Working on Keeping it Together: Exploring the Lived Experience of Precarious Employment in Rural Ontario

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ABSTRACT

WORKING ON KEEPING IT TOGETHER: EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT IN RURAL ONTARIO

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Precarious employment is often experienced as contract work, involuntary part-time work, low wage work, and self-employment. There is a well-developed body of literature pointing to negative health, economic, and social impacts related to precarious employment in urban centres, while little consideration has been given to the particularities that may make a rural precarious employment experience different.

The goal of this exploratory research project is to understand the experience of being precariously employed in rural Ontario. Nineteen unstructured individual interviews with rural Ontarians experiencing rural precarious employment were conducted. The phenomenon of rural precarious employment was distinguished by five themes (financial, health, self-view, social, and system) emergent through phenomenology. The phenomenon encompassed experiences of poverty, decreased health, negative self-views, social struggles, and marginalization from support public systems.

Unpacking precarious employment in rural Ontario from the experience of workers has significance for both rural scholars and policy makers. Rural scholars benefit from a better understanding of precarious employment as an experience in rural areas, and the addition of lived rural experiences to the precarious employment literature advances the understanding of urban bias in scholarship. This research provides provincial policy
makers the opportunity to craft rural focused employment policy and better understand how services can support rural precarious employees.
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1 INTRODUCTION

Labour market reforms in Canada’s history are reminders that the only constant in the labour market, is change. Canada’s labour narrative is full of structural changes stimulated by the collective dissatisfaction of workers. For example, the Toronto Typographical Strike and the Nine Hour Movement occurred in part because workers labouring outside the home during the Industrial Revolution were dissatisfied with labouring hours (Palmer et al., 2006). As a result, the first Canadian National Convention on unions, and the Canadian Labour Union formed (Rouillard & Bullen, 2013). Another example of labour market reform occurred during The Winnipeg General Strike when Canadian workers (some enlisted in the First World War) returned to Canada displeased with the lack of employment opportunities (Idiong, 1997). Conversely, after the Second World War, an economic boom meant more children were born, workers benefited socially and financially with changes like increases to publicly funded social programs and strong unions (Heron, 2012). As demonstrated by these examples, and many others like them, the labour experience in Canada is not constant and is intrinsically linked to events outside of the labour market as well as social trends. Currently, in Ontario, there is a contemporary shift happening, a move towards precarious employment.

Precarious employment is a form of unstable work which can be contrasted with the standard employment relationship (SER) which typically includes: “access to training, regulatory protections and social benefits, decent wages, and a social wage” (Noack & Vosko, 2011, p.3). SERs are most readily associated with the Keynesian welfare state, a period experienced in the developed West beginning after the Second World War.
(Blinder, 1988; Mankiw, 1992). The Keynesian welfare state is connected with the social safety net including minimum wage, inspected working conditions, as well as accident, employment and health insurance (Heron, 2012). SERs are an anomaly in Ontario’s labour market history - precarious employment was the dominant form of work before the Second World War¹ and is gaining prevalence again (Burgess & Campbell, 1998; Tompa et al., 2007).

Like other historic changes to the labour market, there are structural changes to the economy which have created a labour environment which supports the reduction of SERs and increase in precarious employment: neoliberalism and technological advancements. Neoliberalism and technological advancements are not the main focus of this exploratory research project but rather serve as a nod to the environment in which precarious employment has proliferated.

This chapter begins by reviewing neoliberalism and technological advancements as structural changes in economy impacting precarious employment. Next, this

¹ As a contextual reminder that precarious employment is not new - over 124 years ago, in the British House of Commons, Keir Hardie (a member of Britain's Labour Party) is quoted as saying:

Employment to-day was more precarious and intermittent. A man over middle age found it almost impossible to find employment when from any cause he happened to be dismissed. The conditions under which industries were conducted compelled production to be carried on quickly and cheaply, which led to the displacement of men no longer in the flush of youth.

(Quinlan, 2012, p.11)
exploratory research project is described beginning with the problem statement, research goal and research significance. Later in the chapter, the methodology is reviewed, limitations are outlined and a guide to the rest of the document is provided.

