**Contextualising and conceptualising dimensions of precarity for alternative work arrangements and proposed outcomes**

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**Abstract**

1. **Purpose :** This development paper contextualise and conceptualise dimensions of precarity for alternative work arrangements and proposed outcomes
2. **Design/methodology/approach:** Based on extensive literature review associated with alternative work arrangements and its link with precarity , this development paper proposes precarity dimensions and resultant outcomes.
3. **Research limitations/implications:** This development paper only underpins various precarity dimensions linked with alternative work arrangements. The relationship among different dimensions and sub-dimensions is beyond the scope of this paper. The author does provide an outline for possible future research directions.
4. **Originality/value of the paper :** This paper conceptualises four precarity dimensions of individual, work identity, social and professional precarity along with their sub-dimensions that stem from alternative work arrangements and finally categorises four outcomes of precarity , namely: subjective well-being , burnout and work disengagement, social impoverishment and career stasis linking with precarity dimensions. The sub-dimensions of these outcomes have also been proposed. Finally, implications of this theoretical framework and future agenda outlining several research possibilities among different dimensions of the model are explored.

**Keywords**: precarity, alternative work arrangements, precarity dimensions, precarity and its outcomes, professional precarity

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**1.0 Introduction**

The past several years have witnessed an increase in research on the rise and the significance of the so-called ‘alternative work arrangements’ mediated by digital platform businesses and filled by independent contractors and freelancers (Bajwa et al., 2018; Kassi and Lehdonvirta, 2018; Rozzi, 2018; Wood et al., 2019). Spreitzer et al’s (2017) taxonomy of alternative work arrangements is based on an integration of earlier classifications and notions of ‘flexibility’ (Cappelli and Keller, 2013 ; Osnowitz, 2010) and further proposal of three gig work dimensions - namely, flexibility in the employment relationship, flexibility in the scheduling of work, and flexibility in the location of where work is undertaken.

Extant research studies concerning alternative work arrangements often comprise the application of theories and constructs developed in the context of traditional employment relationships rather than alternative work arrangements and their outcomes, sometimes without careful consideration of whether their meaning and application should remain the same in different contexts (Ashford et al., 2018; Connelly and Gallagher, 2004). A key challenge in understanding and evaluating the rise of the alternative work arrangements, is being able to broaden its theoretical scope in order to maintain relevance in a rapidly changing world of work and to further engage in theoretical dialogue and exchange with cognate literatures and fields.

Further, relatively little is known about the answers to all important questions that why alternative work arrangements are categorised as precarious work? What are the positive and negative outcomes of the world of alternate work arrangements? More importantly, while answering these questions it is imperative to establish that if the status of alternate work arrangements is inherently precarious, why it is precarious and how can this precariousness be categorised along different dimensions; and lastly, if there are prospective positive and negative outcomes due to this precariousness , how these can be integrated into a comprehensive theoretical framework. The answers to these questions will be critical for researchers working on alternative work arrangements to further extending its theoretical scope by developing an understanding of the precariousness associated with this kind of work and also for policy-makers who are still grappling with issues of formulating inclusive laws and regulations.

In quest to find answers to these questions, this research contextualises precarity associated with alternative work arrangements, its dimensions and resultant outcomes for performing this kind of work.

**2.0 From precariousness to precarity in context of alternative work arrangements**

Precariousness and relating cognate terms (e.g. precarity, precarious work, precarious workers, the precariat and precarious life), has become a significant theme in employment relations research in recent years (Beer, 2018; Campbell and Burgess, 2018). The author uses the term precarity to contextualise it in terms of alternative work arrangements and further outline its dimensions and proposed outcomes. Precarity has come to signal the ways in which life and labour have transformed in an age of globalization and the new digitalised world of work (Beer, 2018). This research proposes four dimensions of precarity, namely: individual precarity, work-identity precarity, social precarity and professional precarity to help understand the implications of existential vulnerabilities of alternative work arrangements and to further reconfigure ideas and practices about the associated outcomes.

