

June 2019



THE PERI REPORTS

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

INFOBRIEF #6:

Employment Precarity, Income and Household Wellbeing

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 sixth 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

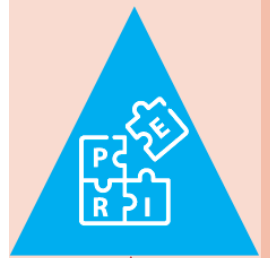
The project goal is to identify how employment and working conditions are impacting the economic, social, physical and mental health and lives of workers and their communities in the Peterborough area. The goal for InfoBrief #6 is to look at factors that impact income stability and household wellbeing such as fluctuations in income, standard of living, interpersonal relationships, and anxiety.

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 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://pepso.ca/tools>.

Family, Relationships, and Anxiety

Respondents were asked if their employment, or uncertainty surrounding employment, had led them to delay forming relationships. The majority of respondents (91%) said they had not delayed forming a relationship. Of the 9% of respondents who said they had, 60% were in the precarious employment category and a further 21% were in the vulnerable employment category. The level of precarity was more strongly aligned with delaying forming a relationship than household income levels.

Respondents were also asked if anxiety about their employment situation interfered with their personal or family life. Most respondents said that they “never” or “rarely” (68%) experienced anxiety as a result of their employment situation, while 21% said “sometimes” and 11% said “often” or “always.” Respondents in the vulnerable and precarious employment categories were more likely to report “often” or “always” experiencing anxiety due to their employment situation (14%) than respondents in the secure and stable employment categories (6%) (Figure 1).

The survey asked about the respondents’ ability to schedule time with family. When asked how often uncertainty about their work schedule prevented them from doing things with their family that are fun, most respondents said “never” or “rarely” (59%), while 27% said “sometimes,” and 14% said

