

June 2019



# THE PERI REPORTS

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

## INFOBRIEF #8: Employment Precarity, Income and Community Participation

### 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 eighth and last 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.

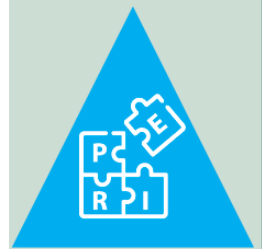
### Research Goal

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 City, County and First Nations of Peterborough. The goal for InfoBrief #8 is to explore the relationship between employment precarity and the impact on the ability to participate in the community through volunteering, social interactions and civic engagement (voting and political involvement).

### About the Respondents

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

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



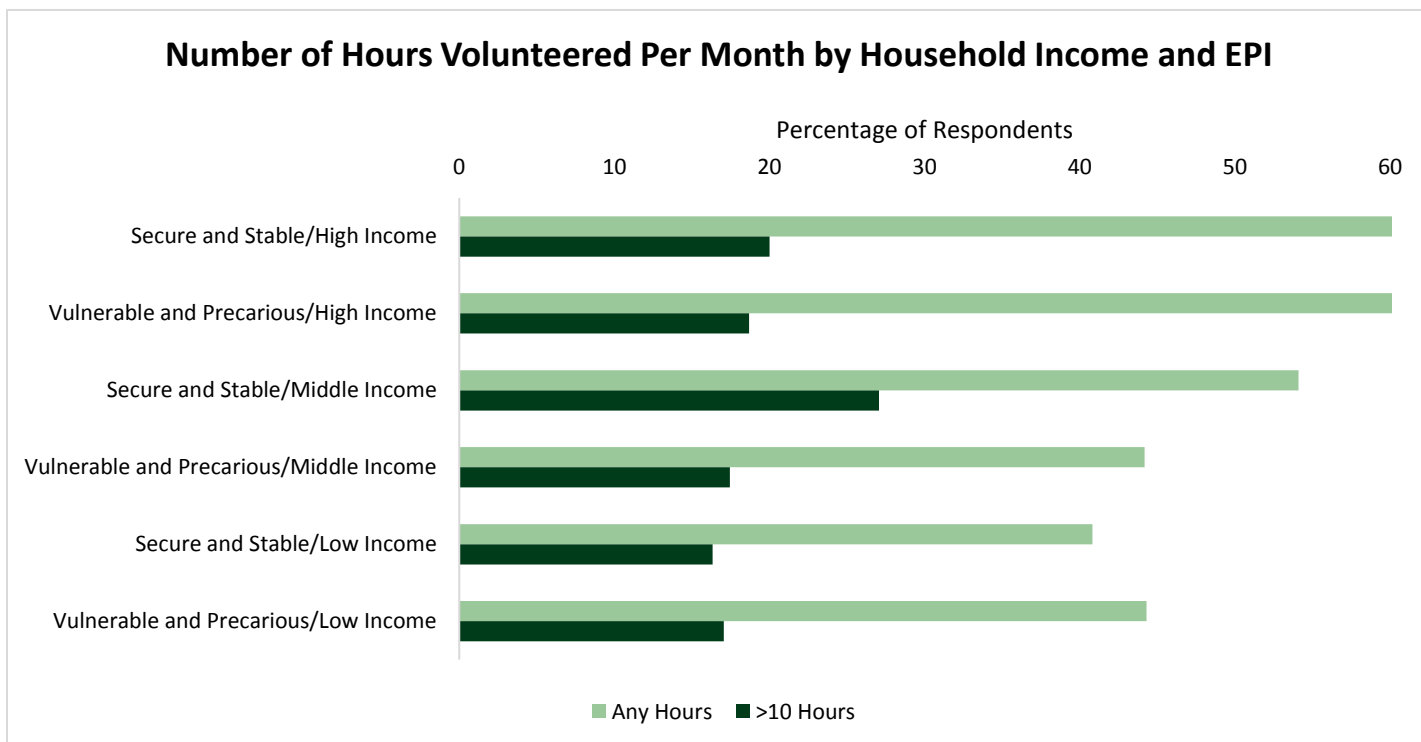
- **Race:** White (88%), Indigenous (2%); Canadian (2%); Visible Minority (3%); (no response: 4%).
- **Marital status:** married (65%); single (25%); separated (7%); and widowed (3%).
- **Education level:** secondary school diploma or other (22%); non-university certificate or diploma, trades certification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

## Employment Precarity

The Employment Precarity Index (EPI) is a measure used to characterize employment conditions. The measure is calculated based on the responses of 12 key questions in the survey. The Index classifies 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%), and; stable (18%). For more details about this Index, visit: <https://pepso.ca/tools>.