*2.1 Individual precarity*

Individual precarity can arise from numerous vulnerabilities that are related to their zero- hour and i-deals nature of the contract of workers with alternative arrangements. Lack of health insurance, no access to collective bargaining, limited opportunities for career training and promotion, and the need to provide their own tools are some of the individual vulnerabilities (Bajwa et al., 2018) that may amount for individual precarity of these workers. Extending upon Lewchuck et al’s (2011) employment strain model, this research proposes three sub-dimensions of individual precarity, namely, *individual employment precarity, individual earnings precarity* and *individual scheduling precarity*. While individual precarity relates to uncertainties regarding the length of the contract, future employment, insufficient notice to accept work, records of pay, being paid on time, and receiving the expected pay, the individual earning precarity can be referred to as inability of these type of workers to plan income in advance and the unavailability of social-security coverage (Bosmans et al., 2017). The last sub-dimension, individual scheduling uncertainty, includes issues such as insufficient notice to plan ahead one’s work and the problematic combination of employment with household responsibilities and social activities (Lewchuk et al., 2011).

*2.2. Work identity precarity*

The work identity of an individual is a multi-identity, multi-faceted and multi-layered construction of the self that comprises organisational, occupational, and other identities that shape the roles a person adopts and is involved in during their employment (Walsh and Gordon, 2007). Extant literature has observed that independent workers operating outside of organisations and established professions lack secure affiliations and predictable futures deemed necessary to construct a stable identity at work (Ashforth et al, 2008; Lehdonvirta, 2016; Petriglieri et al., 2019). Moreover, workers in alternative arrangements (WIAAs from here on), find it tough to construct a work-identity without a solid organisational foundation (Barley et al., 2017) which results in work-identity precarity.

The job demand–resources (JD-R) model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007) offers a potentially useful conceptual model for extending the sub-dimensions of work-identity precarity. While growth opportunities, organisational support and advancement, task identity, team climate and perceived external prestige are listed as job resources (JRs) in the extant literature; on the other hand emotional demands, role ambiguity, role conflict, lack of job control, lack of social support from supervisors and colleagues, lack of feedback, workload , unfavourable physical work environment and an unsupportive climate are the listed job demands (JDs) (de Braine and Roodt , 2015). In the case of workers with alternative arrangements, it is evident that they lack most of the mentioned JRs, and that their JDs are more of *job hindrances* then *job challenges* (see Van den Broecl et al., 2010). These job hindrances (without any JRs) may de-energise WIAAs resulting in a struggle to protect their primary performance goals in the midst of dealing with increased JDs that may result in energy loss (see Hocley’s (1997) Compensatory Regulatory-Control model), which could ultimately lead to work identity precarity. Thus, lack of JRs and job hindrances due to JDs can be proposed as sub-dimensions of the work identity precarity of workers in alternative arrangements.

*2.3. Social precarity*

Social precarity can be defined as a multidimensional phenomenon that not only covers aspect of individualised identity of self, economy and employment, but also the feasibility of one’s ability to define their own role relating to ethical and cultural aspects derived from the basic values in the society and the community at large (Herrmann and Kalaycioglu, 2011). Social precarity has the potential to adversely impact workers’ in alternative arrangement ability to participate in the social-economic, cultural and political life of their communities and may result in the negative phenomena of social exclusion and social isolation (Bu Burridge and Gill, 2017; Herrmann et al., 2008; Ricceri, 2016).In the case of these type of workers, there is non-existential relationship between clients and workers and often the platform acts more as a facilitator of the relationship between clients and workers, thus defeating the notion of meaningful work and resultant social precarity. As work time is often determined by clients and platforms, this leads to unstructured work patterns comprising long working hours leading to a lack of social contact and feelings of social isolation (Wood et al., 2019). This may lead to a lack of social engagement, indicated by declines in membership in voluntary associations and community organisations, trust, and social capital more generally (Kalleber and Hewison, 2013).

