

October  
2018



# THE PERI REPORTS

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

## INFOBRIEF #5: Employment and Work Stress

### 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.

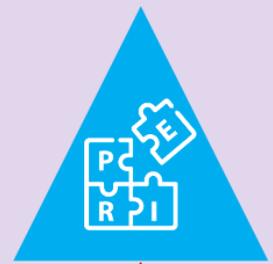
This is the fifth in a series of InfoBriefs meant to be used to start conversations in our community, to inform planning and development of programs and services, and to help shape public policies. The data, collected from a randomly selected, representative sample of working people in the Peterborough 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 #5 is to explore the relationship between employment precarity and several factors that can impact a workers' experience of job stress and their physical and mental health such as job security, satisfaction, support, physical and psychological demands, and control over work.

### 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:



- **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 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 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>.

## Job Security, Support, and Satisfaction

Respondents were asked to think about their current or most recent job and rate how much they agreed with statements about security, support and satisfaction on a five-point scale: 1= strongly disagree; 2=disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree. The statements posed to respondents can be found in Box 1.

**BOX 1. Statements about Security, Support and Satisfaction**

**Job Security**

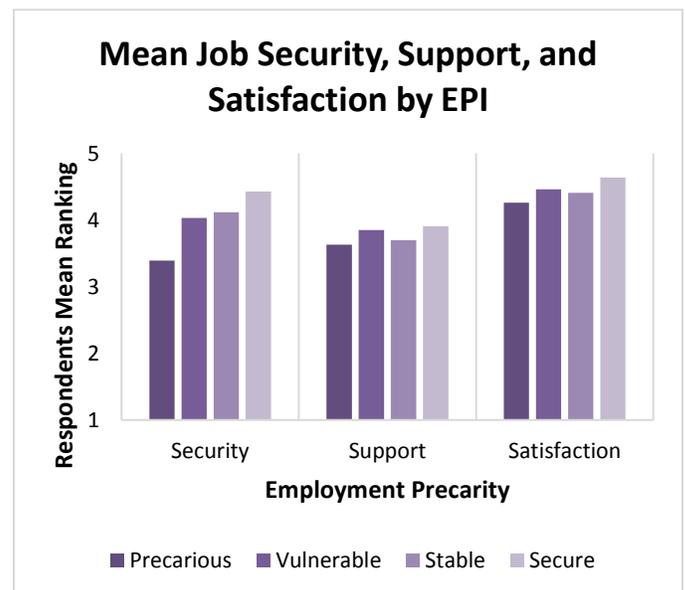
- “Your job security is good”

**Support**

- “You are exposed to hostility or conflict from the people you work with”
- “Your supervisor is helpful in getting the job done”
- “The people you work with are helpful in getting the job done”

**Satisfaction**

- “How satisfied are you with your job”



**Figure 1.** Mean Job Security, Support, and Satisfaction by EPI

The analysis of responses showed a significant difference in perceived job security across levels of employment precarity. As employment security increased across categories, so did perceived job security. Respondents in secure employment situations perceived more security in their employment than all of the other groups. Conversely, those in precarious employment situations perceived less employment stability than the other

groups. Those respondents in the stable and vulnerable employment categories did not differ greatly in their sense of job security.

Findings showed that those in precarious employment reported significantly lower workplace *support* than those in secure employment. There was no significant difference in job *support* between respondents in stable and precarious employment. *Job satisfaction* increased with greater employment stability and respondents in secure employment had significantly greater job satisfaction than respondents in the precarious employment group. Workers in vulnerable and stable employment had similar levels of *job satisfaction* as those securely employed (Figure 1, previous page).

## Physical Demands, Psychological Demands, and Job Control

Respondents were asked to think about their current or most recent job and rate their level of agreement with statements regarding physical demands, psychological demands, and job control. The statements can be found in Box 2.

Findings show that respondents in precarious and vulnerable employment had higher physical demands than those in secure employment (Figure 2).