## Reasons for Volunteering

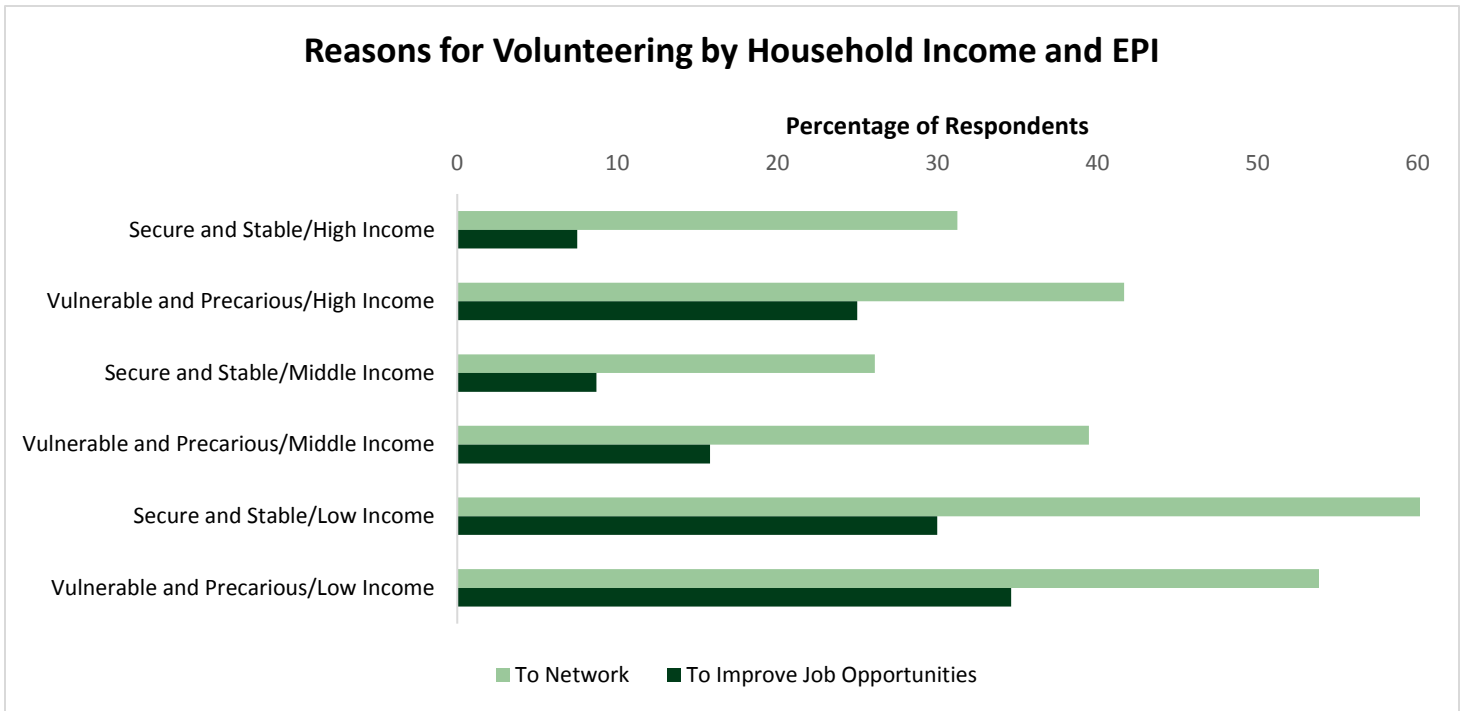
Respondents were asked about how many hours they volunteered per month and then the information was combined with level of employment precarity and household income. Figure 1 shows that household income was a greater predictor of level of volunteering than employment precarity. Respondents in both employment categories with a household income less than \$60,000 were more likely to report a lower number of volunteer hours. On the other hand, respondents with higher household incomes were more likely to report more volunteer hours. Of note, about half of all respondents did not volunteer. On the other hand, respondents in



**Figure 1.** Number of Hours Volunteered per Month by Household Income and EPI

the higher household income category were almost twice as likely to volunteer more than ten hours compared to respondents in the lower household income category.