1.1 Structural Changes in Economy

Neoliberalism is an ideology about the role of the state and assumes the market’s ability to self-regulate, more effectively and efficiently unhindered, than with any government intervention. Strong private property rights, free trade, and low state intervention in the free market are tenets of a neoliberal system – a system able to treat anything (including human labour) in market terms (Bernstein & Jakobsen, 2013; Davies, 2017; Harvey, 2007; Monbiot, 2016). The uniquely individualistic ideology of neoliberalism holds that government interference with the free market (in any capacity, from infrastructure stimulus packages to maternity leave) removes the need for competition between market actors. Subsequently, one indication of being in a neoliberal state is the reduction of publicly funded programs granting power to actors in accordance to wealth and the removal of mechanisms for promoting economic equality (Bernstein & Jakobsen, 2013). One example of this power granting within a neoliberal labour market is income inequality – systemic rewards, such as tax exemptions, which service wealthy actors, not designed to support the poor (Monbiot, 2016; Stiglitz 2012). Clarke et al.’s 2007 work suggests precarious employment puts a strain on publicly provided services as more social services are required to support the financial shortcomings associated with the decrease in standard stable work and services provided by the employer.
Although the impacts of neoliberalism are easily identifiable when investigated, it is rare for actors within the market system to reflect upon the term and its usage in a critical way. Unlike communism for example, neoliberalism benefits from not being identified and named by the general public as an ideology. As George Monbiot (2016) states:

So pervasive has neoliberalism become that we seldom even recognize it as an ideology. We appear to accept the proposition that this utopian, millenarian faith describes a neutral force; a kind of biological law, like Darwin’s theory of evolution. (p.3)

Along with neoliberalism, another economic transformation which has contributed to change in the labour market, and the proliferation of precarious employment is the advancement of technology. Technological advancement signals a change in opportunity for workers because it 1) replaces human labour with automated machinery, as it has for centuries (Arntz, Gregory, & Zierahn, 2016) and 2) facilitates the movement of human labour to where wages are lowest (Acemoglu & Restrepo, 2017; Lazar & Sanchez, 2019).

The replacement of human labour with automation is not a new concept, but with advances in computing no longer leaning on changes to the physical device (hardware), momentum in technological advancements has shifted to software (Archibugi & Filippetti, 2015; Lo & Lamb, 2017). Relating technology to the discussion of labour are: 1) deep learning; utilizing algorithms to mimic the decisions made by the human brain; this type of advancement lends itself to artificial intelligence and machinery that cannot only
perform a task, but understand why the task is being performed and improve upon the
task it completes; and 2) cloud technology; reflecting how through networking, a computer
can become more powerful (Christensen, 2017; The Economist, 2016). The cloud’s
ability, for example, to connect devices, use satellite positioning and store payment
information reflects how some workers are no longer bound by place and space as
components of the labour market (a worker’s ability to work remotely, for example, can
increase through these advancements). Connection through the cloud enables work to
happen wherever network access is available which enables work to take place where
ever wages are lowest, contributing to precarious employment (Lazar & Sanchez, 2019).
These examples of software advances also inform precarious employment because of
their sophisticated ability to displace labour through automation. As the automation of
tasks increases, less human involvement along the value chain is required which
translates to the need for less jobs performed by humans (Waldrop, 2016). Complexity
within the global value chain increases as technological advances increase. Increased
use of artificial intelligence, robots, and 3D printers in the composition of goods
streamlines the delivery system, encourages global competition and reduces the need for
human labourers (Christensen, 2017; Lamb, 2016).

Neoliberalism and technological advancements have contributed to a new reality
of employment precariousness. Kalleberg (2011) describes the interplay between
technology and neoliberal trends in relation to globalization and ultimately precarious
employment by stating:
Technological advances both forced companies to become more competitive globally and make it possible for them to do so. Changes in capital markets that rewarded managers for short-term profits encouraged them to treat labour as a variable rather than a fixed cost, leading to outsourcing and the growth of temporary and other forms of nonstandard work. (p.13)

The labour environment created through neoliberalism and technological advancements moves labour priorities away from human capital (workers) and focuses them squarely on maximizing profits to shareholders. Prioritizing shareholders who have opportunity for direct financial benefit (as opposed to factoring in labour, quality of labour environment etc.) changes the ordered structure of priorities within an organization’s decision-making process (Davies, 2017; Harvey, 2007). This changed order of priority is central to the investigation of a worker’s experience with precarious employment and has been investigated in urban areas (Blinder, 1988; Monbiot, 2016; Quinlan, 2012; Walsh & Mander, 2017).

