

October
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THE PERI REPORTS

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

INFOBRIEF #4: Employment and Health

About PERI

The Precarious Employment Research Initiative (PERI) is a collaborative project among several community partners interested in better understanding the employment and working conditions of workers in our community. This project was initiated by [Peterborough Public Health](#) but quickly 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 fourth 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

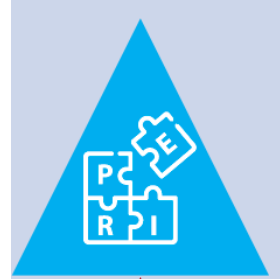
The project goal is to identify how employment and working conditions are impacting the economic, social, physical and mental health and lives of workers and their communities in the Peterborough area. The goal for InfoBrief #4 is to explore general health, mental health, depression and anger as they relate to employment and income.

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 consists of 800 respondents (49% male; 51% female), employed during the previous 3 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%).

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



- **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 sector (50%); knowledge or creative (31%); manufacturing, construction trades, and transport (17%); and primary sector (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 to 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://pepso.ca/tools>.

General Health

Employment has been identified as a social determinant of overall physical and mental health. Survey respondents were asked to rate their general health and, overall, most reported that their health was “excellent” or “very good” (72%), while the remaining respondents reported their health was “good” (21%) or less than good (“fair” or “poor”) (7%). When evaluated by employment precarity, 78% of respondents who rated their health as less than good were in vulnerable or precarious employment as opposed to 22% who were in secure and stable employment. In addition, of respondents who reported their health as “good,” 64% were in vulnerable or precarious employment and 36% were in secure or stable employment (Figure 1).

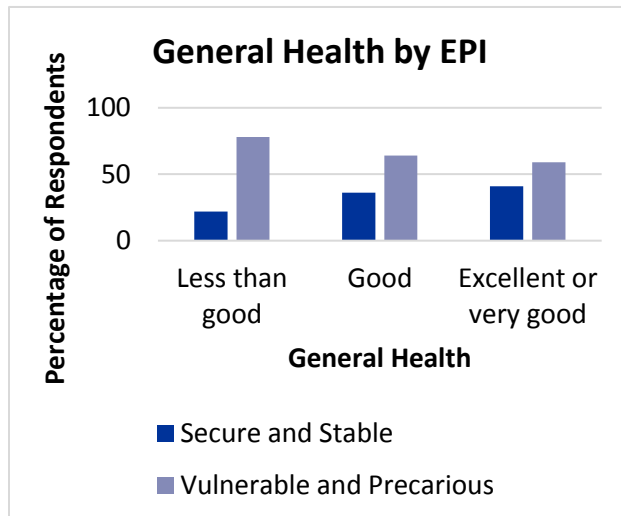


Figure 1. General Health by Employment Precarity

General health ratings were further analyzed by individual income and employment precarity (see Figure 2 next page).

Overall, job precarity was not associated with self-reported quality of general health at the lowest and highest incomes. For these two groups, income level showed a stronger association. On the other hand, job precarity was a factor in self-reported quality of general health for those in the middle income category.

Specifically, at high incomes (\$80 000+), the distribution of health ratings was similar among all respondents regardless of level of job precarity. In the high income group, more respondents reported very good or excellent health in both secure or stable jobs (14%) and vulnerable or precarious jobs (9%) rather than less than good (secure or stable: 8% and vulnerable or precarious: 3%). At low incomes (less than \$40 000), respondents shared similar health ratings where both respondents in the secure or stable category and vulnerable or precarious category reported their general health as “less than good” (10% and 54% respectively) rather than excellent or very good (stable or secure: 9% and vulnerable or precarious: 32%).

On the other hand, in the middle income category (\$40 000 to \$79 999), respondents with secure or stable employment were more likely to report their general health as very good or excellent (21%) (less than good =5%) whereas respondents with vulnerable or precarious employment were more likely to report their health as less than good (20%) (very good or excellent=16%). This suggests that at an income between \$40 000 to \$79 999, EPI is a bigger indicator of general health than income.