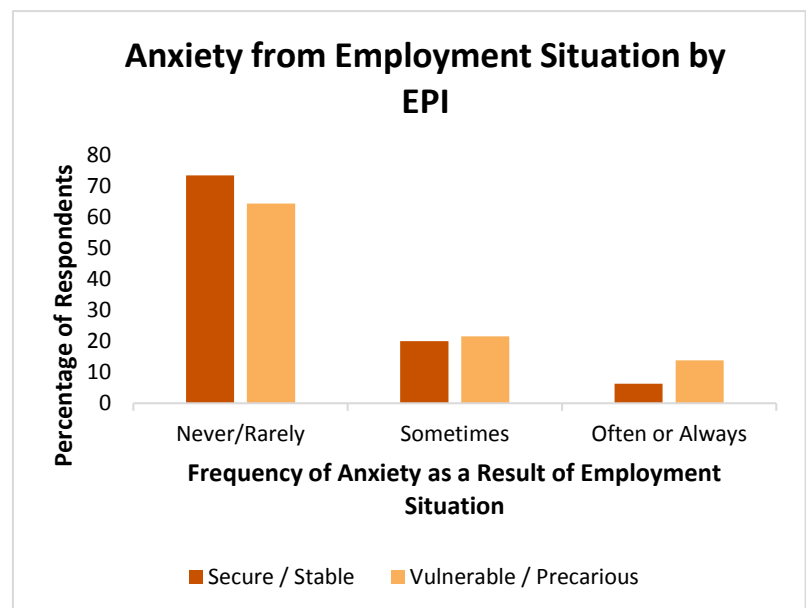


Figure 1. Anxiety from Employment Situation by EPI

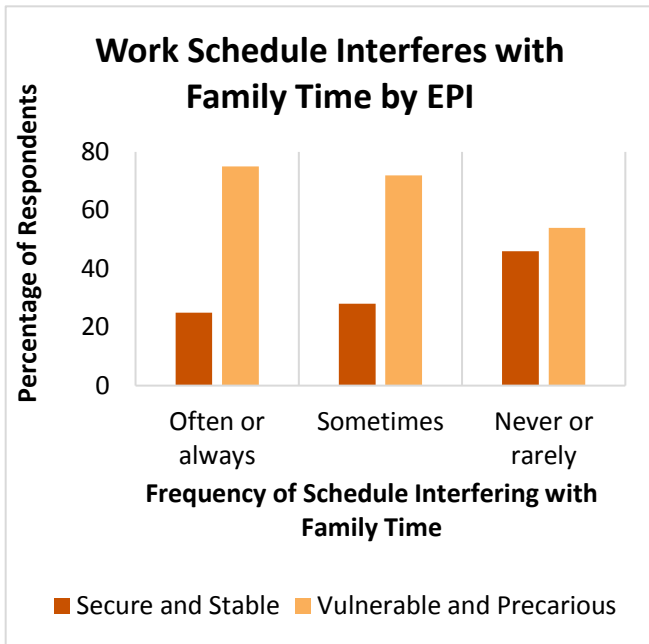


Figure 2. Work Schedule Interferes with Family Time by EPI

“often” or “always.” For those 14% who said that their work schedule often or always interfered with family time, the majority of those respondents were in the precarious and vulnerable employment categories (78%) as opposed to those in the stable and secure employment categories (22%) (Figure 2). Again, precarious employment was the reason why work schedules interfered with family time and not level of income.

Income and Standard of Living

Household income was self-declared by respondents who were asked to include income from all sources before any deductions for the previous 12 months. This report uses the same groupings as those in *The Precarity Penalty*¹ where low household income refers to respondents with an income of less than \$60 000, middle income was between \$60 000 and \$99 999; and high income was that equal to, or higher than, \$100 000.

Respondents were asked about the potential financial stress that may be caused by their employment situation as well as how they felt they were currently managing financially. First, respondents were asked if their employment situation negatively influenced large spending decisions such as large purchases, children’s activities, and vacations. The majority of respondents said “no” (70%) while 30% responded “yes.” Of the nearly one-third of respondents who said yes, the majority (79%) were in the vulnerable and precarious employment categories. When household income was taken into consideration, almost half of the respondents (47%) who reported that large spending purchases were impacted by their employment situation lived in households with low incomes. The remaining respondents who also reported difficulty in making large purchases were evenly distributed among the other combinations of income and precarity as outlined in Figure 3.

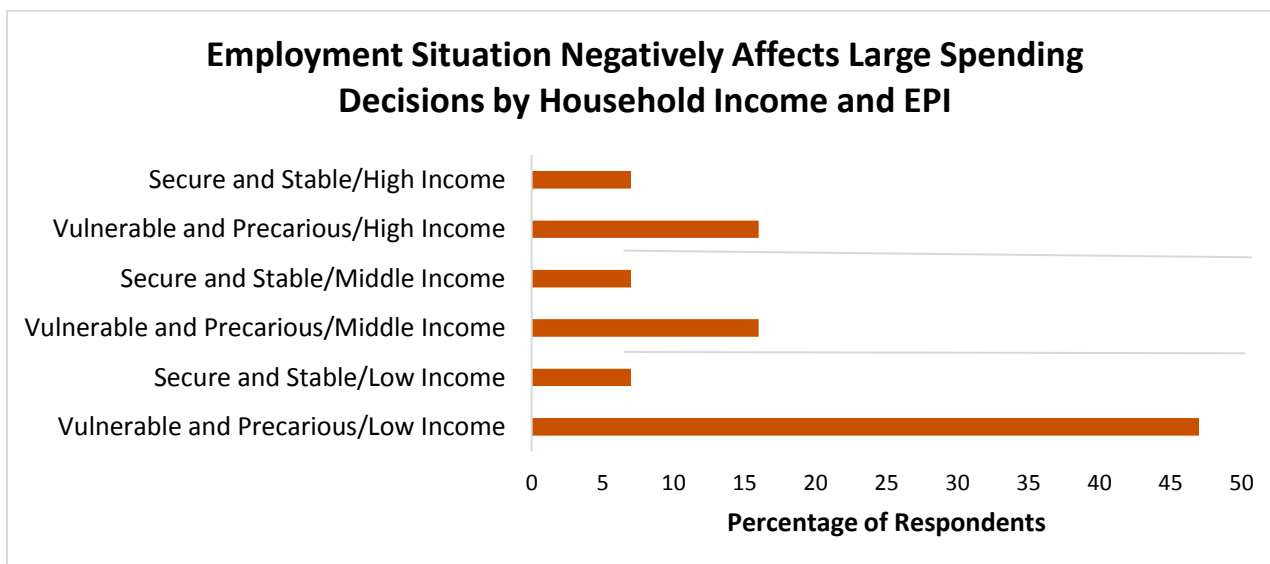


Figure 3. Employment Situation Negatively Affects Large Spending Decision by Household Income and EPI