Home to a larger proportion of Canada’s population, generally, urban centres are better investigated than their rural counterparts (Bassett, 2003). The negative health, economic, and social impacts of precarious employment have been substantiated in urban centres, while little consideration has been given to the particularities that might make a rural precarious employment experience different.

Rural employees in Canada for example, are more likely to be underemployed (Bollman, 2015; Vera-Toscano et al., 2004), reenter the labour market after having a
break in employment (Vera-Toscano et al., 2004), earn lower wages (Bollman, 2015), and are “at greater risk of prolonged work absence” (Lavoie, et al. 2017, p. 11)\(^2\), than their urban counterparts. These differences highlight how investigating precarious employment in urban centres may not capture the full rural experience.

1.2 Problem Statement

Neoliberalism and continuing technological advancements have led to economic restructuring and a labour market that fosters precarious employment. Although there is a growing body of literature investigating precarious employment, the current available research is focused primarily on urban areas. To date, limited research has been conducted about the lived experience of rural workers who are precariously employed.

1.3 Research Goal

The research goal of this project is to explore the experience of being precariously employed in rural Ontario. The aim of the research is not to conflate, generalize, or compare experiences of rural precarious employment in Ontario, but rather to understand the nature of rural precarious employment in Ontario, from the perspective of precariously employed rural people.

\(^2\) “Rural residence was associated with prolonged work disability, even after controlling for age, job type, education level, health utilization and other potential confounders” (Lavoie et al. 2017, p. 1).
1.4 Research Significance

Unpacking precarious employment in rural Ontario from the experience of workers has significance for both rural scholars and policy makers. Rural scholars benefit from a better understanding of precarious employment as an experience in rural areas, and the precarious employment literature is made more robust through the addition of rural precarious employment experiences. This research provides policy makers with rural specific experiences which can be used to better understand how precarious employment might be investigated in the rural areas their policy impacts. This work is providing context and exploring the repercussions of precarious employment on rural individuals.

1.5 Methodology

This exploratory research project applies phenomenology to investigate the question, what is the experience of being precariously employed in rural Ontario? Phenomenology as a methodology stems from its roots as a philosophy which was articulated by Hegel as, “knowledge as it appears to consciousness, the science of describing what one perceives, senses, and knows in one’s immediate awareness and experience” (in Moustakas, 1994, p. 26).

This exploratory research project relies on the phenomenological exploration of the beliefs and perceptions of individuals and their experience of rural precarious employment in Ontario, and the impact it has on them, through individual interviews. Nineteen individual interviews were conducted. Phenomenology was selected for this exploratory research project because it considers an individual’s subjective experiences,
recognizes that individual challenges are experienced uniquely, and takes into consideration both the individual and their environment (van Manen, 2017).

1.6 Limitations

This exploratory research project does not tell the story of every precariously employed rural Ontario worker in the province. The interviews collected are context-specific realities and alone should not be used for crafting provincial policy. This project intentionally excludes the examination of precarious employment experienced by members of Canada’s Indigenous communities, workers employed under Canada’s Temporary Foreign Worker Program and full-time students. These groups highlight a unique set of employment dynamics not explored within the context of this project. Outcomes of this project should not be used to make definitive conclusions about all precarious rural workers in Ontario but rather be used to understand the experience of rural precarious employment, help craft meaningful rural policy, and inform future research.

1.7 Outline

Chapter 2 begins with a literature review, definitions of precarious employment are presented and the known impacts of precarious employment on individuals, families, organizations, and communities are explained. Chapter 3 presents the current rural research and explains the indicators used to identify rural precarious employment: fixed-term or contract work, involuntary part-time work, low wage work, and self-employment
Chapter 3 continues with a description of what is known to date about the factors that impact rural precarious employment which include statistical reviews related to age, sex, as well as qualitative metrics derived from key informant interviews conducted with individuals who support rural precarious employees.

