

# Application for ethics approval

## 0. Basic information

Application for ethics approval for the qualitative analysis of doctoral dissertation titled ‘A mixed methods examination of Precarious Employment and its effects on Wellbeing’.

The research of both *precarious employment* and *wellbeing* are cross-disciplinary fields of research involving sociology, political science, economy, psychology, organisation & business management and anthropology.

The researcher responsible for the proposed research is Robin Fabrin-Petersen, junior researcher/Mladi raziskovalec, mentored by Dr. Valentina Hlebec, Professor and co-mentor John Allister McGregor, Professor.

Proposed ethical assessment is minimum risk. Considering that the respondents and informants are signed up in a marketing panel to participate in research when their participation is relevant, they are considered utmost voluntary participants. In addition to that, the research does not pose any significant risk to their person and the data will be anonymised.

The data collection takes place in Denmark through market research company Norstat. Norstat (Norstat, 2022) is one of the leading data collectors for research in Europe, and are ESOMAR member obligated to follow their international standards for ethical and professional conduct. In addition to that, Norstat has an ISO9001 certification in place that ensures compliance with Denmark’s national legislation for research and data collection. This ISO certification is verified by BDO through ISAE3000 audit. Norstat quality manager, Mrs. Tone Belsvik (tone.belsvik@norstat.no), is willing to assist in the evaluation of this ethics application, to assure all protocols are in compliance with ethics regulations in Denmark.

## 1. Introduction

Over the last few decades, the nature of employment arrangements have developed in the direction of becoming more precarious. By precarious I mean work that is insecure, unstable and uncertain, and where the risks of work have been shifted from the businesses and governments to the employees (Kalleberg, 2009; Standing, 2011; Rodgers & Rodgers, 1989; Vosko, 2010). Precarious work has emerged as a serious challenge and concern to contemporary societies. This societal phenomenon not only has widespread consequences to the availability and quality of jobs, but can also reach into non-work aspects of life such as family, health and work identity. Moreover, it has also been suggested to have broader

consequences to society in form of social disintegration, social disinvestment and to produce a general condition of anxiety throughout society (Castel, 2003; Kalleberg, 2018).

Scholars from different disciplines have devoted many studies to investigate precarious employment related topics: Sociology and economy have focused on the structural forces that contribute to the labour market development where non-standard employment becomes more prevalent (Locke & Thelen, 1995; Bronfenbrenner & Luce, 2004, *Cappelli & Keller, 2013*), in addition to the characteristics associated with being in non-standard employment (Kompier et al., 2009; Wagenaar et al., 2013). Political science and economy have investigated how some of the consequences are mitigated by different welfare and employment regimes (Paskov & Koster, 2014; Kalleberg, 2018). Organisational psychology and health sciences have done extensive research on the consequences of job insecurity on mental health, physical health, job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Virtanen et al, 2005; Llosa et al, 2018; DeCuyper et al, 2008). However, only few studies have investigated how precarious employment affects non-work related individual outcomes, and even fewer have looked at precarious employment from a (social) wellbeing perspective.

In addition to that, the lack of a clear uniformly defined concept of precarious employment seem to have dampened the enthusiasm for research into what makes an employment precarious. As a result, scholarship lags behind in tracking different forms of precarious employment and in testing theories about their broader social implications. This is unfortunate both from a societal and social policy perspective, as this potential societal issue will continue to develop and thrive.

This dissertation is an exploration of the effect of precarious employments on wellbeing. In doing this, I will discuss the notion of precarious employment, evaluate the most frequently used indicator of precarious employment (analysis 1 – meta-analysis), establish an alternative indicator to capture the essence of precarious employment through both objective and subjective indicators of employment relations, and finally, identify the effect of precarious employment on wellbeing through both a top-down perspective (analysis 2 – quantitative analysis) and bottom-up perspective (analysis 3 – qualitative analysis). This dissertation is based on a theoretical perspective in which precarious employment is regarded as a relation category linked to the societal standards of normality. Furthermore, the chosen theoretical perspective puts emphasis on the social aspect of precariousness with its social consequences, as opposed to only presenting the economic consequences.