The survey also asked how well respondents and their households had been keeping up with their bills and financial commitments over the past year. Regardless of employment precarity, most respondents reported that they were “keeping up without any problems” (61%). One-third of respondents said they were “keeping up, but it is sometimes a struggle” (33%), and only 6% said that they were “having real financial problems and falling behind.” Meeting financial commitments was more influenced by household income than EPI, with lower income workers being more likely than higher income workers to be falling behind (Figure 4).

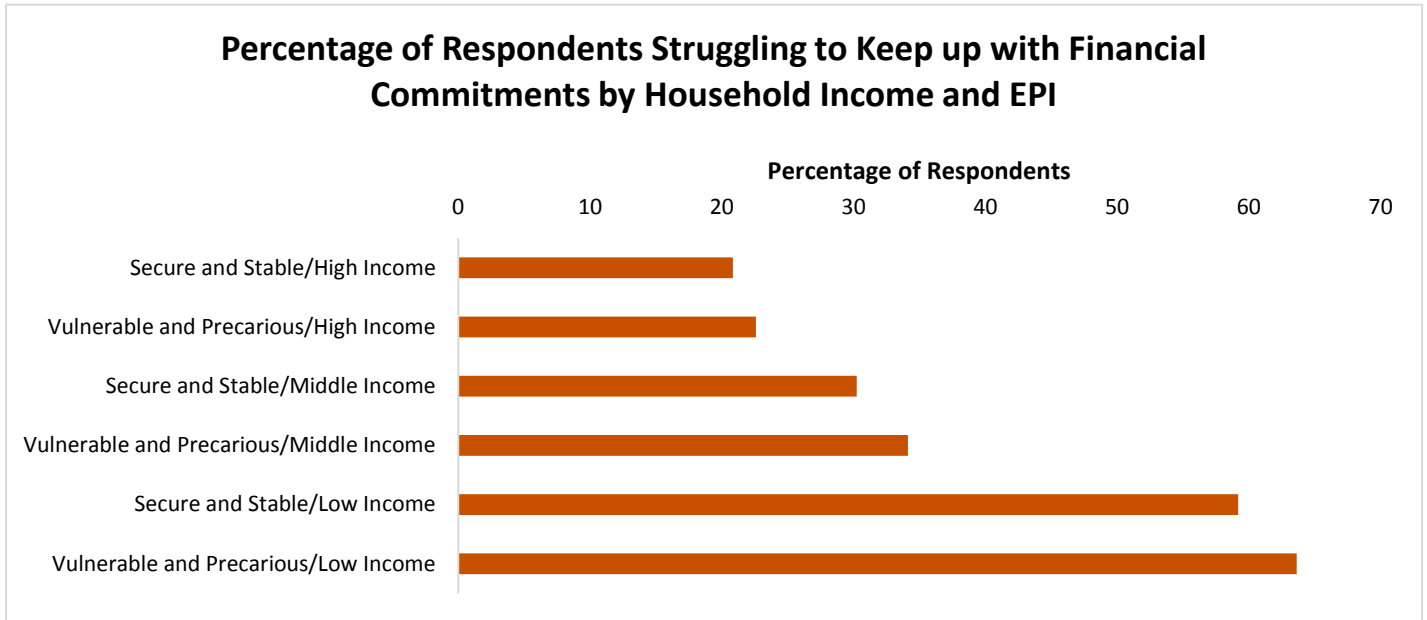


Figure 4. Percentage of Respondents Struggling to Keep Up with Financial Commitments by Employment Precarity and Household Income

Reflecting over the previous 12 months, respondents were asked if they were concerned about maintaining their current standard of living given their employment situation. A large majority (84%) said that they were not concerned, while 16% said they were concerned. Of the 16% who were concerned, 79% were in the vulnerable and precarious employment categories, most notably those in the low household income category (Figure 5).

