

May
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THE PERI REPORTS

The Status of Employment and Working
Conditions in the Peterborough Area*

INFOBRIEF #3: The Employment Relationship: Working Conditions

About PERI

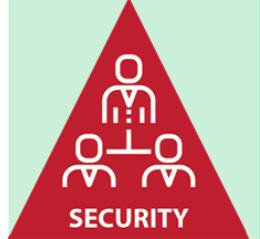
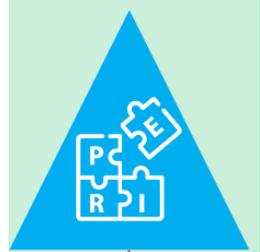
The Precarious Employment Research Initiative (PERI) is a collaborative project among many community partners interested in better understanding the employment and working conditions of workers in our community. This project was initiated by [Peterborough Public Health](#) and expanded to include [City of Peterborough](#), [Peterborough and District Labour Council](#), [Literacy Ontario Central South](#), [Peterborough Workers' Action Centre](#), [Trent Community Research Centre](#), [United Way of Peterborough](#), [Workforce Development Board](#) and [Trent University](#) psychology professor and researcher, Dr. Fergal O'Hagan with support from the [Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario](#) (PEPSO) research project.

This is the third in a series of InfoBriefs meant to be used to start conversations in our community, to inform planning and development of programs and services, and to help shape public policies. The data, collected from a randomly selected, representative sample of working people in the Peterborough area, is available to anyone who would like to use it to answer other important research questions.

Research Goal

The project goal is to identify how employment and working conditions are impacting the economic, social, physical and mental health and lives of workers and their communities in the Peterborough area. The goal for InfoBrief #3 is to explore precarity and how it shapes employment relationships through:

- income instability
- scheduling uncertainty
- benefits and pensions
- training opportunities
- employment standards
- health and safety



* Peterborough Area includes Curve Lake and Hiawatha First Nations and the City and County of Peterborough.

About the Respondents

Data was collected with the assistance of Leger, a Canadian-owned polling and research firm, which conducted a random-dialed telephone survey between November and December 2016. Our sample consisted of 800 respondents (49% male; 51% female), employed during the previous three months between 18 and 70 years old (average age 43). Some additional information on respondents:

- **Race:** White (88%), Indigenous (2%); Canadian (2%); Visible Minority (3%); no response (4%).
- **Marital status:** married (65%); single (25%); separated (7%); and widowed (3%).
- **Education level:** secondary school diploma or other (22%); non-university certificate or diploma, trades certification or apprenticeship (43%); bachelor degree (21%); certification above a bachelor's degree (14%).
- **Union rates:** union membership (36%); no union membership (64%)
- **Employment Sector:** service (50%); knowledge or creative (31%); manufacturing, construction trades and transport (17%) and the primary sector which includes farming and forestry (2%).

Employment Precarity

The Employment Precarity Index (EPI) is the primary measure used to characterize employment conditions. The measure is calculated based on the responses of 12 key questions in the survey. The Index groups employment situations on a continuum with precarious employment at one end of the spectrum and secure employment at the other. (For a description of the categories, please refer to InfoBrief #1.) Participants in this study were in the following EPI groups: precarious (33%); vulnerable (29%); secure (20%); stable (18%). For more details about this Index, visit: <https://pepsoc.ca/tools>.

Income Instability and Scheduling Uncertainty

Fluctuations in income and work schedule can impact the ability of workers to provide for themselves, their families, and affects future planning. When asked over the last year, how much did individual income vary from week to week, 14% of respondents reported experiencing a lot or a great deal of variance in income, while 16% reported some variance. Most respondents experienced little to no change from week to week (71%). Of those respondents who experienced a great deal or a lot of variance in income, 97% were in a vulnerable or precarious employment situation.

Respondents were asked if they were provided with their work schedule at least one week in advance and 69% responded always, 15% knew most of the time, 8% knew sometimes or half of the time, while 8% never had their schedule one week ahead of time. Most respondents reported never (33%) or rarely (29%) experiencing unexpected schedule changes, 22% reported sometimes having unexpected schedule changes and 16% experienced them often. When we take employment precarity into account, those in vulnerable or precarious employment situations made up the majority of those who sometimes (73%) or often (85%) experienced unexpected schedule changes (Figure 1).