Chapter 4 presents the methodological approach to the study. I outline my positionality as a researcher, describe phenomenology, and explain the data collection method being used. Finally, the outline for my analysis is presented and Chapter 5 begins with findings. Firstly, a summary narrative of each participant is given, followed by a description of the themes emerging from interviews conducted with individuals experiencing rural precarious employment in Ontario – financial, health, self-view, social, and system. Chapter 6 presents the discussion first connecting the project’s findings to the literature, then reviews particularities that are experiences with precarious employment linked specifically to rural Ontario and ends by summarizing the connection between themes outlined in the findings. Finally, recommendations for future research are outlined and a conclusion is given.

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3 The work being reviewed is part of a larger exploration into rural precarious employment funded through the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA).
2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a review of the precarious employment literature. Most of the literature relating to precarious employment has been based in research conducted in urban areas and uses quantitative metrics. Limited research has focused on the experience of being precariously employed, and none known to date have investigated this experience in rural Ontario. This chapter begins by describing precarious employment and explaining its impacts on individual employees, their families, organizations, and communities.

2.1 What is Precarious Employment?

Noack and Vosko (2011) characterize precarious employment by how it differs from the identifiers typically associated with standard employment relationships (SERs) which are: “access to training, regulatory protections and social benefits, decent wages, and a social wage” (p.3). Using “low income, no pension plan, small firm size, and no union coverage”, Noack and Vosko (2011) deem a job to be precarious if it meets three of these qualities (p. 7). These same researchers identify a job to be of “undesirable quality” if it is subject to one of more of the following characteristics, “high levels of uncertainty, low income, a lack of control over the labour process, and limited access to regulatory protections” (p.3). Lewchuk et al. (2003) define precarious employment as, “a cumulative combination of atypical employment contracts limited social benefits, poor statutory entitlements, job insecurity, short tenure and low wages (p.23).
Burgess and Campbell (1998) identify precarious employment as a term that can be linked to any job, not only jobs with certain specific characteristics. Quinlan (2012) acknowledges that the term precarious accurately reflects a worker’s situation and argues the term employment is not always appropriate as it reflects a relationship to an employer, and some people who work precariously are self-employed.

Although the different definitions of precarious employment have a lot in common, there is no one formal agreed upon definition of the term (Arnold & Bongiovi, 2012). Since this investigation into the lived experiences of rural precarious employment is exploratory, an inclusive lens was used while reviewing the literature for its known impacts. This means that contributions to the literature by different scholars who use different working definitions and conceptualizations of precarious employment were included in the literature review. Including, rather than excluding, the work of scholars who use different definitions allowed for a more well-rounded understanding of precarious employment for this exploratory research project.

4 This distinction is highlighted because it informs how precarious employment is conceptualized through its presentation in the literature.

5 The vagueness of legal definitions related to employment terms in Canada is discussed by Tucker et al. (2002).

6 Furthermore, an inclusive review of definitions informed the creation of indicators of precarious employment which were used for a quantitative review of the trend in rural Ontario.
2.2 Impact of Being Precariously Employed

Precarious employment has far reaching implications which include the health, economic, workplace environment, employee development and social wellbeing of workers, their families, and communities (Clarke et al., 2007; Ferrie, 2001; Lewchuk et al., 2015; Lewchuk et al., 2003; Marmot et al., 2001). The following sections explore what is presented by the current literature as the impacts of precarious employment on individual workers, their families, organizations, and communities. Since there is not, to date, a robust body of rural-focused precarious employment literature, most of the impacts discussed in this section are based on research conducted in urban areas7.

2.2.1 Individual

Mental, physical and emotional health all correspond to holistic wellbeing and have been investigated in the context of precarious employment. Lewchuk et al. (2003) found precarious employees have poorer health8 than those who do not work precariously. Ferrie (2001) supports these findings and Marmot et al. (2001) used data from former civil servants to assess the “job insecurity-health” (p.2) dynamic and found precarious employment leads to a decline in health, both measured quantitatively by researchers and self-reported by employees. Bardasi and Francesconi (2004), however, used a logistic regression model to evaluate British census data from 1991 to 2000 and found that out of the four indicators being assessed: mental health, physical health, job

7 Literature review parameters include publications in English from developed countries.
8 Health measured using Statistics Canada’s National Population Health Survey.
satisfaction and life satisfaction, only job satisfaction is negatively impacted by precarious employment⁹.