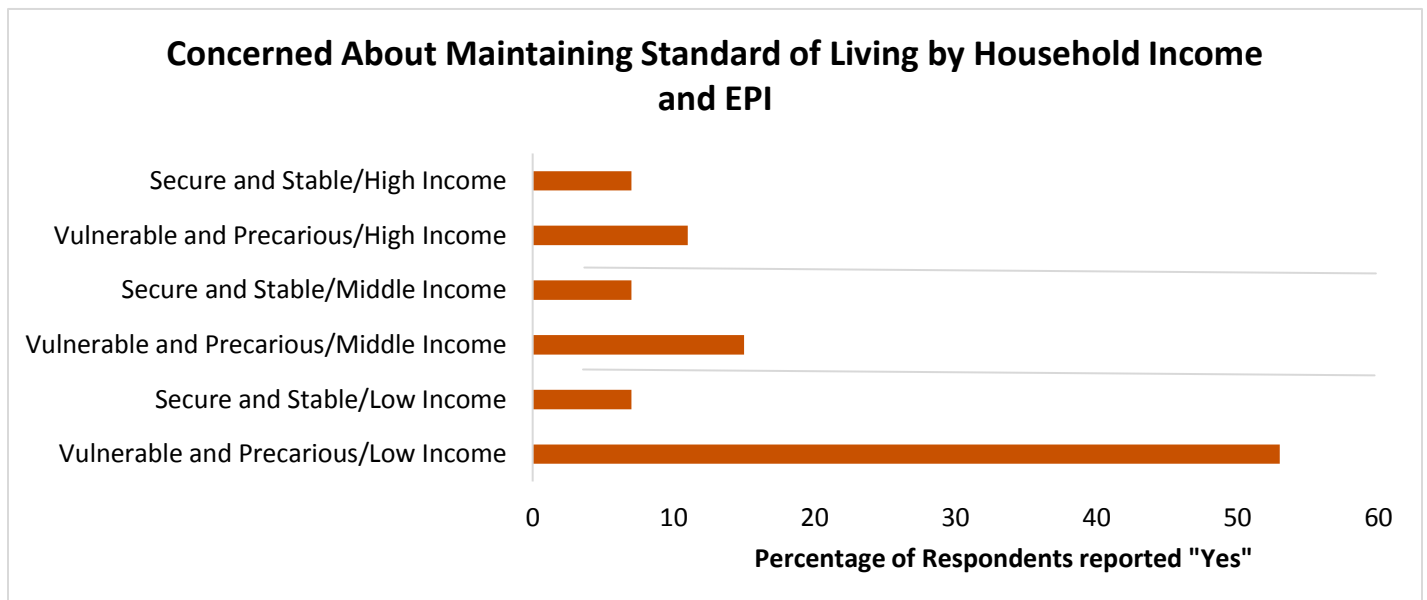


Figure 5. Percentage of Respondents Concerned About Maintaining Standard of Living by Household Income and EPI

Another issue that contributes to concern about maintaining standard of living is consistency in income. Respondents were asked how their income this past year compared with the previous year and, overall, 53% of respondents said it was “the same” as the previous year, 34% said it was “higher,” and 13% said that it was “lower.” Respondents in the vulnerable and precarious employment categories, regardless of household income level, were more likely to anticipate lower income in the next year than those in the stable and secure employment categories (Figure 6).

