

"Exploring The Precarious Employment Practices And Decent Work Objectives In South Africa: A Comprehensive Analysis"

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Abstract

This study addresses the gap in existing literature related to precarious employment and decent work by examining the impact of precarious employment on employee well-being. This study aims to contribute to understanding how precarious employment practices influence employee well-being in South Africa, with a focus on the private security industry. While some argue that flexible employment patterns offer opportunities for professional growth, others emphasise the threats to job security and the denial of essential benefits to workers. The study aims to shed light on the impact of precarious employment on the health and well-being of private security officers in South Africa. A qualitative research approach was employed, using a purposively chosen sample of 20 participants from the private security industry in South Africa. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect primary data. The study revealed that precarious employment significantly affects the health and well-being of private security officers. Participants expressed the detrimental impact of their work conditions on their physical and mental health. Issues such as inadequate safety equipment, job instability, and financial strain emerged as critical themes. The findings highlight the need for policymakers and organisations to address the challenges private security officers face in precarious employment. Efforts should be directed toward creating a

work environment that aligns with the principles of decent work, ensuring the workforce's well-being. This study contributes valuable insights for policymakers, organisations, and scholars, guiding efforts to foster a work environment that promotes decent work and enhances the overall well-being of employees in South Africa, particularly within the private security sector.

Introduction

Work is an essential human activity in society as it transforms people and sustains organisations while empowering the nations. Through work, it gives meaning and expresses one's feelings, thoughts and humanity. Edralin (2014) attests that work is a source of self-esteem, self-actualisation and security. It can also be a source of livelihood for a decent life. Work is essential to life, influencing how individuals sustain themselves and interact within society (Blustein, 2013). Work matters to people and provides an essential context for their well-being (Blustein, 2019; Clifton & Harter, 2021). The world of work has recently changed drastically as technology is changing the nature of work and how people interact with each other and do their work (Ghislieri et al., 2018).

Technological changes have also shifted economies with increased mobility of capital and workers over recent decades, transforming employment conditions (Kreshpaj et al., 2020). Baart (2021) noted that global change processes resulted in precarious job conditions. In contrast, Goldin and Muggah (2020) noted that climate change, poverty, inequality, and severe corruption threaten humanity. Van de Klink et al. (2016) state that individuals are changing and want to be involved in and participate in work and feel empowered. Aubert-Tarby et al. (2018) attest that these changes in the world of work have impacted how people choose to work. Flexible work has become common, and one job for life may become almost impossible in the future. The labour market has witnessed a transition where new and more flexible forms of employment are generally associated with full-time, long-term and secured jobs with entitlement benefits (Bosch, 2004; Quinlan, 2012). To shed light on the changes in the workforce, Tamers et al. (2020) state that work arrangements are slowly moving away from standard work arrangements in which an employee's job is permanent with a fixed work schedule, the employees are expected to attend office/work hours face to face and obtain a

stable pay/income (salary) monthly as opposed to non-standard work arrangements which comprise of short-term employment tenure (days, weeks, months or a few years), where work schedules are based on shifts or few hours per week, rotational work and with pay based on aspects such as piece-rate, commission, job rate, training experience, wages or intrinsic rewards and outputs and workers can work for more than one organisation. Kreshpaj et al. (2020) note that increased labour flexibility has been considered to impact economic growth positively and contributed to a growth of atypical forms of employment of lower quality with potential adverse effects consequences on employee well-being. The rise of precarious employment has been noted recently. The concept of precarious employment has gained remarkable prominence, particularly since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic ushered in a global decline in economic activities and led to widespread downsizing (International Labour Organisation, 2021). A notable observation by Allan, Autin, and Wilkins-Yel (2021) is the steady increase in precarious employment, particularly in post-industrial countries, even before the pandemic. In light of these trends, the International Labour Organisation (2021) anticipates that precarious work will continue to expand as the pandemic progresses.

The proliferation of low-paid, unstable and otherwise insecure employment has given rise to the literature centred on the growing precariousness of work in several different contexts (Kalleberg & Vallas, 2018). Precarious employment refers to the work for a remuneration characterised by uncertainty, insecurity, risk, instability, low-wages, limited social benefits and reduced access to legislative entitlements (Kalleberg, 2009; Arnold & Bongiovi, 2013; ILO, 2011, 2016; Mosoetsa et al., 2016). Precarious employment, as defined by the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2012), is characterised by several dimensions, which include uncertainty about work duration, lack of clarity on the employer's identity, limited access to social protection and benefits associated with stable employment, low wages, and challenges in collective bargaining. In addition, Standing (2014) argues that the precariat is those who live through insecure jobs interspersed with periods of unemployment or labour force withdrawals or economic inactive and living insecurely with uncertain access to housing and public resources. Employers are drawn to

