

Women and Public Sector Precarity: Causes, Conditions and Consequences

FACT SHEET 5: THE IMPACTS OF PRECARIETY ON WORKERS' HEALTH, SAFETY, HOME, FAMILY & COMMUNITY

The consequences of precarious public sector work are wide-ranging and interconnected. As noted above, these conditions have come about in the context of a broader shift in public services. The conditions of precarious employment have particularly profound impacts on **women's: general working conditions; health and safety; homes, families, and communities; and rights as workers.**

HEALTH AND SAFETY

The relationship between precarious work and poor health and safety has been widely documented. A 'social determinants of health' perspective understands that peoples' health and well-being suffer as consequences of precarious work. This is a widely accepted way of understanding health and well-being. The understanding that peoples' health and well-being is shaped by a number of social and structural issues that are often beyond one's control. Income and social status, and employment and working conditions, are two of the 12 recognized determinants of health in Canada.

Health-related effects of job precarity include: **harassment and aggression; emotional and psychological effects; and physical injuries.**

Harassment and Aggression

Public sector budget cuts, restructuring, and the adoption of private sector managerial methods have led to work intensification and higher rates of harassment. Marginalized workers are, on average, exposed to more harassment than socially advantaged groups, with labour stratification likely playing a significant role. In studies on workplace harassment, **women; LGBT, racialized, Aboriginal, and immigrant workers; and workers with disabilities report disproportionately high levels of harassment.** This suggests that precarity contributes to bullying, and to the erosion of workplace inclusion through the potential loss of diversity. The higher rates of harassment against women, immigrants, and racialized workers may partly reflect their over-representation in high-risk and insecure occupations, such as health, education and social services.

Emotional and Psychological Effects

Government restructuring and downsizing in healthcare are factors contributing to increased stress, emotional exhaustion and psychological burnout among nurses in Canada. Anxiety, insecurity, and anger, for example, increased during restructuring.

This is the fifth of seven fact sheets on women and public sector precarity. All of the fact sheets are available at: <http://www.criaw-icref.ca/en/page/women-and-public-sector-precariety-fact-sheet-series>

CRIA-W-ICREF acknowledges its presence and work on Indigenous Territories. We respectfully recognize the legacy of colonization.

PRECARIOUS WORK is characterized by employment that is low-paid, little or no benefits and with high job insecurity

Stress is a particularly common consequence of precarity for women. According to research by Bourgeois, health claims filed by public servants for mental health issues were 13 per cent higher after *Workforce Adjustment* process had begun.

Feelings of isolation, competition and distrust are common in precarious work environments, and are exaggerated by unpredictable assignments, frequent interruptions, and under-staffing. Under these conditions, workers have also reported feeling regret or mourning over the loss of their caring relationships with clients due to restructuring.

Physical Injuries

There is also evidence to suggest that physical injuries can result from precarious work environments. In long-term care, the increase in privatization of residential long-term care and for-profit nursing homes is linked to higher reported rates of disability and time off work due to musculoskeletal injuries. Due to employment insecurity there is more fear of job repercussions for reporting a work-related injury or accident.

Overall, it is evident that serious mental and physical health repercussions are associated with precarious public sector work. The research highlighted above demonstrates that precarious public sector workers are at heightened risk of harassment, bullying, stress, and injury.

Women and women-dominated sectors are at the forefront of bearing these consequences.

HOME, FAMILY & COMMUNITY

Damages occur when individuals and families are deprived of time and resources. **Women in particular have to juggle increased responsibilities because they continue to bear disproportionate childcare and household responsibilities.**

When exploring the effects of precarity beyond the individual, research also finds that low wages, insufficient hours of work, no benefits, and job insecurity translate into deprivations for workers' families. There is a falling standard of living, which has an impact on the ability to afford tuition, recreation, lessons, or holidays for the family.

The need to supplement the low income with a second or third job creates obstacles to spending time with children, spouses, parents, and friends. This can have real consequences for women's engagement in community and volunteer activities.

Precarious work can have immediate and long-term consequences for women and their homes, families, and communities.

Research demonstrates that precarious public sector workers are at heightened risk of harassment, bullying, stress, and injury, and also that women and women-dominated sectors are at the forefront of bearing these consequences.

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