When we explored psychological job demands by

**BOX 2. Statements about Physical and Psychological Demands and Job Control**

**Physical Demands**

- “Your job requires a lot of physical effort”

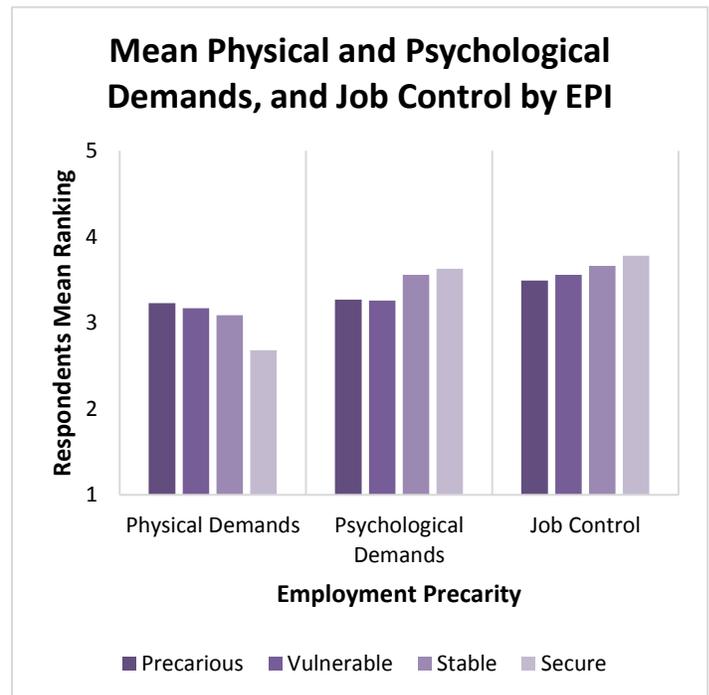
**Psychological Demands**

- “Your job is very hectic”
- “Your job requires that you do things over and over”

**Job Control**

- “You are free from conflicting demands that others make”
- “Your job requires you to learn new things”
- “Your job requires a high level of skill”
- “Your job allows you the freedom to decide how you do your job”
- “You have a lot of say about what happens in your job”

job control was significantly lower among those in precarious and vulnerable employment situations than those in the secure employment situations.



**Figure 2.** Mean Physical and Psychological Demands, and Job Control by EPI

employment precarity, respondents in secure and stable work situations had significantly higher psychological job demands than those in precarious and vulnerable employment. Job control plays a critical role in workers’ stress. Higher levels of control combined with high levels of satisfaction result in lower levels of job strain. The analysis of factors contributing to job control by employment precarity showed that control tended to increase as employment security increased. Moreover,

## General Health and Job Content

The factors noted above including job security, job support, job satisfaction, physical and psychological demands and job control are all measures of job content. These factors were analyzed by respondents' general health and mental health self-reports to get a better sense of how these factors impact well-being. General health was positively associated with job security, satisfaction, support, and control. When looking at job security the results showed that significantly more respondents with health rated as less than very good had low job security, and significantly fewer had high job security (Figure 3). It was also found that respondents with poorer ratings of physical health were more likely to report lower job satisfaction