precarious employment due to its advantages in terms of hiring flexibility and cost reduction (Fapohunda, 2012; Kalejaiye, 2014; Mucheche, 2017). Bayo (2019) underscores that organisations prefer fixed-term employment because it allows them to pay lower wages and alter their workforce without encountering legal complications. This is not in line with the objectives of International Labour Organisation (ILO) as they thrive that working quality is a central issue that is vital to life and how personal value and achievement is realised. The decent work aimed to ensure that in every country, all employees could enjoy decent working conditions (ILO, 1999). The ILO holds that decent work contributes to the sustainable development of human beings and is a vital objective on its own, since decent work is an essential aspect of human rights (ILO, 2008, 2013, 2017). Decent work is not just a theoretical construct but a crucial element of employee welfare, work-life balance, community harmony, and economic growth that opens doors to productive employment (Cohen & Moodley, 2012). It encompasses a range of indicators outlined by the ILO, including adequate earnings, employment opportunities, stability and job security, reasonable working hours, work-life balance, equal treatment and opportunities, safe working conditions, social security, and the promotion of social dialogue. Importantly, decent work also considers individuals' subjective perceptions, such as fair compensation for their efforts, stability in social settings, appropriate time for rest, and a balanced equilibrium between family and work (Duffy, Bluestein, Diemer & Autin, 2016). Scholars recently proposed a psychological perspective on decent work (Duff et al., 2016). This assists in understanding individuals' well-being better in terms of sustainable career development by highlighting theoretical inclusiveness, social justice, practical application, and political advocacy at both individual and institutional levels (Blustein et al., 2008).

Despite these ideals, challenges have persisted over the years concerning precarious employment and attaining decent work objectives. As Kalleberg and Hewison (2013) noted, the rise of flexible employment patterns threatens employee well-being, offering less job security and often depriving workers of decent work conditions. Precarious workers are frequently denied benefits enjoyed by permanent employees, including access to unemployment insurance, adequate healthcare, and affordable housing (Djurkovic, 2021). Kalleberg and Vallas (2018) have observed that precarious employment adversely

affects people's health, well-being, and even their ability to start families or fully participate in society. Kalejaiye (2014), on the other hand, views casualisation as a step towards progress, arguing that it provides opportunities for the unemployed to work and develop their potential.

Nevertheless, disparities in the perception of precarious employment persist. While the existing literature provides background on the concepts of precarious employment and decent work, there is a dearth of research specifically examining the impact of precarious employment on employee well-being. This study aims to address this gap by investigating how precarious employment practices in South Africa affect the realisation of decent work objectives within the unique South African context.

Theoretical framework

The psychology of working theory

The current study adopted the Psychology of Working framework theory to understand precarious employment's impact in realising decent work principles. The psychology of working framework (PWF) was developed as a response to traditional work psychology perspectives that only focused on people who had a choice regarding their occupation (Bluestein, 2008; Vollenhoven, 2020). The PWF shows how social class influences work experience, demonstrates the impact of discrimination and marginalisation on career development, and how work volition affects the individual's career decisions and work satisfaction (Duffy et al., 2016). The PWF addresses workers' lives who have been ignored or forgotten because of their social class or due to racism, sexism, and other forms of social oppression (Blustein, Kenna, Gill & DeVoy, 2008). This includes the unemployed, differently abled, the working poor, migrant workers, and marginalised and oppressed workers (Bluestein, Kenny, Autin & Duffy, 2019). In the context of this study, it serves as a valuable theoretical framework to comprehend the multifaceted implications of precarious employment on the pursuit of decent work standards.

The key assumptions guiding PWF are: (1) Work functions as a means for survival and power – Related to access to basic health care, food, and shelter. The need to attain psychological, economic, and social power is closely related to survival needs (Blustein, 2006). Security officers struggle to meet their basic needs as they are often hired under precarious conditions and

are paid low wages. A study by Simelane (2023) found that security guards in India are exposed to poor work conditions and paid low wages. The ILO (2018) opined that security officers in numerous countries earn below minimum wage levels and are not covered by social security schemes. This leaves these workers vulnerable and unable to satisfy their survival needs. (2) Working as a means of social connection - This claim is based on the work of early research, which identified connectedness as a basic human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Work allows people from different social and cultural backgrounds to forge relationships that can contribute to their development (Blustein, 2008). Security officers work long hours that sometimes exceed 12 hours per day, which causes physical and psychological strain (ILO, 2018). Some work in isolated sites, making it hard for them to connect with their colleagues. The long hours that security officers endure impede them from forging social ties and maintaining social relationships. (3) Work as a means of self-determination – This is the extent to which one is involved in satisfying and meaningful work that is motivating on both extrinsic and intrinsic levels (Blustein, 2008; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Duffy et al., 2016). Nalla and Wakfiels (2014) opined that security guards in South Africa received minimal training on safety and security, communication, and conflict resolution. Moreover, security guards often lack career progression and advancement opportunities, which may affect their job satisfaction and motivation.