Further, alternative work arrangements often leaves workers exposed to vulnerabilities in respect to employment-linked social security benefits (Bajwa et al., 2018). Thus workers risk a lack of social security with an underlying uncertainty of the likely levels of income and social security benefits. Moreover, the effects of work-status dissimilarity with full-time workers may be associated with lack of or less positive social identity (Chattopadhyay and George, 2001). Thus, based on this discussion , this research proposes four sub-dimensions of social precarity intertwined around four social issues that seem especially challenging for workers in alternative arrangement –*relational support precarity* (i.e. support system that buffers the stresses of work) *relational agility precarity* (i.e. the ability to form, maintain and dissolve work relationships productively) *social security precarity* and finally *social identity precarity* due to work-status dissimilarity with full-time workers.

*2.4. Professional precarity*

Although Herrmann and Kalaycioglu (2011) introduced professional precarity as the depletion of the store of knowledge, but no further studies have conducted an exploration of this term. Professional precarity in this research is explored in the context of the professional careers of WIAAs based on individual professional development challenges arising due to the structural constraints of this type of work, the exclusion of WIAAs from organisation membership and the non-accreditation of skills learned on the job (Dall’Alba and Sandberg, 2006; Lewchuk, 2015).. Due to the structural constraints of this type of work (for example, no disposable time for further skill development), the resultant autonomy, lack of any intervention from the engaging organisation and lack of choice for decent alternative offers of employment (Pichault and McKeown, 2019), WIAAs face the prospects of individual professional precarity.

Further, dominant models of professional development (Ericsson and Smith, 1991; Sternberg and Ben-Zeev, 2001) assume that becoming a skilled professional involves progressively accumulating a set of knowledge and skills, principally acquired and developed through organisational socialisation and practical experience in the workplace (Abele et al., 2012; Dall’Alba and Sandberg, 2006). Due to their zero-hour work status and absence of clear association with a workplace environment, WIAAs cannot expect long-term exchange relationships within the employing organisation and also fail to get exposure of recognition, role clarity, supervisor support and further learning opportunities, thus leading to professional precarity. Last but not least, these workers’ employment experiences are not recognised and there is an absence of any skills-acknowledgement system, such as the Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) process that can help WIAAs for the purposes of obtaining future employment (Lewchuk, 2015).

**3.0 Outcomes of precarity**

The second component of proposed theoretical framework comprises outcomes on the basis of proposed precarity dimensions. Feelings of stigma, discrimination, unfairness or powerlessness among workers (Benach et al., 2014; Bosman et al., 2017), feeling depressed loss of self-esteem, hypertension, alcoholism, and addiction of drugs (Ivancevich and Matteson, 1980), less positive social identity (Chattopadhyay and George, 2001), vulnerabilities of anomalies in employment-linked social security benefits (Berg, 2016), social isolation (Bobek et al., 2018) and adverse impacts of psychological well-being (Bosman et al., 2017), are some of the negative outcomes found in extant research in relation to different types of alternative work arrangements. Given that the previous research about negative outcomes tend to be generic, and without any overarching conceptual framework, the author proposes following dimension of outcomes based on precarity dimensions of WIAAs.

*3.1. Subjective well-being*

Subjective well-being is a multidimensional concept covering multiple aspects of a person’s subjective state (Diener et al. 1999). More recent literature has observed that a wide range of job characteristics affects individuals’ subjective well-being beyond monetary compensation (De Neve and Ward, 2017). The combination of high employment relationship uncertainty and high employment relationship effort (Lewchuck et al., 2008) may adversely affect the subjective well-being of workers in alternative arrangements. In line with Inanc (2018), this research focuses on two distinct subjective well-being outcomes in the context of individual precarity: *psychological* wellbeing and *overall life satisfaction.* Individual precarity conditions (i.e. *employment precarity, earnings precarity, scheduling precarity*) can make these type of workers uncertain and at the same time evoke feelings of stigma, discrimination, unfairness or powerlessness among workers (Benach et al., 2014; Bosman et al., 2017) and these feelings may have a negative impact on workers’ psychological well-being (Bosman et al., 2017) and result in dysfunctional psychological well-being (George, 1992). Further, due to this dysfunctional psychological well-being WIAAs may feel depression, loss of self-esteem, hypertension, alcoholism, and drug addiction (Ivancevich and Matteson, 1980) and that may affect their performance (Wright et al., 1993).