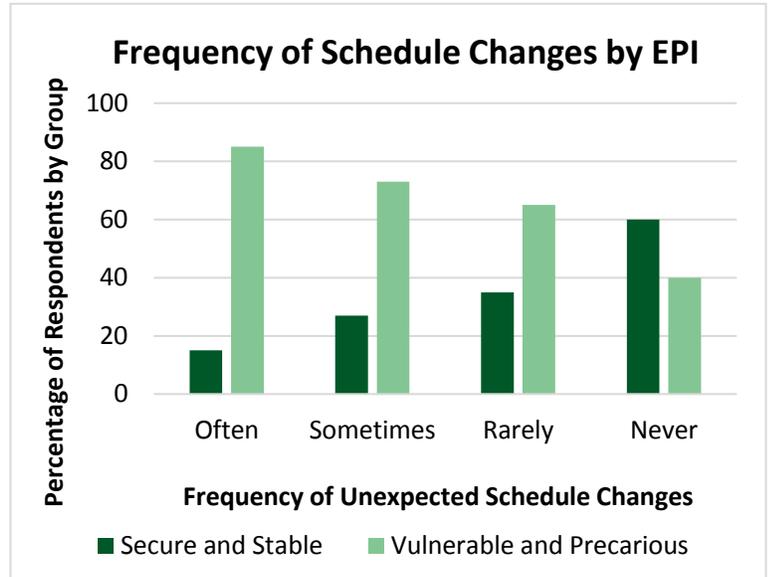


Figure 1. Unexpected Schedule Changes by Employment Precarity

Benefits and Pensions

Benefits and retirement pensions are factors that contribute to having secure and stable employment, and are features of the Standard Employment Relationship. (For more information on the SER see *InfoBrief#1: Overview*.) Just over half (55%) of respondents received employment benefits from their current employer such as drug plan, vision, dental, life insurance, etc. while 45% did not. When asked if the respondent would usually get paid for missing a day's work, 51% reported they did and 49% reported they did not. From respondents who were not paid for missing work, 92% were in vulnerable or precarious employment situations.

A similar divide was found when asked about retirement savings. 53% of respondents reported having either a company pension plan or contributing to a Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RRSP), while 45% reported having neither. Figure 2 illustrates retirement savings by employment precarity, showing how vulnerable and precarious employees made up most participants without pensions or RRSP (89%) while those with secure and stable employment had more contributions to a company pension plan (73%) or an RRSP (53%).

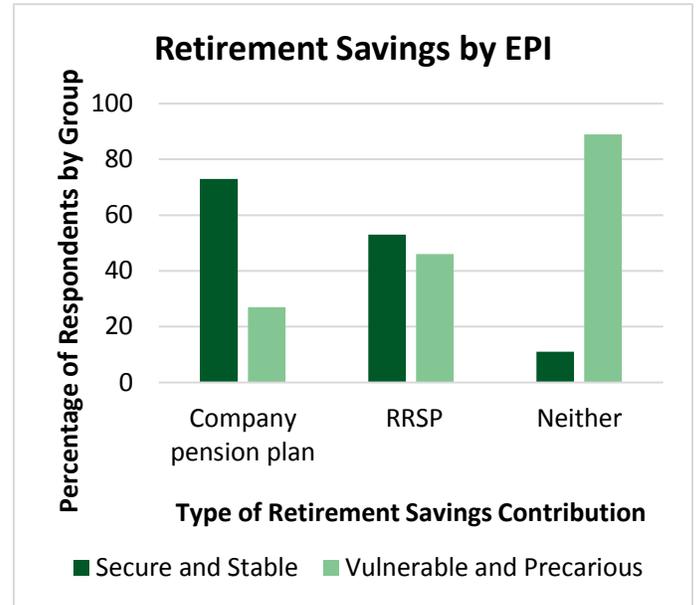


Figure 2. Retirement Savings by Employment Precarity

Training

Training and professional development are valuable for employees to acquire new and diverse skills that can lead to more opportunities with potentially more secure and higher-paying positions. When asked about opportunities for training to upgrade skills and improve employability, 58% of respondents had some training over the 12 months prior and 42% of respondents did not have any training.