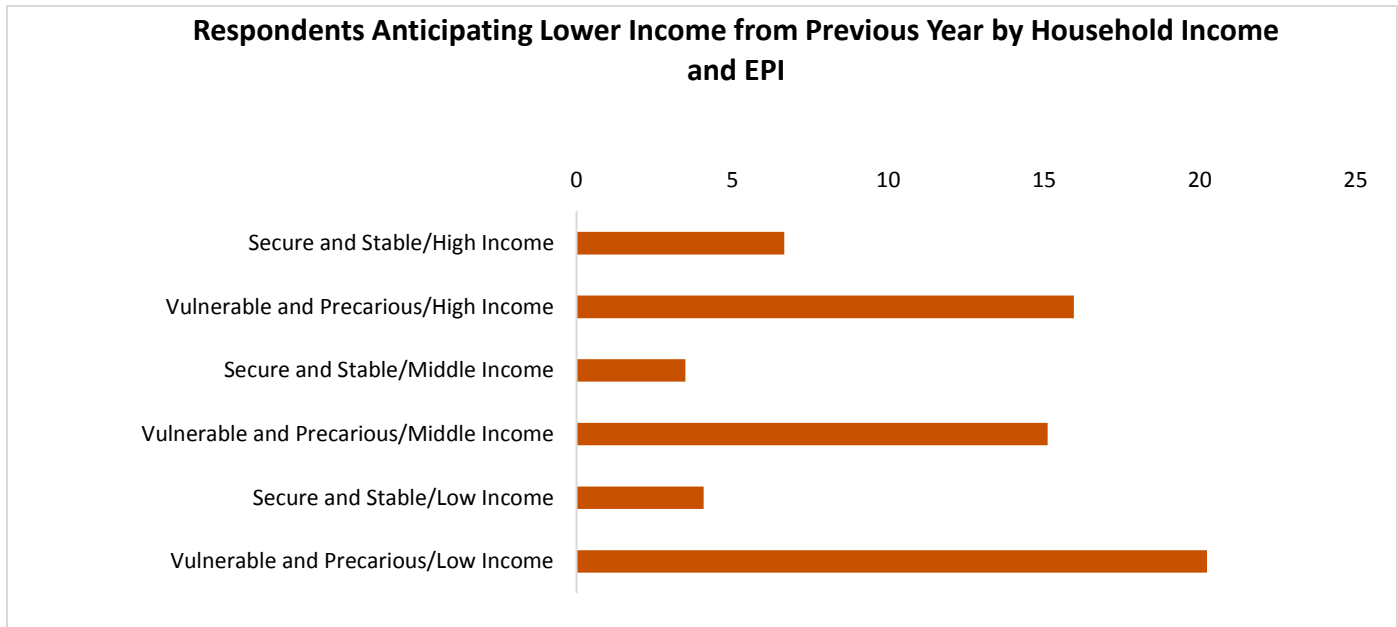


Figure 6. Percentage of Respondents Anticipating Lower Income from Previous Year by Household Income and EPI

Takeaways

- While the majority of respondents seem to be managing the relationship between their employment situation and their family and financial lives, if any worker is going to be negatively affected, it will be a low income worker in precarious or vulnerable employment.
- Delaying forming a relationship because of employment uncertainty was not very common in this sample, however, those who had delayed forming a relationship were more likely to be in vulnerable or precarious employment.
- Experiencing anxiety as a result of work was more common among those in vulnerable and precarious employment.
- Being in vulnerable and precarious employment situations impacted financial security and increased chances of experiencing financial difficulty and falling behind bill and debt repayment.
- Vulnerable and precarious employment when combined with low household income negatively impacted workers’ ability to make large purchase decisions and was also associated with an increase in concern over their ability to maintain their current standard of living.

More Findings to Come

You can find this InfoBrief as well as *InfoBrief #1: Overview*, *#2: Employment Security*, *#3: The Employment Relationship: Working Conditions*, *#4: Employment and Health*, and *#5: Employment and Work Stress* at <http://www.peterboroughpublichealth.ca/PERI/>. Future reports will focus on themes including:



Employment Precarity, Income and Children



Employment Precarity, Income and Community Participation

Suggested Citation

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¹ Lewchuk, W., LaFleche, M., Procyk, S., Cook, C., Dyson, D., Goldring, L., Lior, K., Meisner, A., Shields, J., Tambureno, A., & Viducis, P. (2015) *The precarity penalty: The impact of employment precarity on individuals, households, and communities – and what to do about it*. Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario.