

Women and Public Sector Precarity: Causes, Conditions and Consequences

FACT SHEET 6: THE IMPACTS OF PRECARIETY ON PUBLIC SERVICE USERS

Besides eroding workers' health and safety; homes, families, and communities; and rights as workers, precarious work conditions create precarious public services by affecting: **quality and access**; and **accountability and safety** of services.

DECLINING QUALITY AND ACCESS

Loss of staff, lower budgets, and fewer resources raise concerns about the quality and accessibility of services. Communities already underserved, like rural communities, will bear large impacts as the government's role in ensuring equality of service across geographies declines.

- ▶ Generally, families, and especially women, will find it more difficult to receive adequate services, since, as Oxfam notes, "cutbacks to health care, and the failure of the government to implement child care and home care programs...have a disproportionate effect on women who are more likely to be caregivers in the family context".
- ▶ Casualization compromises academic freedom in universities because of job insecurity, and therefore the quality suffers.
- ▶ The impacts on certain groups of marginalized persons can be far reaching. For example, the impacts of privatization on persons with disabilities has had a range of negative outcomes including creating additional barriers to accessing necessary prescription drugs.
- ▶ It has been documented that costs for users increase when services are privatized.

Another challenge with quality and access relates to **the diversity and representativeness of the workforce, which is at risk in the face of precarious work.**

Members of ethnocultural or racialized groups bring important knowledge, skills and social networks to their work as public servants. This can help the public service communicate and connect with more diverse communities, and in turn provide more relevant, sensitive and appropriate service delivery to reflect the intersections of the identities of the people accessing services.

DECLINING ACCOUNTABILITY AND SAFETY

There has also been a focus on how increases in private sector practices and privatization

This is the sixth 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.

in the public health and education systems have led to accountability and safety issues.

Privatization of long-term care facilities and services weakens accountability and opens seniors' care to instability and displacements that are costly and harmful for residents, workers and the health care system. There is evidence of the **linkages between precarious work and negative consequences for public service users**. Poor health and lower quality of life for residents as a consequence of understaffing and privatization have been documented by decades of research.

Local health department directors who privatized their services reported that staff spent an increased amount of time on administration and program management rather than service delivery. The health department directors also noted that they felt that privatization had hindered their ability to respond to emergencies and outbreaks. In addition to the impacts on the individual user, this is a serious safety issue for the public at large.

These studies help to demonstrate that workers' environments can play a significant role in the safety of clients and patients. They also point out that efficiency is not gained through privatization; instead, users may simply be faced with more risks.

Restructuring has created issues of quality, accessibility, accountability, and safety for public service users. **When those users are themselves precariously employed, further problems ensue.**

Precariously employed lone mothers (and their families) are not well-served by Ontario's workfare policies (rolled out under Ontario Works legislation in 1997), because the policies focus on work incentives and cost containment and do not address the precarious nature of employment. Those who remain on social assistance are increasingly likely to be those individuals who are at most disadvantage in the labour market.

There are similar issues with the mismatch between the realities of a precarious labour market and employment insurance (EI) policies. For example, the difficulties faced especially by young workers and recent immigrants in accumulating sufficient work hours to qualify for EI points out that EI's requirements are detrimental to part-time workers.

The effects of precarious work in the public sector are a problem for more than just workers. Citizens – and especially those who are themselves experiencing precarious employment conditions – also feel the consequences of precarious work because the quality and availability of services declines, and issues of representation, along with concerns about accountability and safety, emerge.

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