The psychology of working theory suggests that access to decent work will allow people to satisfy their core physiological needs such as survival, access to shelter food, social-relatedness, and self-determination (Bluestein, 2006). These basic needs will improve employee well-being and work satisfaction (Blustein et al., 2018; Duffy et al., 2016). Decent work for security guards involves improving their working conditions, wages and benefits, training and professional development, and health and safety. Governments, employers, and trade unions have a crucial role in promoting decent work for security guards through policies and programs that address these issues. Rossier and Ouedraogo (2021) conducted a study that included security guards in their research sample. The study participants came up with five different categories for achieving decent work. A decent work activity should cover basic needs, provide security and protection, be tolerated and accepted by the workers' social

group of membership, preserve the dignity and honour of the worker and finally, be a blessed activity by God.

The Conceptualisation of Decent Work

The concept of decent work was an expression in the form of quality of labour and was presented in the report of the Director General of the International Labour Conference meeting (87th session) in 1999. The report further explained the four constituent pillars of decent work: employment, social security, workers' rights, and social dialogue. The ILO (2016) defines decent work as “entailing opportunities for productive work with fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organise and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunities and treatment for all women and men”. Duffy et al. (2016) further add that decent work is work that provides physical and interpersonal safety, reasonable work hours, and organisational values compatible with the worker's values, adequate compensation and access to healthcare. The concept of decent work emerged as an institutional effort to combat the degradation of the labour market (Pereira et al., 2019). Scholars from different disciplines have vested interests in the concept of decent work. The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948) expressed the need for the integral human rights aspect. The proposed human rights include:

- (1) Everyone has the right to work, to have an accessible choice of employment, to have just and favourable work conditions, and to have protection against unemployment.
- (2) Everyone has a right to work without any discrimination and equal pay for equal work.
- (3) Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration, ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.
- (4) Everyone has the right to form and join trade unions to protect his interests (Kunz, 1949; United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, 1948).

A decent work deficit is characterised by a lack of safe working conditions, limited time for resting, satisfactory remuneration, and access to adequate healthcare (Santili, Maggio, Ginevra,

Nota & Soresi, 2021). The psychology of working theory assumes that decent work arbitrates the relations between contextual and psychological factors to work and general well-being (Duffy et al., 2016). The PWT explains decent work as “(a) physical and interpersonally safe working conditions, for example, the absence of physical, mental, or emotional abuse; (b) hours that allow for free time and adequate rest; (c) organisational values that complement family and social values; (d) adequate compensation; and (e) access to adequate health care” (Duffy et al., 2016). Measuring the extent to which work is decent is not easy. To guide the assessment and measurement of decent work, the ILO developed statistical indicators for general work characteristics that individuals worldwide would consider essential elements of decent work (ILO, 2013).

The Conceptualisation of Precarious Employment

Precarious employment comprises of temporary, insecure or part-time work arrangements whereby employees are often underpaid and enjoy minimal legal protection (Kalleberg & Vallas, 2017). Practices underpinning precarious employment include outsourcing, subcontracting, casualisation, fixed-term contracting, abusive probationary periods, home working, and involuntary part-time work (Metal World, 2007; Edralin, 2014). The uncertainty of precarious work relates to the fear that employees might lose their jobs and their inability to deal with unforeseen consequences due to limited power and resource access (Bosmans, Hardonk, De Cuyper & Vanroelen, 2016). Employees who are engaged in precarious work endure short periods of employment, and they do not have control over work conditions and earn wages that cannot get them out of poverty (ILO, 2007). Employers drive precarious employment because they need to lower their wage bill, which is achieved by employing individuals who will not demand additional benefits. Using precarious workers also eliminates the cost of dismissals, employers are not legally liable for employees, and they also decrease the burden of dealing with trade unions (Edralin, 2014). The employees in this work arrangement often experience high levels of dissatisfaction, vulnerability and unprotected they cannot challenge the status quo as they can be easily fired and replaced by other readily available unemployed individuals (Standing, 2011). Kalleberg (2018) states that precarious employment deprives individuals of the opportunity to develop as autonomous, self-reliant adults as they do not have job security and a stable income. Precarious

employment directly challenges the decent work agenda since it subjects employees to practices that undermine workers' rights, employment promotion, and social dialogue (Edralin, 2014). Gutiérrez-Barbarrusa (2016) states that precarious employment is categorised by (a) insecurity regarding the continuity of the employment relationship; (b) insufficient wage or discriminant remuneration; (c) deterioration of the employment relationship and workers' vulnerability in terms of hours and work intensity, promotion, health, safety, and so forth; and (d) weakening of workers' social protection. Workers can have access to safe working conditions but, due to long working hours, have no time for rest or to afford adequate healthcare when ill (Bluestein et al., 2020). A study by Borat and Stanwix (2018) found that the sharp rise of precarious employment through temporary employment services is driven by the restrictive process of direct hiring, which is coupled with high costs and tedious human resource processes. Employers opt for temporary employment services to decrease their wage bill. This forces workers to endure precarious conditions that are characterised by low wages, no job security and limited access to legal protection. Luijckx and Wolbers (2018) further argued that precarious employment makes it difficult for workers to plan for their future.