This ethics application is for the qualitative analysis, in which I use the established indicator of precarious employment to investigate the effect of precarious employment on wellbeing. In

doing this, I intend to apply a three-dimensional wellbeing approach, where wellbeing is studied more as a process than an outcome. This purpose of this is to the explore narratives and strategies that precarious employees use in the pursuit of wellbeing.

## 2. Participants

The participants are the four types of employees, established in the precarious employment (PE) typologies. The typologies are constructed from the characteristics of the variables, non-standard employment (objective precariousness) and job insecurity (subjective precariousness). The combination of these characteristics creates the employee types: 1) The not precarious employees, who are neither in non-standard employment nor feel subjective sub insecurity. 2) The objectively precarious employees who are in non-standard employments but do not feel subjective job insecurity. 3) The subjectively precarious employees who are not in non-standard employment but do feel subjective job insecurity. 4) The double precarious employees who are both in non-standard employments and feel subjective job insecurity.

The qualitative analysis contains a two-step analysis; survey of individualised wellbeing followed up by individual interviews with selected volunteers to explore narratives and wellbeing strategies. The sampling and recruitment of people to participate in the survey and qualitative interview will happen through Norstat, a marketing panel (not to be confused with panel data). Norstat is a private recruitment company that have thousands and thousands of people in various countries signed up for completing surveys on a regular basis in exchange for a point compensation, which can subsequently be exchanged for gift cards to regular shops. This option allows for access to the relevant respondents/informants (the PE typologies) on a variety of criteria that you can set up.

Since the focus of this dissertation is on theoretical generalisability rather than statistical generalisability, the sampling framework falls within purposive sampling. This entail trying to establish good correspondence between research question and sample, so that the sample contain the people that are meaningful to the intended analysis. The sampling framework is therefore based on a broad framework for capturing people in precarious employments. The sampling criteria include:

- The sample have to be of **employees only**, since we are focusing on the distinctions within the official employment structure. This excludes people that are on pension, unemployed and people outside the established employment system. Since the study seeks to identify distinctions between non-precarious and precarious employees, the sample will have to be of employees in general.

- People that are **full-time employees**, in order to focus on the employment insecurity aspect of the issue. This excluded people that are casual workers and part-time workers, so that to not focus on how the amount of work influence wellbeing.
- Who is in the **working age of their lives**. This includes a lower limit of 25 years of age, with the intension of capturing people who are seeking to establish themselves in the labour market. People that are younger than 25 years of age are likely to be in a different stage of their lives: under education, without family or other obligations and without intensions of keeping their current job.

Although this analysis will make no attempt of statistical generalisability – and cannot do so from marketing sampling – we still make certain sampling criteria on socio-demographic characteristics such as; equal distribution of men and women, respondents from different age groups and with different levels of education. The purpose of this is theoretical generalisability as such characteristics can be basis for different qualitative values.

In addition to sampling criteria, some limitations was made for the case of the qualitative study. This will be done in the broadest sense by only focusing on the macro-level social conditions of which the employment takes place i.e. the country of the employment. This is necessary as qualitative research, naturally cannot be done on multiple countries due to resource limitations. The appropriate case for the qualitative analysis is one that is both *theoretically relevant*, *empirically relevant* and a *practically viable option*. Theoretical relevance relates to the macro-level conditions of the employment, characterised by the welfare regime in the case country. The empirical relevance relates to the results of the quantitative analysis, which was operationalised according to the typologies and wellbeing approach that this analysis seeks to understand. The practical viable option is what is practically possible with the resources and skills available to the researcher involved in this study. Consequently, the case for this study will be (precarious) employees in Denmark. Denmark belongs to the Social Democratic welfare regime, characterised by its emphasis on universalism in form of generous social welfare and unemployment support, which is paired with relatively loose Employment Protection Legislation (EPL), making hiring and firing processes less regulated. Due to the universalism of social welfare and unemployment, it was hypothesises as the welfare regime with smallest negative effect of precarious employment. While this was true of subjective precariousness, the objective precariousness of non-standard employment seem to have among the greatest negative effect on wellbeing of all welfare regimes, as was the result of the quantitative analysis in the dissertation. Understanding the results behind these findings makes it an interesting case.

In addition to that, the researcher of the dissertation, Robin Fabrin-Petersen, is native to Denmark, which makes it a practically good option for qualitative data collection.

The sample is intended to contain 300 fully answered questionnaires, following up by 10 qualitative interviews. The sample will contain a minimum of 25 % precarious employees as one of the requirements for the sample.

### 3. Research plan

#### Dissertation research design

The research plan for the dissertation follows a mixed methods research design, in which a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods will be used in interrelated analyses to answer the research questions. The reasoning for using the mixed methods research design is to get a holistic view of the complex issue of precarious employment. The idea is that the insights from quantitative and qualitative methods will complement each other by bringing together the explanatory strength of the quantitative approach with the understanding strength of the qualitative approach (Creswell & Plano, 2007, p.1-19). In overcoming the issues of fundamental paradigmatic differences between quantitative and qualitative methods and analysis (Bryman, 2008, p604-606), the dissertation adopts an ontological and epistemological approach specifically to support the mixed methods research design. This includes a structural-constructivist approach (Bourdieu, 1989; Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p24-26) to the phenomenon and the investigation into the potentially different results of the analyses.

The specific mixed methods research design that will be used is a triangulation design following the convergence model (Creswell & Plano, 2007, p.63) embedded in a contextual analysis that function as introducing and supporting frameworks for the triangulation. The convergence model is interested in seeing how the quantitative and qualitative data converge or diverge in order to get a valid and well- substantiated insight into the phenomenon of precarious employment.

#### Theoretical concepts

**Precarious employment** is the primary theoretical concept of this dissertation and the main independent variable. Overall, precarious employment can be understood as paid work that is insecure, unstable and uncertain, and where the risks of work have been shifted from the businesses and governments to the employees (Kalleberg, 2009; Standing, 2011; Rodgers & Rodgers, 1989; Vosko, 2010). It is a historical phenomenon that is expressed in the power relations between employers and employees and is manifested in labour market regulations and the arrangements of the welfare state (Castel, 2003; Glerup et al, 2018; Kalleberg, 2009). As

such, precarious employment can be defined as a relational category linked to the societal definitions and standards of normality.

One of the most substantial theoretical contributions to understand the societal standard of normality is the Robert Castel's a theory of Social Integration, in which precarity can be considered transition zone(s) between the people with permanent stable employment and people who are isolated and detached from society through their conditions of unemployment. Castel theorised that employment means more than just work, that it has become the key to lasting social relations, network and social positioning, providing meaning to peoples' lives (Castel, 2003). An essential element in the theory is that precarity is not a dichotomous category between permanent on one side and non-standard temporary employment on the other side. Rather, precariousness is seen and experienced in the formal and informal contractual relations between employer and employee. These formal and informal precarities can be understood in terms of both objective and subjective indicators, since the phenomenon of precarious employment takes place between the subjective experience of individuals and the objective structures of society (Castel & Dörre, 2009). Consequently, the PE typologies are established from the employment contract characteristics (non-standard employment) and subjective feeling of job insecurity, that you may lose the job.

**Wellbeing** is the second major theoretical concept in this dissertation, and the dependent variable(s). In this dissertation I adopt a three dimensional (3D) wellbeing framework that seeks combine the different wellbeing approaches in a conception, where wellbeing is defined as "*a state of being with others, which arises when human needs are met, where one can act meaningfully to pursue one's goals, and where one can enjoy a satisfactory quality of life*" (McGregor, 2008, 2018). This translates to: 1) The resources that a person is able to command (Material); 2) What the person is able to achieve with those resources, and in particular what needs and goals the person is able to meet, in the relations that enable or constrain the person (Relational); 3) And the meaning that they give to the outcomes they achieve and processes in which they engage in (Subjective experience). Furthermore, it is a concept that embodies the pursuit of a better life, to which wellbeing can both be understood as an outcome and a process. Consequently, when quantitative analysis is applied, wellbeing is more often understood as an outcome to measure. In qualitative analysis, I aim is to understand the process of pursuing wellbeing from the perspective of the precarious employees.

### Plan of action

The planned course of action for the qualitative analysis, which is the focus of this application, is to have the analysis finished by the start of May 2022. This includes:

- Application for ethics approval.

- Preparing the individualised wellbeing measurement tool
- Sending out survey to collect data
- Data analysis and writing.

#### 4. Process

The operationalisation of the qualitative analysis answers the third research question of the dissertation: *“How does living with precarious employment manifest itself in individuals’ everyday lives and do the individuals adopt certain narratives or strategies to cope with their situations”*. The question was originally intended to use lifeworld qualitative interviews to explore precarious employment from an everyday life process perspective, of regarding wellbeing as a process of constant negotiation. However, due to the current Covid-19 pandemic, it seems impossible to distinguish between manifestations of precarious employment and effects of a life-threatening pandemic. Consequently, the focus of the analysis had to be changed. The alternative approach, as previously mentioned, is a two-step analysis involving both survey and individual qualitative interviews. This approach changes the problematic focus from the current situation of the employee to an individualised wellbeing approach where wellbeing priorities can be different from person to person, or group to group. The alternative approach is less qualitative than the original plan, but it will make it possible to answer the third research questions, which was approved in the doctoral dissertation disposition. Underneath is a description of the two parts in the qualitative analysis, their analytical tools and the intended outcomes.

In the first step of the analysis, we use the survey method to investigate a bottom-up individualised wellbeing, in which we identify precarious employment manifestations in everyday lives through wellbeing priorities and satisfactions with these. Essential to the individualised wellbeing approaches is that need identifiers can vary from person to person or group to group, rather than assuming that all wellbeing aspects are equally important to everyone. The idea of this approach is to emphasise the subjective nature of wellbeing and puts the person back into focus of the analysis. The general assumption of using this approach is that people have different priorities to what aspect of life makes their wellbeing. In relation to the three dimensional wellbeing approach, a person may value relational wellbeing more than material wellbeing, to which he/she might be considered poor (in terms of money and belongings) but be satisfied in his/her life because of good social relationships. For this proposed study, it will be interesting to see if the distinctions in wellbeing priorities (and satisfactions) can be observed between the four types of employment situations identified in the PE typologies. The theoretically and empirically interesting grouping of the typologies are

considered 1) being in precarious employment versus not precarious employment, and 2) objectively precarious versus subjectively precarious. The practical process of performing this bottom-up individualised wellbeing approach is to have employees: 1) rate the importance of a variety of wellbeing indicators, 2) evaluate their satisfaction with these specific wellbeing indicators, and 3) elaborate on future prospect (expectations, hopes, strategies) on important aspects of wellbeing that are not fulfilled. The individualised measurement tool will be established in collaboration with the author of The Quality of Working Life Systemic Inventory (QWLSI) (Dupuis, 2006). The tool and its psychometric properties has been validated to be able to capture different forms of work related quality of life. However, as the original tool focus purely on in-work aspects of life, some adaptations will be made to connect working life to non-working life. Added items will be inspired by previous research on the interconnection between work and wellbeing, namely The Employment Precariousness Scale (EPRES) (Vives et al, 2010) and The European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS, 2016)