The overall life satisfaction of an individual is an evaluation of the satisfaction of people with their present state of affairs against standards set by the individual themselves and it is not externally imposed (Erdogan et al., 2012). The ‘spillover’ model (See Loscocco and Roschelle, 1991) suggests that satisfaction in one domain of an individual life extends into other areas, and this may be from life to job satisfaction or from job to life satisfaction. Most previous research which has examined the relationship between job and life satisfaction have found support for the spillover hypothesis (Nielsen et al., 2011). Thus, extending on the spillover model, this research hypothesises that the individual precarity conditions of WIAAs and the above-mentioned work-related variables of individual precarity (i.e. employment precarity, earnings precarity, scheduling precarity) have potential negative impacts on WIAAs’ job satisfaction that may negatively influence overall life satisfaction.

*3.2. Burnout and work disengagement*

According to the JD-R model, job demands evoke a health impairment process that may exhaust employees’ mental and physical resources and therefore may lead to burnout (Nahrgang et al., 2010). Job demands are predicted to have a direct relationship with burnout (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007). Moreover, the job resources definition assumes that these resources buffer the impact of job demands including burnout (Bakker et al., 2005; Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). Since WIAAs lack most of the JRs (i.e. growth opportunities, organisational support) and their JDs (i.e. emotional demands, unfavourable physical work environment and an unsupportive climate) are more of job hindrances (same as work-identity precarity sub-dimensions), thus it is proposed that WIAAs may be particularly at risk of burnout.

Interestingly, while discussing the impact of JDs on burnout, it becomes important to discuss the impact of JRs on work engagement as the research on burnout has stimulated most contemporary research on work engagement (Bakker et al., 2014).Some research scholars have posited work engagement as the hypothetical antipode of burnout (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2003), but in the light of the recent observations that both concepts appear to be common (Demerouti et al., 2010), it becomes important to discuss the work engagement of WIAAs. JRs are known as the most important predictors of work engagement (Halbesleben, 2010). Given that WIAAs have limited JRs (i.e. growth opportunities, organisational support, team climate), they might be callous, distanced and have cynical attitudes toward the work, which may result in work disengagement (Kahn, 1990), where they withdraw and defend themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during their role performances.

*3.3. Social impoverishment*

Social impoverishment is a term that has been used more often in the context of lack of social resources in a child’s life and how it undermines child’s healthy development (Ashford and LeCroy, 2009). In context of this research, however, the author use this term as an outcome based on the social precarity sub-dimensions of workers in alternative arrangements. The author defines social impoverishment as a lack of critical social resources (such as relationship support, relational agility, social identity and social security) that negatively impact an individuals’ affiliation with society, leading to a breakdown of the relationship between society and the individual. and ultimately result in social exclusion and social isolation. Thus, due to imposed relationship deprivation (support and agility), lack of social security benefits and a weak social identity, WIAAs may face the prospect of social exclusion. This hypothesis becomes stronger given that the precariousness of employment is known to reflect social exclusion because it emphasises relational aspects (Bhalla and Lapeyre, 1979, p-428) and WIAAs tend to lack quality time in maintaining social ties with the family, friends, local community, state services and institutions or more generally with the society to which they belong. This imposed social exclusion due to the nature of gig work may particularly result in WIAAs’ deliberate social isolation.