Health and well-being

Precarious employment often exposes employees to hazardous working conditions that impact their mental and physical health. This can have a detrimental impact on the health of precarious employees as they have to endure unhealthy working hours, and there is a high likelihood of them being injured on duty from their repetitive tasks (Benach et al., 2016; Muoka & Lhussier, 2020). Duffy et al. (2019) used the PWT model to explore the relationship between decent work and mental and physical health, finding that satisfaction of survival needs (food, shelter, utilities) is partially mediated by decent work's relation to physical health. Precarious jobs are often unsafe, and employees are likely injured on duty (Mullany, Valdez, Gubrium & Buchanan, 2021). Senthnar, MacEachen and Lippel (2019) conducted a study on work injury and the return-to-work process for precarious employees, and they found that injured workers felt caught between self-interested employers and disinterested workers' compensation. Furthermore, this weakened mental health and well-being as it impacted families' financial security and daily routines (Senthnar et al., 2020).

Tang and Pilgrim (2017) purposefully sampled participants who had received a psychiatric evaluation and included individuals who had attempted suicide and developed schizophrenia as a result of precarious work. Precarious employees may also experience higher stress levels from being responsible for a high workload, hostile working environment and workplace bullying (Tang & Pilgrim, 2017). Scott (2017) reported that precarious employees also feel a decreased sense of self-worth and are dehumanised because they can be easily fired for being sick, excessive supervision and being denied taking breaks. Various studies have found relationships between components of decent work (low pay, unsafe working conditions) and physical health (Dich, Lund, Hansen, & Rod, 2019; Hoobler, Rospenda, Lemmon, & Rosa, 2010; Magee, Stefanic, Caputi, & Iverson, 2012; Pohling, Buruck, Jungbauer, & Leiter, 2016; Schrijvers, van de Mheen, Stronks, & Mackenbach, 1998).

Conversely, individuals with more flexible work hours are less likely to feel exhausted from work and are more likely to engage in physical activity (Mausner-Dorsch & Eaton, 2000; Nomaguchi & Bianchi, 2004). Among a diverse sample of employed parents, work conditions, such as hours, shifts, and job security, related to food choice coping strategies. That is, working long hours, nonstandard hours, and having irregular work schedules were positively associated with take-out meals, prepared entrees and restaurant meals, further highlighting the influence of aspects of decent work on healthy and unhealthy behaviors (Devine et al., 2009). One corollary of health behaviors is weight gain. A study comparing day-shift workers to night-shift workers average weight gain since starting the job on the current shift found that night-shift workers gained, on average, almost ten pounds since beginning their job, compared to an average weight gain of two pounds for day-shift workers (Geliebter, Gluck, Tanowitz, Aronoff, & Zammit, 2000). In a review of studies examining work stress and health risk behaviors, Siegrist and Rodel (2006) cited 12 studies finding that inadequate financial compensation at work and low job control were associated with weight gain and obesity (Hellerstedt & Jeffery, 1997; Kouvonen, Kivimäki, Cox, Cox, & Vahtera, 2005; Niedhammer, Goldberg, Leclerc, Bugel, & David, 1998; Popkin & Gordon-Larsen, 2004). Other studies have found relations between work hours and healthy behaviors, such as healthy eating and physical activity (Atkinson, Fullick, Grindey, & Maclaren, 2008).

Research methodology

Research philosophy and approach

The current study employed a qualitative research approach. An interpretivist research paradigm was chosen for the study as it shares a philosophical foundation similar to qualitative research. The researcher used interpretivism philosophy to understand employees' coping strategies and mechanisms in precarious employment. The current study adopted the phenomenology research strategy. Phenomenological inquiry is based on exploring how the identified research participants make sense of their lived experiences (Williamson & Hood, 2013). The current research study was conducted within the South African private security industry.

Research setting and sampling

The current research study was conducted within the South African private security industry. The industry is comprised of private organisations and individuals that provide security-related services, including investigations, patrol, armed response, and guarding (Kakalik & Wildhorn, 1971; PSIRA, 2020). The industry is intensive, and the country's biggest absorber of unskilled employees is often hired in precarious conditions. This study used the purposive sampling procedure, which allowed the researcher to include a variation of participants across the proposed population and draw conclusions based on their interactions (Koerber & McMichael, 2008). This study focused on private security officers who were purposefully selected because they had lived experiences and were knowledgeable about the phenomenon under study.

Data collection

The current study utilise semi-structured interviews as a method of data collection. The researcher chose this interview technique because it offers the participants with flexibility to comment on specific concerns. The researcher formulated twenty-five questions which were based on the pillars of decent work. The questions were posed to all participants in order to explore the impact of precarious employment on the proletariat within the South African private security industry. The questions were also formulated to determine the lived experiences of private security officers and whether they have access to decent work as set out by the ILO.