The second step of the analysis is the follow-up qualitative interviews with selected respondents from the survey. The purpose of doing interviews after the survey is to explore patterns that appear from the survey, in the attempt to get a deeper understanding of the narratives and strategies that employees use in living with precarious employment. Specifically it is how they understand and speak off their social position in society, how their see/plan their future and what matters for their wellbeing, which is interesting in this analysis. The third part of the survey – future prospects – will function as screening questions for which the employees will be recruited. As with the survey, the interviews will explore the three aspects of wellbeing – the material, the relational and the subjective – following the three-dimensional approach (McGregor, 2018) In this, wellbeing is understood a process of constant negotiation in which you leverage current position and strategize to achieve better wellbeing over time. The qualitative interviews will be with objectively precarious and subjectively precarious employees only. The reason for this is that only precarious employees are of interest to the narratives and strategies. Although non-precarious employees certainly also have narrative and strategies to their lives, these are of less interest to this analysis as they already find themselves in advantageous positions. The interviews will follow a semi-structured approach and will happen through virtual communication (Zoom etc.) due to the current pandemic.

## 5. Informed consent to participate

Obtaining informed consent to participate in the study is one of the essential requirements for proper ethical conduct and appropriate implementation of social research. This includes making the respondents and informants aware of the key elements of the research, as well as



any risk of benefits of the participation. In addition, the respondents and informants will be ensured complete anonymity and confidentiality of the data collected, so that the participation will not have any further implication to their lives. Since the qualitative analysis involves two data collections (survey and interviews) at two different points in time, the consent to participate will be given at two times.

The marketing panel who recruits the participants, Norstat, will ask for consent for the survey part of the analysis. This is reasoned by the fact that they are the gatekeeper and contact between researcher and respondents. In fact, the respondents will remain anonymous throughout the entire survey process. The researcher will however provide information about the content of survey and purpose of the study, which will be sent to the potential respondents at the invitation to participate.

The marketing panel, Norstat, is also responsible for the recruitment of the informant for the qualitative interviews. The informants are recruited from the willing respondents of the survey. At the screening process to identify relevant informants, Norstat will collect their own informed consent to participate. The researcher will provide information about the content and purpose of the interview, which Norstat will use for their informed consent. At the (zoom) interview, the researcher will make an introduction to the content of the interview as well as their right to revoke consent and have data deleted. After the introduction of the interview, the informants will be asked if they have any questions or doubts about the study, and if they remain willing to participate. If so, the interview proceeds. If not, the interview is terminated with no further consequences to the informant. At the end of the interview, the informants will be de-briefed with an informal post-interview conversation.

Research description and consent form for the respondents is attached to this application. Do note that the consent form will be translated into Danish, as the interviews will also be conducted in Danish.

## 6. Data protection and confidentiality

Ethical principles dictate that researcher carefully protects the personal data collected and ensure anonymity in any further handling of the data. The interviews will be recorded on a dictaphone for transcription and following analysis. After transcription and the anonymisation of data, the recordings will be deleted. During transcription, the recordings will be stored on the researcher's personal work computer, protected by computer-generated password. After the analysis is concluded, the anonymised transcriptions of the interviews will be stored on the Social Science Data Archive (ADP) for long-term preservation and future re-use.

## 7. Assessment of potential risks and benefits of cooperation

The participants will be made aware of the potential risks and benefits to the participation in the study. The risks are minimal, as any data collection from the respondents and informants will be anonymised. Since the interview has the intension of making the informant reflect on their employment situation, wishes for the future and possible strategies, there is a small risk that such reflections will evoke emotional response. Even if this is the case, the consequences are minimal and temporary. Ultimately, the only cost for the respondents and informants of participation in the study is their time. The benefits of participating in the study thought of as same as the risks, which is the knowledge and experience gained from participating in the framework of the study. In addition to that, the participation will help the current research on precarious employment and its effects on wellbeing

## 8. Attachments

9. Research description and consent form

## 10. Bibliography

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