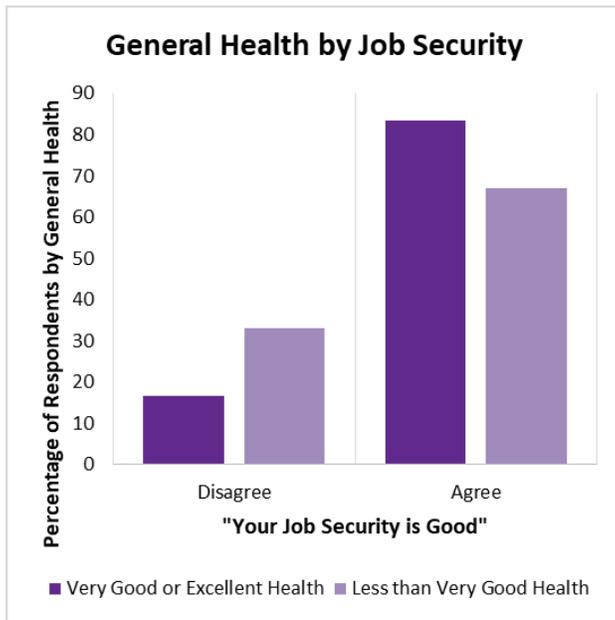


Figure 3. General Health by Job Security

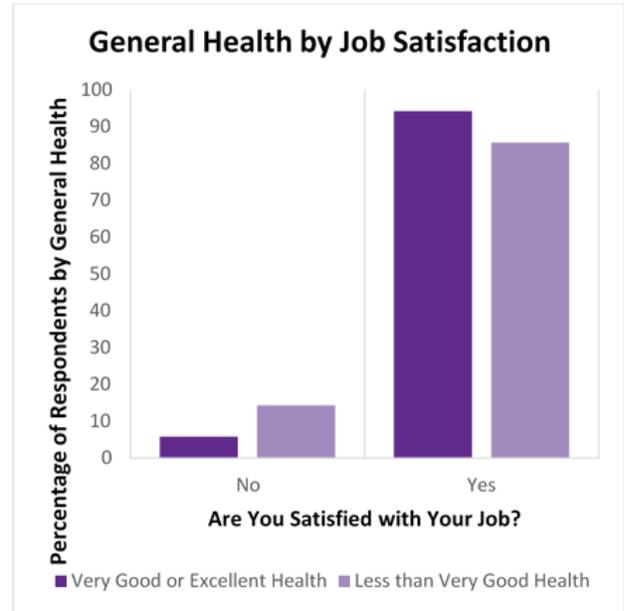


Figure 4. General Health by Job Satisfaction

(Figure 4). Respondents with very good or excellent health reported higher levels of workplace support along with higher levels of job control. Psychological demands were similar between those with very good or excellent health and those with good or less than good health. No difference was found among health ratings and physical job demands.

## Mental Health and Job Content

The analysis of mental health with job content factors showed that, as with general health, mental health is associated with job security, satisfaction, support, and control. Respondents with lower job security were more likely to report "less than very good" mental health than those with higher job security (Figure 5). Findings also showed that respondents with "less than very good" mental health were more likely to report low job satisfaction while those with "very good or excellent" mental health were more likely to report higher job satisfaction (Figure 6, next page). Respondents who reported higher levels of workplace support and job control were also more likely to report "very good or excellent" mental health. Psychological demands were similar between those with "very good or

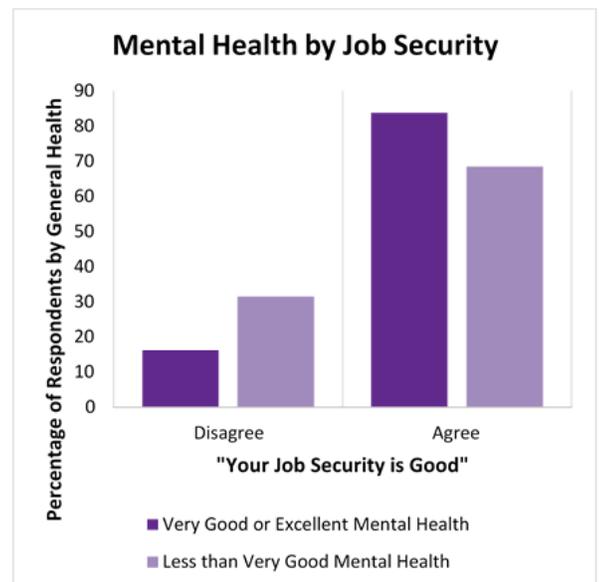


Figure 5. Mental Health by Job Security

excellent” mental health and those with “good or less” mental health. Mental health was not associated with physical job demands.

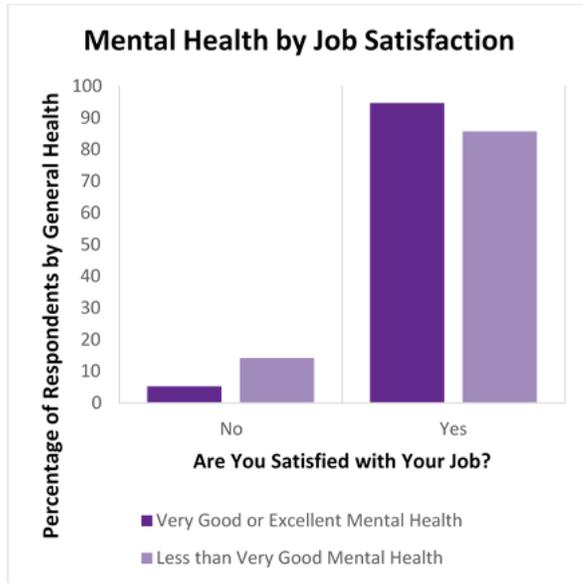


Figure 6. Mental Health by Job Satisfaction

## Takeaways

- Having secure and stable employment increases perceived job security and the chances of having a supportive work environment.
- People in precarious employment situations reported less support at work and lower perceived job security and satisfaction.
- Workers in vulnerable and precarious employment were more likely to work jobs with high physical demands, whereas stable and secure employment had higher psychological demands.
- People who reported more job security also self-reported higher general and mental health.

## 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 Health* at <http://www.peterboroughpublichealth.ca/PERI/>. Future reports will focus on themes including:



Employment Precarity, Income and Household Wellbeing



Employment Precarity, Income and Children



Employment Precarity, Income and Community Participation

## Suggested Citation

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