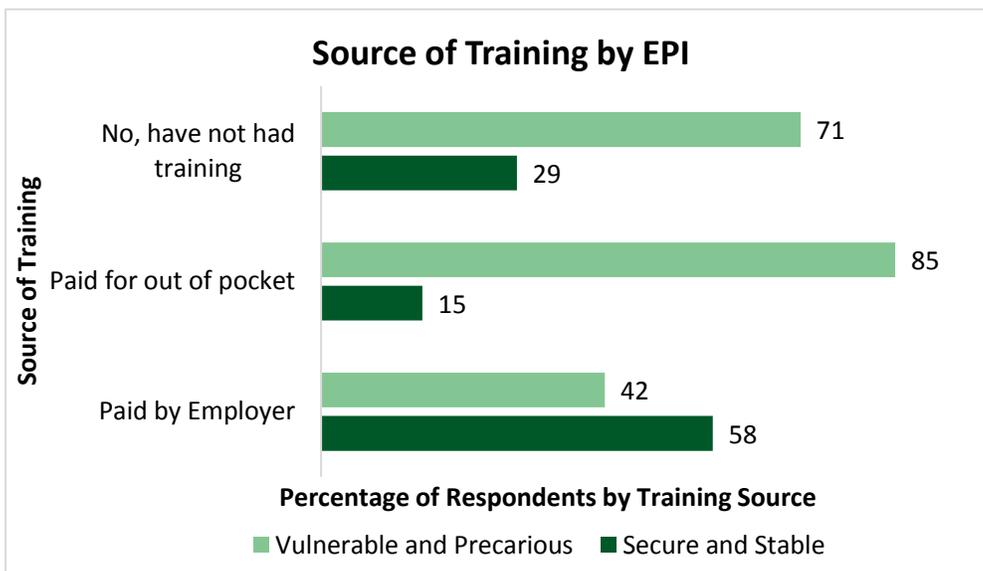


Figure 3. Source of Training by Employment Precarity

Respondents who had training provided by their employer were more likely to be in stable or secure employment (58%). Those who paid for training out of pocket were far more likely to be in vulnerable or precarious employment (85%). Those in vulnerable and precarious employment were also the majority of respondents who did not receive any training (71%) (Figure 3). A small percentage of respondents had training that was paid for by government programs (2%).

Reporting Health & Safety Issues

It is important for employees to be able to address health and safety issues within the workplace without being concerned about repercussions. The survey asked respondents if their current employment would be negatively affected if they raised a health and safety issue or an employment rights issue with their employer. The majority responded that it was “not at all likely” (59%) or “not likely” (24%) that there would be repercussions to bringing issues forward and 6% reported that it was “somewhat likely.” Of those who reported it was “likely” (5%) or “very likely” (7%) that there would be negative repercussions, 83% were in vulnerable and precarious employment situations.

Takeaways

- Income instability, along with unpredictable work schedules, are features of vulnerable and precarious employment.
- Being in vulnerable or precarious employment can impact one’s ability for long-term financial stability, such as retirement savings.
- Access to opportunity for training and skill development is limited for employees who would benefit most, those in vulnerable or precarious employment situations.
- Many employees do not fear repercussions for reporting health and safety issues in the workplace but those in vulnerable or precarious employment were more likely to fear repercussions for doing so.

More Findings to Come

You can find this InfoBrief as well as *InfoBrief #1: Overview* and *#2: Employment Security at <http://www.peterboroughpublichealth.ca/PERI/>*. Future reports will focus on themes including:



Employment and Health



Employment and Work Stress



Employment Precarity, Income and Household Wellbeing



Employment Precarity, Income and Children



Employment Precarity, Income and Community Participation

Suggested Citation

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