Data analysis

The collected data was analysed using a thematic analysis to answer the research questions. Braun and Clarke (2006)

postulated that thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. Validity in qualitative research refers to the researcher's checks for the precision of the findings as defined by the researcher and the reader (Cresswell, 2014). This includes the use of numerous approaches to check accuracy for the benefit of the researcher and readers (Cresswell, 2014). The current study used a combination of validity techniques: thick description and member checking. The researcher carried a member verification to ensure transferability. This description involved comprehensively explaining the research setting and interpreting the social meaning (Cresswell, 2014). Lincoln and Guba (1986) proposed that to ensure trustworthiness, researchers must consider dependability, transferability, credibility, and confirmability. This was achieved through record-keeping of the study process while providing a thorough description of research techniques to ensure dependability. Lastly, the researcher maintained an audit trail to ensure confirmability.

Ethical considerations

The researcher conducted this study guided by ethical considerations which includes obtaining consent from participants, protecting personal information, allowing participants to voluntarily withdraw from the study, reporting accurate results, and refraining from plagiarism. The researchers ensured that all the participants were made aware of the research's goals, allowing them to decide whether to participate in the study.

By utilising pseudonyms to conceal their identities, the researcher gave participants the assurance that their information would be anonymous and confidential. This was done to decrease the likelihood that participants would be harmed, should confidentiality be compromised.

Profile of the participants

Ten research participants were purposefully chosen from the private security company in South Africa to participate in the current study.

OA: The first participant was a 34-year-old black female. She has been active in the industry for over a year and disclosed the difficulties of being a female within the private security sector.

OB: The participant was a 36-year-old black female. She has been active in the industry for seven years. She mentioned that

it is difficult to get hired within the industry as a female, even though she can do both night and day shifts.

OC: The participant was a 34-year-old black male. He has been active in the industry for four years and mentioned that the main challenge they face currently is getting paid in irregular intervals, which distorts their plans.

OD: The participant was a 50-year-old black male. He has been active in the industry for almost twenty years and has a wealth of knowledge to share about the industry. The participant answered calmly and relied on his years of working for numerous companies to respond to the questions.

OE: The participant was a 49-year-old black male. This was the longest interview, as the participant was open to answering all questions. The participant indicated that security companies do not abide by the laws that are set by institutions such as PSIRA and the Department of Labour. The participant also shared the challenges that come with having to change jobs.

OF: The participant was a 25-year-old black male. The participant has been active in the industry for 4 years and disclosed a lack of support from his immediate supervisor. The participant also mentioned that the insecurity within the industry impacts negatively on his well-being as he is afraid of losing his only source of income.

OG: The participant was a 31-year-old black female. She has been active in the industry for a year. She mentioned that she is solely responsible for taking care of her dependents at home, and there is a need for trade unions that can protect them from unfair dismissals.

OH: The participant was a 23-year-old black female. She has been active in the industry for 2 years. She indicated that she plans to up-skill herself to apply for supervisory posts.

OI: The participant was a 30-year-old black male. He has been active in the industry for five years, and he provided detailed responses on how the conditions that he worked under were unsafe.

OJ: The participant was a 40-year-old black female. She has been active in the industry for twelve years. She indicated that employers do not provide enough tools to conduct their jobs effectively, thus leaving them in danger of being targeted by criminals.

Findings

Based on the responses from the research participants, the following themes emerged in respect of their coping mechanisms to improve their daily experiences: health and well-being, financial strain, lack of access to healthcare, work-

life balance deficiency and physical health struggles. The above mentioned subthemes were categorised into three themes, namely concern for mental health, financial stability and economic dimension. Table 1 below presents themes and sub-themes derived from data analysis.

Table 1: Themes and sub-themes

Theme	Sub-Theme
Health and well-being	Concern for mental health
Financial Strain	Financial stability
Lack of access to healthcare	
work-life balance deficiency	
physical health struggles	

Data frequencies

The findings showed that some of the research participants struggled with their health and well-being. While some other participants in the private security company revealed that precarious employment had a financial strain and uncertainty. Other participants indicated that precarious employment does hinder them to access to healthcare. Table 2 below illustrates the research participants' response rate.

Table 2: Themes that emerged from data analysis and frequency

Theme	Frequency
Health and well-being	8
Financial Strain	7
lack of access to healthcare	7
work-life balance deficiency	4
physical health struggles	4

Presentation of findings from participants

Themes emerged from the semi-structured interviews with workers on the effect of precarious employment on the proletariat, which in this study referred to private security officers. The themes were health and well-being, financial strain, lack of access to healthcare, work-life balance deficiency and physical health struggles and sub-themes, namely, concern for mental health, financial stability and economic dimension. The themes above will be discussed in detail below.