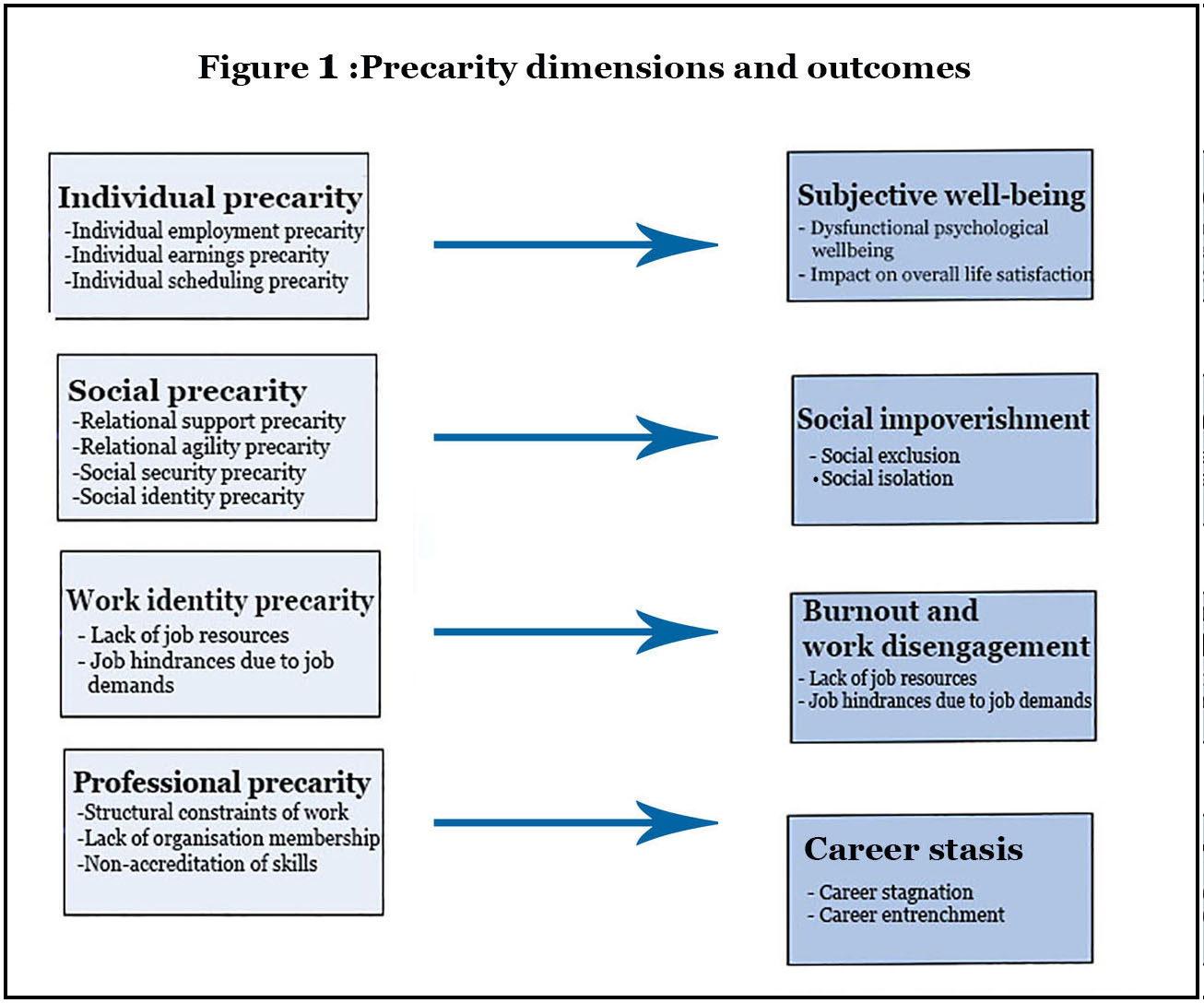
*3.4. Career stasis*

Due to the professional precarity WIAAs may experience - phases in which they do not move ahead, or their job fails to offer them opportunities for further career transitions (i.e. organisational, horizontal or vertical – Chudzikowski, 2012) - often they become ‘trapped’ to stay in the current occupation, and that may lead to involuntary career stasis. The concepts of *Career stagnation* and *Career entrenchment* are the two suggested dimensions for further developing the construct of career stasis of WIAAs based on an extensive literature review (Abele et al., 2012). Career stagnation is a multifaceted phenomenon, and multiple factors (i.e. self-efficacy issues, goal issues dual-career issues, discrimination at work, lack of socialisation/support/mentoring) can lead to career stagnation (Abele et al., 2012). Career stagnation of WIAAs is more concerned with lack of *Career decision self-efficacy (CDSE)-* (Betz et al., 1996) and *Lack of support and mentoring* issues. While the lack of CDCE skills amounts to a lack of accurate self-appraisal, gathering occupational information, goal selection, making plans for the future and problem solving skills of WIAAs (Gushue et al., 2006), on the other hand, the lack of mentoring and support refers to the lack of career-related and psychosocial mentoring (Noe,1988) in the absence of organisation membership.

