitative evidence: Work task, social relations, ...

• Discrimination:
  • “When there’s a staff party or they go out for bowling and dinner for some or other occasion, the temporary agency workers aren’t invited. You just can’t sign up. They hand out a piece of paper to write your name on, but this piece of paper is just not handed to you.” (Patrick, 49, manual worker)

• Power abuse by permanent workers:
  • “Had this permanent colleague gone up to tell the boss that he had seen me using my cell phone, I would’ve been fired immediately, on the spot. Just because I put him in his place!” (Jason, 23, manual worker)

• Doing the dirty, less interesting, dangerous, ... work:
  • “These kinds of jobs were always given to the agency workers ... There were boxes which came in from China on pallet boards which had mould because they were wet ... we were the ones who had to move those boxes onto other pallets. We were supposed to wear a mask against the bacteria, but most of us didn’t bother.” (Patrick, 49, manual worker)
Discussion

Main conclusions:
- Precarious work puts focus on ‘labour market bottom’
- Strong associations with (mental) health
- Strongly, but not entirely mediated by PSR via different pathways
- Domestic cleaners in SVS are relatively homogenous population, but still:
  - Strong differences in exposure to precarious work
  - Strong links with mental health
  - Importance of work-intrinsic and household features as mediators (= room for action)
- Results very consistent with previous EPRES-research

Policy pointers for the bottom of the labour market:
- Regulate the contingent sector: anti-discrimination and equal pay, social protection, OHS-efficacy, ...
- Investment: (net) wage increases, training, innovative work organisation, collective working time reduction, ...
- Strengthen collective voice (labour unions) and individual level say
- Stimulate alternative economic models: social economy, cooperatives, in-sourcing