Theme 1: Health and well-being

The theme of health and well-being was generated from the participants' responses to health and well-being-related questions during the interviews. Seven participants indicated that the work conditions have a long-lasting negative effect on their health. The interviews were conducted on a very cold week, and the participants were stationed in sites that were near the mountain, and one of the guard houses was in poor condition. The participant would occasionally ask the researcher to look at the conditions, and the older ones would even narrate how the conditions are almost similar for most sites and how this negatively threatens their physical well-being. Elaborating on how the work affects the health of a private security officer, **OD** stated that:

"Yes, it has an effect on my health you see, I was working for another company for four years you see, and I can still feel the effects of the cold in my body. This is one of a major cause of death for many security guards because in conditions like this where the roof is even leaking the guard house becomes colder you see".

In support, **OB** stated the following:

"When I get home after a night shift, I try by all means to warm myself and I usually get a fever, but I have no choice but to keep on working".

All the participants claimed that the tools the employer gives them are not enough to assist them in conducting their jobs. The participants are given a baton, handcuffs and pepper spray to protect themselves and subdue delinquents in the case of a robbery. Eight of the participants indicated that they had never experienced a robbery while on duty. Seven participants responded that they do not feel safe at work. Below are reflections from **OI** and **OJ**:

"I have never experienced a robbery at work, but I am always concerned that if that could happen, I would have no choice but to wait for the police to arrive as I would not dare to confront armed people with a baton. My duty is just to get a good description of the suspect and write what they took." (**OI**).

"The best thing to do when there is a robbery in progress, is to protect yourself by making sure that you hide, because these machines are insured and myself I cannot risk to be injured or die because no one will take care of my family when I am gone." (**OJ**).

The participants also indicated that they often suffer from stress when they think of the possibility of losing their jobs.

They become anxious to the point of getting discouraged from going to work. In support, **OE** had this to say:

"This work does affect my health, in the sense that on my way from home to work I get scared. I get scared mainly because I do not know when I might get fired so I must always behave like I am a school child."

In support, **OA** added:

"I am always worried and get headaches when I think about the bad things that might happen to me here at work. But I was aware of what I was getting myself into, so I try by all means to get rid of all negative thoughts and focus on things that I can control."

Sub-Theme 1: Concerned for mental health

The sub-theme of health and well-being which is concerned for mental health was generated from the participants' responses to their mental health questions during the interviews. Four participants indicated that the work conditions have a long-lasting negative effect on their health. Participants revealed that their mental health is also affected by precarious employment. The participants indicated this:

OI added that:

"The constant uncertainty about my job and financial future really takes a toll on my mental health. It's like walking on eggshells every day."

While OJ supported that:

"Not having job security makes it hard to plan for anything. It's a constant source of stress, and it definitely affects my mental well-being."

in addition to concerned for mental health, OE state that:

"The anxiety from the instability in my job seeps into every aspect of my life. It's challenging to maintain mental balance when there's a constant fear"

The participants also indicated that they have mental issue challenges when they think of the possibility of losing their jobs. They become anxious to the point of getting discouraged from going to work. In support, OA had to say:

“Concerns about job stability create a cloud of worry that hangs over me daily. The impact on my mental health is significant, and it's a struggle to find moments of peace”

OC supported this by confirming that precarious employment does affect their mental well-being:

“Job insecurity translates to constant mental unease. It's hard to focus on self-care when there's a looming fear about the stability of my work and financial situation.”

Theme 2: Financial Strain

The participants indicated that the salary they receive is not enough to support them and their dependents throughout the month after all their living expenses. They indicated that, in addition to their salary being not enough, they also get paid at irregular intervals, and months can go by without them being paid. The participants had the following to say.

“I have dependants and the salary that we receive is never enough. There are many challenges we face at work, but you see the one of not getting paid on the date we were promised really frustrates me because a month can even pass without us receiving our money”. (OA).

“From the wages that I receive, I have to take care of my needs and my child so no it is far from being enough” (OC).

“I do not have dependants but the wages are not enough. I do not even spend the money recklessly. It is just not enough”. (OF).

The effects of not being paid on time puts them in an economically unstable position as they are forced to borrow money in order to supplement their wages, leaving them in debt. **OI** responded as follows:

“The financial strain from uncertain income takes a toll on my mental well-being. It feels like a constant battle to juggle basic expenses and maintain a sense of stability.” (OA)

Sub-Theme 2: Financial stability

All the participants agreed that they do contribute towards the unemployment insurance fund.

"I'm always worried about the next paycheck. It's hard to prioritise health when you're constantly scrambling to pay bills and put food on the table." (OC)

'Not having a steady income or job security makes it difficult to plan for the future. The financial stress adds a layer of anxiety that affects both my mental and physical health" (OJ)

'The lack of financial security makes it challenging to access necessary healthcare and support. It's a constant struggle that leaves me feeling mentally drained and overwhelmed.'

The government have set a minimum wage for security officers based on their training grades. In practice, most companies still refuse to comply with the set wage determinations, and the participants responded as follows:

“No, the salary is not enough, and it does not cover my necessities. The reason is that most of these security companies do not pay us according to the rate that the government sets for paying security guards.” (OF).