Respondents were asked to identify their reasons for volunteering including: 1) to benefit themselves or their families; 2) to contribute to their communities; 3) to network, and; 4) to improve job opportunities. The major reasons reported by respondents were to benefit themselves or their families, or to contribute to their communities. These reasons had no association with EPI or income. On the other hand, respondents with a household income less than \$60,000 were more likely to report volunteering to network than respondents in the other two household income categories (Figure 2). The level of job precarity did not seem to be a factor. Finally, respondents in the precarious or vulnerable employment categories were 2.3 times more likely to volunteer for job opportunity reasons.

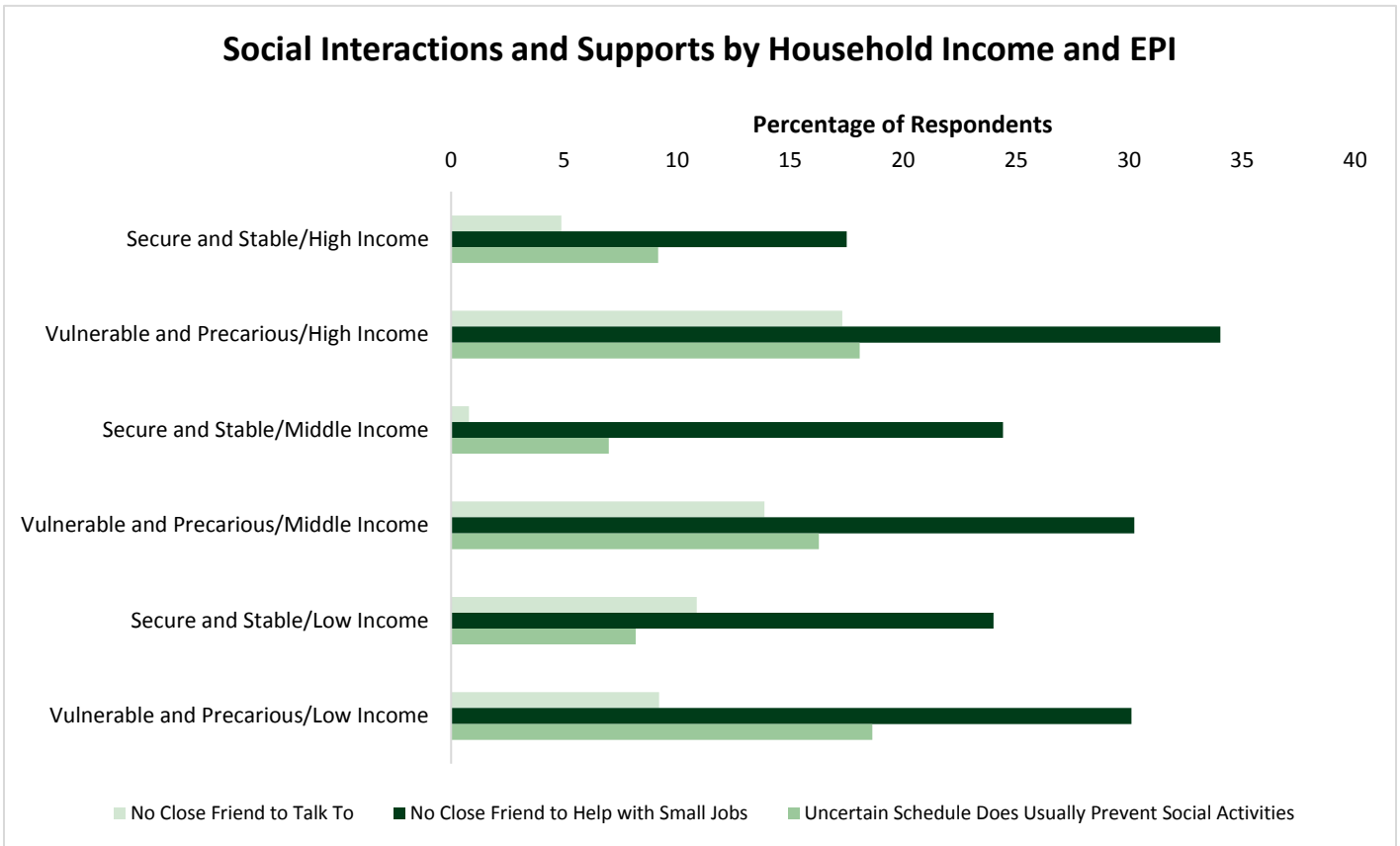


**Figure 2.** Percentage of Respondents Citing Reasons for Volunteering by Household Income and EPI

## Social Interactions

Having social connections is a key component to health and wellbeing for individuals and their community. This section looks at the social supports available to the respondents including having a close friend to talk to, having a friend who could help with small jobs including childcare and participating in social activities. Most of the respondents reported that they had a close friend to talk to (91%), that they had a friend who could help them with small jobs such as childcare (72%), and that their work schedules did not interfere with social activities (86%).