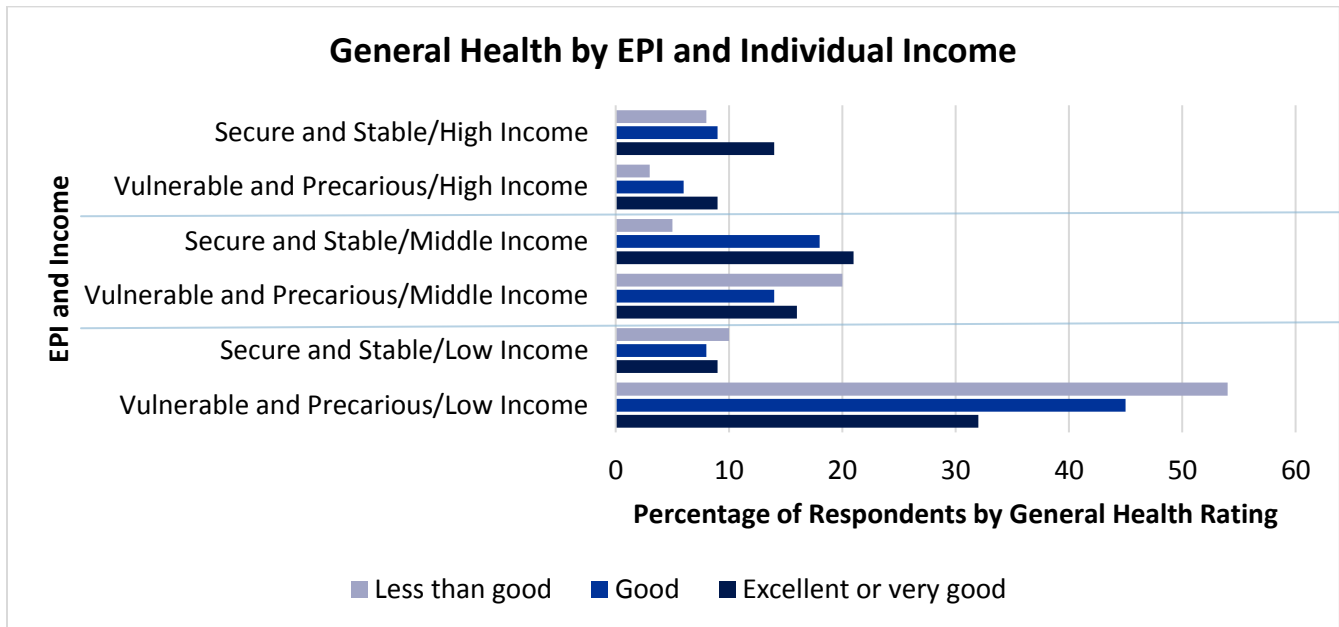


Figure 2. General Health by EPI and Individual Income

Mental Health

When asked about mental health, 68% of respondents rated their mental health as very good or excellent and almost one-third responded that their mental health was good, fair, or poor (32%). Figure 3 shows the comparison by employment precariousity, where 74% of respondents in secure and stable employment, and 65% of those in vulnerable and precarious employment, rated their mental health as excellent or very good. Slightly more respondents in vulnerable and precarious employment rated their health as less than very good (35%) than those in secure and stable employment (26%).

Looking at respondents' mental health by employment precariousity and individual income, the results were similar to general health outcomes. The highest percentage of respondents who rated their mental health as less than good were in vulnerable and precarious employment and had low incomes (58%); a much higher percentage than when compared to respondents in secure and stable employment with low income (11%) (Figure 4).

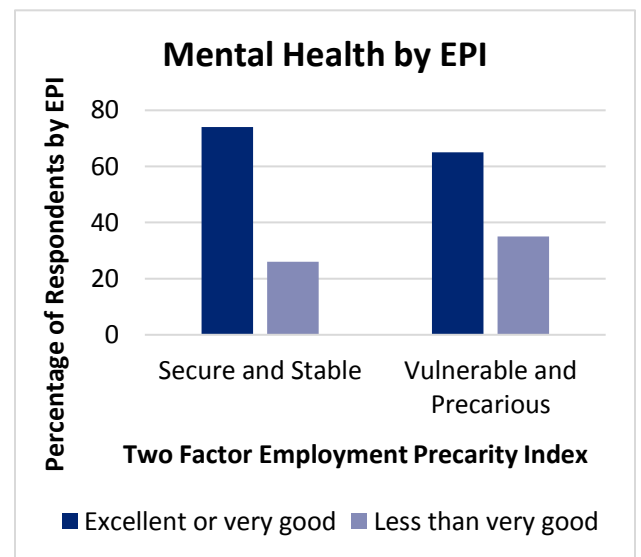


Figure 3. Mental Health by Employment Precarity

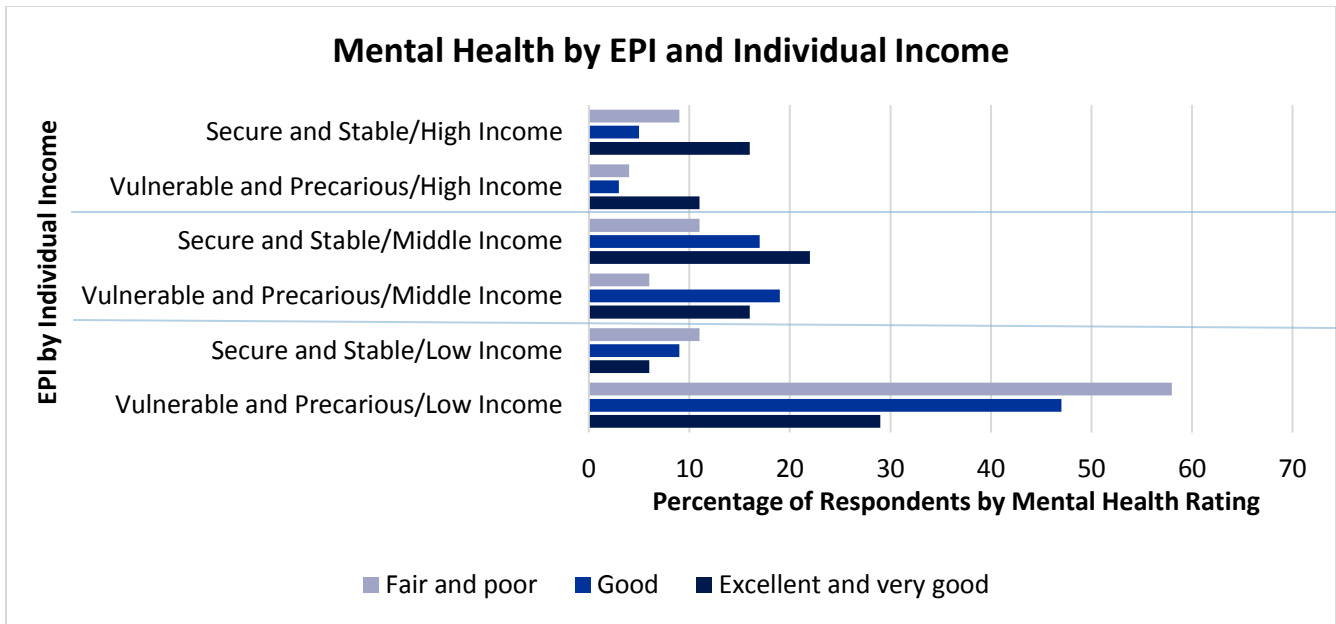


Figure 4. Mental Health (less than very good) by EPI and Individual Income

Depression and Anger

Related to the issue of mental health, respondents were also asked how often over the previous 12 months they were depressed as a result of work. In all, 45% reported never feeling depressed because of work, 26% said “rarely”, and 29% said “sometimes” or “often” (Figure 5). When we looked at these results and took employment precarity into account, the representation of respondents from stable or secure employment and vulnerable or precarious employment were equal in each response category for “depressed over work.”