In terms of job-related physical health impacts, Block (2010) points to characteristics of employment precariousness: low training, low employee investment and fear of termination, as barriers to safe work being done properly onsite. Ninety percent of workplaces reviewed by Block (2010) reported a decrease in experienced occupational health and safety by workers after their workplace shifted towards precarious employment. Agreeing, Virtanen et al. (2005a) observe that precarious employees are more likely to be injured in the workplace but less likely to take sick days, compounding adverse health issues which may arise from being subject to any number of factors related to precarious employment, which could include inadequate onsite training or a high-pressure work environment. Also, Quinlan et al. (2001) point to precarious employment as being associated with reduced health and safety, “terms of injury rates, disease risk, hazard exposures, or worker (and manager) knowledge of [occupational health and safety] and regulatory responsibilities” (p. 335).

Increased physical pain and stress are associated with precarious employment but are less likely to be reported (Menéndez et al., 2007; Min et al., 2015). Stress is highlighted by Virtanen et al. (2005b) as the single factor associated with precarious employment which most harms the health of employees. Furthermore, Clarke et al. (2007) ____________________________

⁹ These discrepancies illustrate how various assessment metrics yield different results related to health measures.
connect high levels of employment strain to adverse health outcomes. Using the “employment strain model” Clarke et al. (2007, p. 313) move the work-related health investigation away from what is typically associated with health and safety (workplace hazards, job training etc.) by introducing mental health related indicators to the evaluation process. Interestingly, the study found stressors related to employment strain (such as the effort required to manage the needs and expectations of numerous employers) more frequently and more intensely impacted the health of employees when compared to physical health or environmental work factors. There is a widely-accepted consensus among scholars investigating precarious employment, that it has a negative impact on the mental health of employees (Bosmans et al., 2016; Clarke et al., 2007; Marmot et al., 2001; McGann et al., 2012; Menéndez et al., 2007; Min et al., 2015; Morissette et al., 2007).

Menéndez et al. (2007) highlight mental health issues, physical pain and stress as increasing because of precarious employment. This study goes on to further determine that these factors impact women more than men, concluding that women are currently

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10 The Employment Strain Model is comprised of three measurements explained in Clarke et al. (2007) as: "1) Employment Relationship Uncertainty (uncertainty over future employment, uncertainty over the terms and conditions of future employment and uncertainty over work schedules); 2) Employment Relationship Effort (effort finding employment, effort keeping employed, efforts and challenges surrounding multiple worksites and employers, and pressures from close and constant evaluation); and 3) Employment Relationship Support (support from formal organizations such as a union, from co-workers, and personal support from friends and family)” (p. 313).

11 The Employment Strain Model is a change in conceptualization from the Job Strain Model. The Job Strain Model describes the result of low control by an employee and high effort, in a specific employment situation. The Employment Strain Model captures the impact of organizing for work that effects health, regardless of an employee’s experience with a specific employer. The Employment Strain Model recognizes elements of precariousness in Standard Employment Relationships as well.
operating within a labour market system developed, designed and controlled by men. Cranford et al. (2003) agree, arguing more women are precariously employed with less stability and less success in self-employed work. Contrastingly, Rodriguez’s (2002) investigation into the health of precarious employees in Britain and Germany found the health of women and men to be equally negatively impacted by precarious employment.

McGann et al. (2012) suggests precarious work does not provide employees with freedom, flexibility and autonomy but rather limits their ability to be healthy, engage in social relations and maintain sound mental health. Benach and Muntaner (2007) identify having less information about the labour environment and lacking the ability to take a personal leave as factors directly associated with adverse health due to employment precariousness.