Considering employment precarity and household income in relation to social interactions and supports, the results show that respondents in the vulnerable and precarious employment categories were three times less likely to have a friend to talk to compared to respondents in the stable and secure employment categories (Figure 3). The level of household income was not a major factor.



**Figure 3.** Social Interactions and Supports by Household Income and EPI

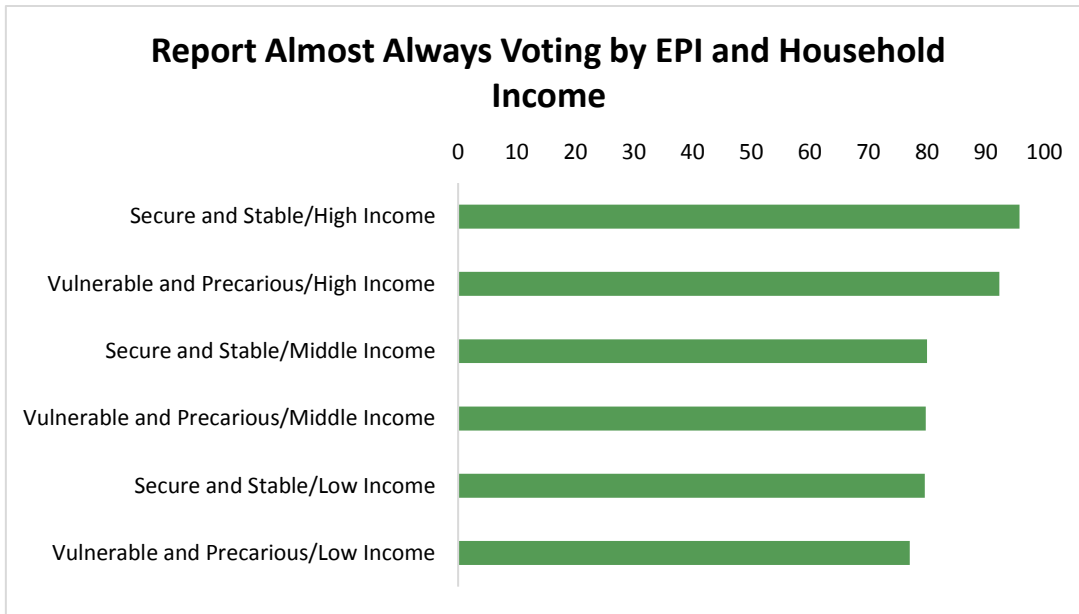
The level of employment precarity, but not household income, had a negative effect on whether or not a respondent had a friend to help with small jobs. Respondents in the precarious employment category were less likely to have such a friend to help with small jobs. Regardless of household income level or employment precarity, most respondents reported that they have: someone they would help; someone they could do something with like having a meal, and; someone they could borrow money from in an emergency.

When looking at whether uncertainty about work schedule prevented participants from doing fun things with others, employment precarity but not household income, had an effect. The majority of respondents (88%) had someone they could spend time with doing fun things. However, those respondents in the vulnerable and precarious employment categories were 2.4 times more likely to be prevented from participating in social activities due to work schedules compared to respondents in the stable and secure employment categories.