The survey also asked respondents to rate how often they were angry as a result of work over the previous 12 months. Respondents reported feeling anger because of work more than depression: 43% had “sometimes” or “often” experienced anger because of work, 32% had “rarely”, and 25% had “never” (Figure 6, next page). When precarity was considered, there was no significant difference for those who reported being angry sometimes or often, however, those in vulnerable and precarious employment situations were more likely to report never having been angry because of work (71%).

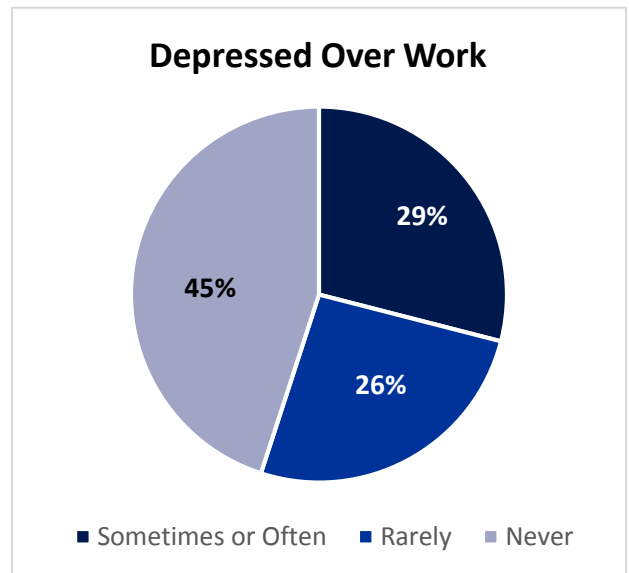


Figure 5. Percentage of Respondents Depressed as a Result of Work

Takeaways

- Low income combined with vulnerable or precarious employment is associated with lower general and mental health.
- Self-reported general health is more influenced by level of income than job precarity in both the high and low income levels. Job precarity seems to influence self-reported general health at the middle income level.
- Nearly one-third of survey respondents experience feelings of depression as a result of work and just under half experience anger as a result of work. Depression and anger over work did not vary significantly by level of precarity.

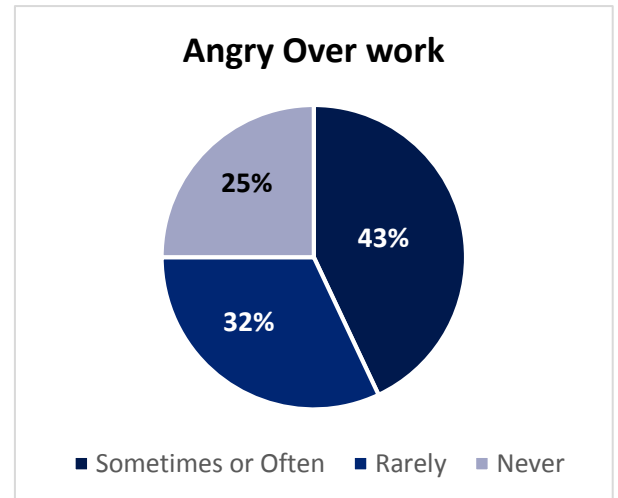


Figure 6. Percentage of Respondents Angry as a Result of Work

More Findings to Come

You can find this InfoBrief as well as *InfoBrief #1: Overview*, *#2: Employment Security*, *#3: The Employment Relationship: Working Conditions*, and *#4: Employment and Discrimination* at <http://www.peterboroughpublichealth.ca/PERI/>. Future reports will focus on themes including:



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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