Lewchuk et al. (2008) highlight workplace factors associated with health which include the association between uncertainty in work scheduling and negative health outcomes as well as the positive health outcomes of being able to access support networks at work. Tompa et al. (2007) determine negative health implications can be associated with all types of work, not only precarious employment. Tompa et al. (2007) suggest an employee does not need to be in a precarious employment situation to be impacted by elements of precariousness in their working life. Full-time, standard work arrangement employees can face issues of precariousness at work (benefits, poor career advancement etc.). Tompa et al. (2007) recommend questioning who benefits from precarious employment and engaging in a multidisciplinary approach to investigating health concerns.
Precarious employment can be the source of mental health challenge for workers. Job insecurity and related uncertainties (such as affordable child care, access to medical care etc.) are positively correlated to rates of anxiety, stress and other limiting mental health issues (Marmot et al., 2001). Strategies for handling these issues (such as connecting with a professional, chatting with a peer, and investigating employment alternatives) can be made inaccessible by precarious employment as work schedules are unpredictable and factors leading to social isolation increase. Mental health issues also tax the general public and increase the risk of poverty. Illustrating how exasperating this particular set of health issues can be is Marmot et al.’s (2001) finding that the psychological turmoil caused by the stresses associated with precarious employment may not be remedied even if a standard employment relationship is achieved later, illustrating the ongoing harms an experience of precarious employment can have on an employee. Furthermore, a 2016 study by Moscone et al. traces the medical treatment of temporary workers over a four-year period and empirically links the increased need of psychotropic medication to an increase in temporary work.

There is a positive correlation between job specific skill development, job satisfaction, and the likelihood of employment stability, according to Vera-Toscano et al.’s 2004 investigation. This correlation reflects the importance of employee training and development, factors not typically associated with precarious employment. It is in the best interest of employers concerned with retention and dividends on their employee investments to foster work-life balance (Pocock, 2005). Tsui et al. (1997) state investing in employees is better than not, on all measurable scales: employee work-life balance,
economic output, labour environment and employee interaction, are all positively related to employee investment.

Precarious employment also impacts the individual worker’s connection to their place of work by, for example, distancing them from decision making processes, which, according to Spector (1986) results in poorer job performance and satisfaction. Vacotto’s 2013 work for the International Labour Organization found that precarious employment is used by employers to weaken union representation and keep employee concerns at bay. A powerful connection between control and Spector’s (1986) conclusion is stated in the area of perception: if an employee believes they are in possession of workplace certainty (if they believe they have control at work), their work satisfaction may increase.

2.2.2 Family

Ultimately, precarious employment translates to reduced agency, and negative social outcomes for families (Pocock, 2005). Woodman (2012) emphasizes that a precarious employee’s uncertainty around their own work schedule directly determines how precarious work impacts an employee’s social connection and family life (from dinner as a family to engaging in extracurricular activities to being able to care for an aging family member) (Bohle et al., 2004; Seifert et al., 2007). Ferrie (2001) introduces the “spillover” concept (p. 71), described as the negative impact of income uncertainty on home life. Furthermore, Steele et al. (2014) find for every year of precarious employment (regardless of any other indicator) the likelihood of childbirth by age 35 reduces by one year, and Raymo et al. (2011) find employees exposed to precarious jobs are more likely to retire after age 65 than unionized workers in stable jobs. Countering the argument that
the unstable nature of precarious work is negative is the notion of work opportunities being available outside of regular business hours, enabling certain community members (such as mothers who are responsible for child rearing in their home) to access the labour market (Smithson & Stokoe, 2005).

Paired with the decreased access to support networks, precarious employment further isolates employees by not providing the resources required to move forward socially and financially (McLaren, 2015). This is best exemplified by the limited or complete lack of access to benefit packages. A precarious employee without medical benefits may choose not to start a family for fear of economic instability to delay a desired life plan. This notion of isolation is exacerbated by the perceived need to, ‘know someone to get ahead at work’ (Lewchuk, 2013).

2.2.3 Organizations

The relationship between precarious employment and employers is a reflection of typical labour market trends before the Second World War (Burgess & Campbell, 1998; Tompa et al., 2007). Through precarious employment, employers maintain a flexible relationship with employees, workers can be easily terminated enabling only the most highly productive workers to maintain employment (Lewchuk, 2013). The case is made, in Galarneau’s 1997 investigation into earnings of temporary versus permanent employees, for precarious employment having advantages. The study introduces the employer who is freer to be more fluid with employment scheduling and, certain workers who seek to create a work-life separation and not be obliged to bring work-related thoughts or concerns home. Parker et al.’s (2002) longitudinal study suggests precarious
workers are less distracted by higher up decision-making in the organization because their commitment to the employer is low.