“I would like inspectors from PSIRA to visit the sites more so that they can see the conditions we work under. The payment rate is increased every year, but these companies are still using the R19 per hour, which is from years ago even the government set a minimum wage which I think is above R20, but we are still stuck on R19 even today”. (OD).

Theme 3: Lack of access to healthcare

The participants indicated that precarious employment does not even provide them with enough compensation to access to healthcare. They indicated that, in addition to their lack of access to healthcare, create a barrier to well-being. The participants had the following to say. OE stated this:

“I can't afford regular check-ups or preventive care. It feels like I'm always one illness away from a financial crisis.”

While other participants reveals that:

“The absence of health coverage means I have to prioritise my health needs. It's a constant juggle between financial strain and essential medical care.”

The work that they are doing does not fulfil the objectives of the decent work. The participants had this to say:

“Not having access to affordable healthcare creates a barrier to well-being. I find myself weighing the cost of seeking medical attention against the financial burden it may bring.” (OF)

“Healthcare costs are a significant concern. I often delay necessary medical visits, which impacts my overall health. It's a tough choice between health and financial stability. (OA)

The financial strain cannot be overlooked as it contributes significantly on the lack of access to healthcare. One participant has this to say:

“The fear of medical expenses looms over every health decision. It's disheartening to know that your well-being is compromised due to financial constraints.” (OI)

Theme 4: work-life balance deficiency

Most participants indicated that their precarity of work affects their work-life balance. In most cases, striking a balance between work and life is impossible. This has an adverse effect on their families. Participants had to say:

"The unpredictable hours make it difficult to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Finding time for self-care or even spending quality time with family is hard." (OE)

"Maintaining a healthy work-life balance seems like a luxury. The demands of precarious work often mean sacrificing personal time and well-being." (OH)

"Being on 12 12-hour shifts takes a toll on my personal life. It's challenging to relax when you're constantly worried about the next shift." (OC)

Sometimes, the company does not have a fixed work schedule as some employees do not pitch for work. This affects the work schedule.

"The lack of a fixed schedule affects my work-life equilibrium. It's challenging to plan activities or allocate time for personal well-being when the work hours are uncertain." (OE)

"The impact on work-life balance is profound. It's not just about the long hours but the unpredictability that makes it hard to find time for oneself or loved ones."
(OJ)

Theme 5: Physical health struggles

In the precarious employment, a recurring theme emerges as workers grappling with the physical health challenges to their well-being. These struggles stems for the work itself and participants battle against physical health struggles that arise from irregular schedules, demanding tasks, and the pervasive stress embedded in the precarious work environment. Elaborating on how the work affects the physical health of a private security officer, **OA** stated that:

"Irregular schedules mess up my sleep patterns. It's affecting my energy levels, and I'm always fatigued.

In support, **OD** state the following:

"The lack of breaks and constant pressure to perform make it challenging to stay physically healthy. I've noticed a decline in my overall well-being."

All the participants claimed that the physical health struggle is common to everyone as the job is demanding but not enough time to rest as required. Eight of the participants indicated that they experienced fatigue on their third day of the shift. Below are reflections from **OI** and **OJ**:

"Sleep deprivation is a real issue. The demanding hours and the pressure to meet targets have significantly declined my physical health."

"Maintaining physical health is a struggle. The nature of the job and the stress it brings have taken a toll on my energy levels and overall fitness."

While other participants revealed that the lack of time to rest hinder them to even do physical exercises. Irregular schedule

is also another factor that contributes significantly to physical health struggle. **OA** and **OG** assertions below:

“The physically demanding aspects of the job and the irregular schedule make it difficult to prioritise exercise and self-care.

“I've experienced weight gain due to the irregular hours and stress. It's disheartening to see how my physical health has deteriorated since taking on precarious employment.

Discussion of the findings

The participants expressed the detrimental impact of their work conditions on their health and well-being. Their poor working conditions contribute significantly to their decaying health and well-being. The issue of safety equipment inadequacy was raised, with participants feeling ill-equipped to handle potential threats. The fear of robberies and the perception of personal risk were evident, with participants expressing a reluctance to confront armed individuals due to safety concerns. These findings mirrored the findings of Benach et al. (2016) and Muoka and Lhussier (2020), who revealed that poor and unhealthy working conditions have a detrimental impact on the health of precarious employees as they have to endure unhealthy working hours, and there is a high likelihood of them being injured on duty from their repetitive tasks.