Career entrenchment refers to employees' feelings of ‘immobility resulting from substantial economic and psychological investments in a career that make change difficult’ and comprise three dimensions: perceived career investments, limited career alternatives, and emotional costs (Carson et al, 1996, p. 274) that can be explored in context of career entrenchment of WIAAs. The fear of reducing their worth, perception of unavailability of new career opportunities, and expected socio-emotional risks associated with the pursuit of a new career may entrench WIAAs’ careers.

**4.0 Theoretical model and future research agenda**

*4.1 Theoretical model for precarity dimension and outcomes*



*4.2 Implications and future research agenda*

The proposed renewed dimensions of precarity and their outcome help to reveal the rich research possibilities that lie ahead. The full implications of the precarity of alternative work arrangements and its link with proposed outcomes in this research is a work-in-progress and needs further inputs from researchers to refine it further. Following are several research possibilities and issues that are likely to arise in future research.

*4.2.1 The relationship between precarity dimensions and outcomes*

Given that most of the earlier research has treated alternative work arrangements as precarious form of employment, the outcome dimensions seem to be more closely and directly related to proposed precarity dimensions. For example, individual precarity conditions (i.e. employment precarity, earnings precarity, scheduling precarity) directly lead to negative subjective well-being outcomes such as dysfunctional psychological well-being and negative influence on the overall life satisfaction of a workers in alternative arrangements. As individual precarity conditions may have a negative impact on workers’ psychological well-being (Benach et al., 2014; Bosman et al., 2017) and further due to the spillover impact (Loscocco and Roschelle, 1991), they may negatively influence the overall life satisfaction of a WIAAs . Similarly, social impoverishment, burnout and disengagement and career stasis dimension are directly related to social and work identity and professional precarity dimensions. Further cross examination of the relationship among the proposed dimensions of precarity and outcomes may provide warrant interesting results and could significantly contribute to the alternative work arrangements literature.

*4.2.3 Future research based on outcomes*

The four suggested outcome dimensions of the basis of precarity provide a solid platform for future research projects. While the impact of dysfunctional psychological well-being on WIAAs can be further explored in linking and exploring their health and longevity, income, work- productivity and individual and social behaviour (See Neve et al., 2013), the overall life satisfaction sub-dimension of these workers can lead researchers to examine the mediating role of job satisfaction between individual precarity and overall life satisfaction. The proposed outcome of social impoverishment on the basis of social precarity of WIAAs is a novel concept which can be further explored to connect the sub-dimensions of social impoverishment with the phenomenon of social exclusion and resultant social isolation. Further, derivation of the term ‘work identity precarity’ around the notion of the JD-R model have linked lack of job resources of the WIAAs and job hindrances to burnout and work disengagement. The concept of career stasis has not been used in the context of alternative work arrangements and author proposes that most WIAAs may be trapped in career stasis. Research to explore the different factors that lead to career stagnation and career entrenchment will help to understand the psychosocial dynamics of these alternative work arrangements.

**8. Concluding remarks**

This development paper has proposed a theoretical framework for precarity of workers in alternative work arrangements and also different outcomes of the dimension of precarity are discussed. . Four different precarity dimensions and outcomes of precarity dimensions have been proposed with further sub-dimensions for each. While the relationship among different dimensions and sub-dimensions is beyond the scope of this development paper, the author provides an outline for some possible future research directions. The theoretical model offers a useful framework for clarifying and understanding the characteristics of WIAAs and provides researchers with a valuable platform for conducting systematic, well-designed investigations into alternative work arrangements.

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