Suggesting employees can complete tasks and have no further input in the employment setting might be construed as positive but, as Seifert et al. (2007) found, creating increasingly isolated labour environments negatively impacts an organization’s bottom-line. Marmot et al. (2001) determines that in the long run, precarious employment costs employers more as employees perform more poorly, decrease productivity at work and register a lower quality of life. Also, Bohle et al. (2004) found employee commitment to work increases productivity and is ultimately cost-saving\textsuperscript{12}. Bohle et al. (2004) further debunk the myth that precarious work provides beneficial increased flexibility and suggests the increased demand to be flexible makes for toxic labour environments.

Viewing the employer benefit from a different perspective, Lewchuk (2013) explains precarious employment is more frequent in the current labour market because of the need employers have for employees to be flexible due to an emergent global economy with increased communication, connectedness and resource movement. Interestingly, McGann et al. (2012) state conclusively: “with regards to non-skilled professions, the autonomy that results from the deregulation of working hours is in fact possessed solely by the employer at the expense of the employee” (p.100).

\textsuperscript{12} Notice how this impact is on the individual whereas the previous examples given impact the employer.
Precarious employment reduces the unemployment rate which may seem to be positive, but, Benach et al. (2002) suggest a reduced unemployment rate masks precarious employment’s negative impacts at a systemic level. The unemployment rate is most often used as an indicator of labour market success, but Benach and Muntaner’s 2007 study raises concern around this indicator as it only measures having a job versus not having one, it does not measure job satisfaction, benefits or the reality of reduced agency. Furthermore, Benach and Muntaner (2007) discuss precarious employment as being less healthy and more economically unstable than traditional unemployment. Marmot et al. (2001) determined the negative health outcomes associated with precarious employment are costly and suggest policy makers consider how moving away from precarious employment can be cost-saving for the social purse of a social welfare state, such as Ontario.

2.2.4 Community

Employing precariously serves to undermine the social fabric of communities (Torka et al., 2005). This employer behaviour can weaken trust and social trust\(^\text{13}\) is importantly presented in McLaren’s (2015) review of precarious employment in Ontario’s Grey Bruce region because it bridges the economic implications of precarious employment with its social components. Beginning by describing how social trust decreases as income inequality increases, McLaren (2015) relates social trust to

\(^{13}\)“Social trust” refers to an individual's beliefs about the general trustworthiness of others and it is part of a person’s worldview regarding the benevolence of other human beings” (Justwana, Bakker, Berejikian, 2018, p.1).
increasing entrepreneurial activity, civic engagement, and increasing reentrance into the labour market after underemployment, trends not typically associated with precarious employment (Vera-Toscano et al., 2004).

The isolation experienced in a precarious employment situation can be detrimental to the social wellbeing of an individual. Networking opportunities, for example, are identified as prominent places to gain the connections needed to move from precarious to secure employment while these opportunities rarely involve financial compensation and come at a cost to income gaining. The balance of needing to work precarious jobs to generate the revenue required to live and attempting to break out of precarious employment to increase quality of life is daunting at best and crippling at worst (Ferrie, 2001). This form of employment removes a person’s ability to share talents with their community inherently reducing their contributions impacting their place in society, right down to their likelihood of voting (Lewchuk et al., 2015).

2.3 Summary

Like many other employment terms, there is not one agreed upon definition of precarious employment. For the purposes of this exploratory research, an inclusive definition of precarious employment was used. The impacts of being employed precariously pertain to individual workers, families, organizations, and communities. Mental and physical health are negatively impacted by precarious employment, factors which spill over into families and communities by increasing stress and decreasing social trust. Organizations benefit from a flexible labour force and are harmed by unfavourable labour environments. The next chapter focuses on rural precarious employment
specifically, and explains the trends that are known to date, using qualitative and quantitative measurements in exploratory work done by Gaspard et al. (2018), Gaspard (2018) and Bollman (2017)\textsuperscript{14}.