Moreover, the uncertainty of job stability emerged as a significant stressor, impacting participants' mental health. Anxiety about potential job loss was a recurring theme, influencing their daily lives and decision-making. The constant worry about job security created mental unease, affecting participants' ability to focus on self-care and overall well-being. Precarious employees may also experience higher stress levels from being responsible for a high workload, hostile working environment and workplace bullying (Tang & Pilgrim, 2017). Scott (2017) reported that precarious employees also feel a decreased sense of self-worth and are dehumanised because they can be quickly fired for being sick, excessive supervision and being denied taking breaks. The sub-theme of concern for mental health delved deeper into participants' experiences of how precarious employment affects their psychological well-being. The overarching sentiment was one of constant uncertainty, with participants describing the feeling of walking

on eggshells due to the unpredictability of their jobs. The lack of job security posed a significant challenge in planning for the future, leading to chronic stress and its subsequent impact on mental health. This finding is in line with the study of Duffy et al. (2021), which revealed that employees involved in precarious employment struggle with mental, physical and emotional exhaustion due to experiences in the workplace. The findings also mirrored Kim et al.'s (2011) and Maslach (2001) study. The participants consistently reported feelings of anxiety, discouragement, and mental unease stemming from the precarious nature of their employment. This sub-theme underscores the interconnectedness of job insecurity and mental well-being, emphasising the need for holistic support for workers facing such challenges. The study by Duffy et al. (2021) supported the idea that decent work is directly linked to physical health. This finding contradicts the Duffy, Kim, et al. (2019) study and suggests that the connection between decent work and general physical health may have more to do with workplace fatigue and inadequate compensation. Previous literature has demonstrated that workplace fatigue predicts health behaviours such as healthy eating and physical activity (Ahola et al., 2012; Alexandrova-Karamanova et al., 2016; Padilla, Wilson, Vandenberg, Davis, & Clark, 2019) and that workplace fatigue mediates the relation of workplace factors to health (Bao & Zhong, 2019), yet the present study's findings are consistent with the findings of the current study.

Financial strain emerged as a critical theme, with participants expressing dissatisfaction with their salaries. Irregular payment intervals and inadequate wages to cover living expenses were significant concerns. The participants reported instances where months would pass without receiving their pay, forcing them into economically unstable positions. This financial instability was linked to increased stress levels, creating a perpetual struggle to balance basic expenses. Furthermore, this weakened mental health and well-being as it impacted families' financial security and daily routines (Senthnar et al., 2019). In a review of studies examining work stress and health risk behaviours, Siegrist and Rodel (2006) cited 12 studies finding that inadequate financial compensation at work and low job control were associated with weight gain and obesity (Hellerstedt & Jeffery, 1997; Kouvonen, Kivimäki, Cox, Cox, & Vahtera, 2005; Niedhammer, Goldberg, Leclerc, Bugel, & David, 1998; Popkin & Gordon-Larsen, 2004). The lack of access to healthcare was a

prominent concern for the participants, with financial constraints cited as a significant barrier. Participants reported being unable to afford regular check-ups and preventive care, creating a constant dilemma between health needs and financial stability. Precarious employment significantly impacted participants' work-life balance, making it challenging to allocate time for self-care and personal life. Unpredictable hours, lack of fixed schedules, and the pressure to work long hours were highlighted as key contributors to the struggle for work-life equilibrium. The physical toll of precarious employment was evident in participants' descriptions of irregular schedules, sleep deprivation, and the demanding nature of the job. Fatigue, declining physical health, and challenges in prioritising exercise were reported. Irregular schedules were identified as a significant factor hindering the participants from engaging in physical activities and maintaining overall physical well-being.

Practical implications

The findings highlight the multifaceted challenges private security officers face in precarious employment. From adverse working conditions impacting physical health to financial strain affecting mental well-being, the study highlights the interconnectedness of these themes. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach encompassing improvements in working conditions, fair wages, mental health support, and access to healthcare. Advocacy for industry-wide changes and policy interventions may be necessary to create a more equitable and supportive environment for workers in precarious employment.

Managerial implications

The current study has some managerial implications. Managers must regularly assess working conditions to improve employee health outcomes. It is also essential to assess the adequacy of safety tools provided to security officers and provide additional training on the effective use of equipment. Enhancing personal safety initiatives during potential robberies could be used. Addressing mental health concerns can also be prioritised by implementing employee assistance programs that offer mental health support, counselling, and stress management. Consider organising workshops or training sessions on resilience and coping strategies. Managers should establish transparent communication channels about job security and organisational changes. Evaluate the current

salary structure and explore adjustments to ensure it aligns with the cost of living. Consider establishing a financial wellness program to educate employees on budgeting, saving, and managing financial stress. Collaborate with healthcare providers to offer affordable health insurance packages for employees. Organise on-site health check-up programs or partner with local clinics to facilitate regular health assessments. Implement flexible scheduling options, where possible, to support a better work-life balance. Encourage a culture of taking breaks and vacations to prevent burnout and improve overall well-being. Lastly, provide education on the importance of regular exercise and adequate rest for physical well-being. These managerial implications aim to create a comprehensive strategy for improving private security officers' overall health, well-being, and job satisfaction in precarious employment.

Conclusion

The study has identified that the prevalence of precarious employment conditions in the private security industry worsen the chances of attaining decent work. The study has identified the challenges that private security officers face. The challenges revealed pathways that can be used to attain decent work. Private security companies are expected to benefit from the study's findings and set up policy measures that will pave the way towards providing decent work conditions for their employees.

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