## Voting and Political Involvement

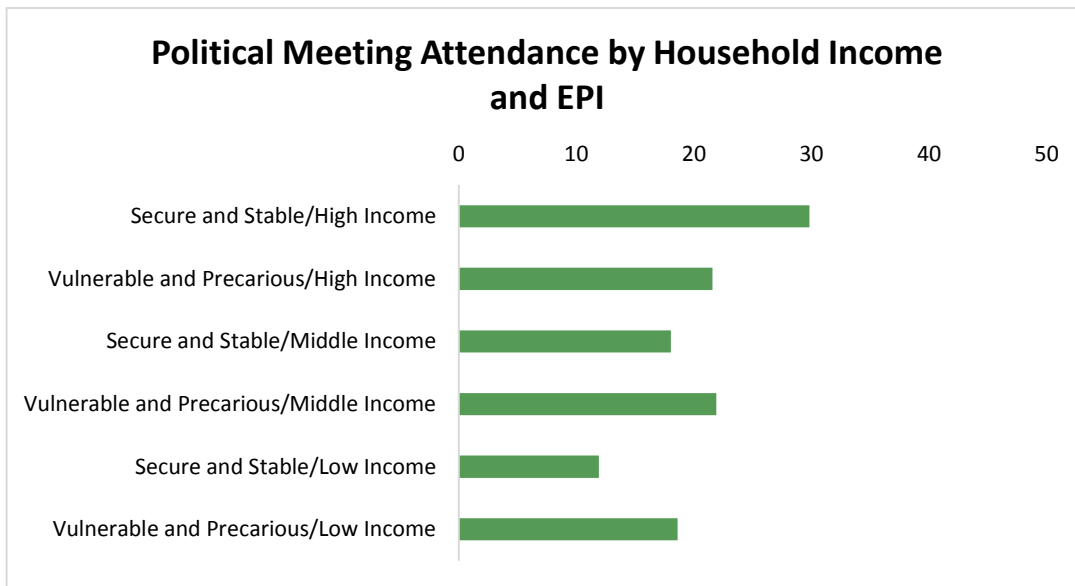
Voting in elections is one way that individuals can be engaged in their communities and help shape the quality of their communities.

Respondents were asked questions about their voting patterns and the results showed that 82% of respondents almost always voted, 10% occasionally voted, 5% never voted, and 3% were ineligible to vote. Figure 4 shows the relationship between voting patterns, EPI and household income. The level of employment precarity experienced by the respondents did not greatly influence their voting patterns whereas their level of household income did. Respondents with household incomes greater than \$100,000 were 4.5 times more likely to “almost always” vote compared to respondents in the lower household income categories.



**Figure 4.** Voting Patterns by Household Income and EPI

Respondents were also asked if they attended any political meetings in the last 12 months. Only 21% of respondents reported that they had. Figure 5 shows the relationship between attending political meetings and level of employment precarity and household income. Like voting, household income is shown to have an effect while EPI does not. Respondents with household incomes greater than \$100,000 were much more likely to attend political meetings, regardless of their level of employment precarity. Respondents in the other household income categories did not differ in their likelihood to attend political meetings.



**Figure 5.** Political Meeting Attendance by Household Income and EPI

## Takeaways

- About half of respondents volunteered for the purposes of benefiting their families and communities. Respondents in precarious employment also volunteered in order to improve job opportunities.
- A large majority of respondents had someone they could count on for support. Having said that, respondents in more precarious employment reported that their work schedules interfered with their ability to socialize.
- Employment precarity did not influence the voting behaviours of the respondents but household income did. Those respondents with higher household incomes were more likely to vote and participate in political meetings.

## Other Findings

You can find this InfoBrief as well as *InfoBrief #1: Overview, #2: Employment Security, #3: The Employment Relationship: Working Conditions, #4: Employment and Health, #5: Employment and Work Stress, #6: Employment Precarity, Income and Household Wellbeing* and *#7: Employment Precarity, Income and Children* at <http://www.peterboroughpublichealth.ca/PERI/>.

## Suggested Citation

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