\textsuperscript{14} The exploratory work in Gaspard et al. (2018), Gaspard (2018) and Bollman (2017) is part of a four-year study in which this project is embedded.
3 CURRENT RURAL CONTEXT

This chapter discusses the changing rural economy and reviews what is known about precarious employment in rural Ontario to date\textsuperscript{15}. This chapter begins by presenting statistics from Bollman’s (2017) synthesis of Statistics Canada and Labour Force survey data using the precarious employment indicators of low wage work, involuntary part-time work, term or contract work, and self-employment with no paid help. Next, what is known to date qualitatively about rural precarious employment, related to factors including age, sex, and the perspective of service providers are provided. Many qualitative insights in this chapter are provided by key informants who support individuals experiencing rural precarious employment, interviewed in Gaspard (2018).

3.1 The Changing Rural Economy

Today, rural employees are more likely to be underemployed (Bollman, 2015; Vera-Toscano et al., 2004), reenter the labour market after having a break in employment (Vera-Toscano et al., 2004), earn lower wages (Bollman, 2015), and are “at greater risk of prolonged work absence” (Lavoie, et al. 2017, p. 11), than their urban counterparts.

\textsuperscript{15} Impetus for this exploratory research project is derived from the ongoing investigation into rural precarious employment taking place in collaboration with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) through the University of Guelph’s School of Environmental Design and Rural Development. Research project team members include the author as well as: Dr. Ray Bollman, Dr. Ryan Gibson, Carol Kenny, Dr. Al Lauzon, Dr. Heather Mair, and Dr. Miana Plesca. Bollman (2017) and Gaspard (2018) were completed as part of the ongoing larger investigation into rural precarious employment funded by OMAFRA of which my original contribution to the literature, this exploratory investigation, is a part.
The presentation of changes in the economy specific to rural Ontario and an Ontario-focused identification of rural places are important components of this exploratory research project because they are commonly overlooked in the investigation of precarious employment\(^{16}\). The categorization of non-metro, partially-metro, and metro census divisions as described in Bollman (2013) is being used to identify what is meant by rural Ontario\(^{17}\). This categorization was selected for three reasons: 1) the statistical diligence exhibited\(^{18}\) 2) the consideration taken for external factors measuring distance and density (such as, commuter area and urban fringe), and 3) the consistency offered over time. While using this categorization, metro Ontario is also denoted as urban, while non-metro and partially non-metro areas are called rural. This description of rural is most beneficial to the project as it denotes distinction in geographic areas which are contrastable and connected to census data\(^{19}\).

Bollman (2015) reports the goods-producing sector to be more prevalent in non-metro Ontario than in urban parts of the province. The four service-producing sectors

\(^{16}\) At times in scholarship, rural is viewed only in relationship to urban, as in Ali et al. (2011) who argue the best strategy for rural revitalization is an urban increase in employment opportunities because they may directly provide employment options for their rural counterparts.

\(^{17}\) The classification of rural areas in Ontario is presented as a ‘Focus on Rural’ brief compiled through the Rural Ontario Institute. The document can be located electronically http://www.ruralontarioinstitute.ca/file.aspx?id=1c38f15e-df4e-41a8-9c4d-7ad02cf55b0

\(^{18}\) A description of the designations prepared by Bollman (2013) based on population size class can be found here http://www.ruralontarioinstitute.ca/uploads/userfiles/files/Focus2%20Number%20of%20non-metro%20communities%20by%20size.pdf

\(^{19}\) More information can be found about this rural description in Appendix 1.
more intense in non-metro Ontario are retail\textsuperscript{20} (relatively lower paying, service related), healthcare, administration (lower-skill, reduced opportunity for advancement), and accommodation and food services (seasonal based on incoming need). The nature of the jobs associated with these sectors are more likely to be precarious in rural Ontario (Bollman, 2015). Furthermore, rural Ontario workers are subject to seasonal work more frequently than their urban counterparts and the employment trends associated with rural Ontario reflect seasonality. For example, the employment rate is higher in rural Ontario than in urban Ontario during peak months, while the employment rate is higher in urban Ontario during the winter (Bollman, 2007; Sharpe & Smith, 2005). Also, a reflection of seasonal work is the higher percent of couple family taxfilers reporting Employment Insurance (EI) benefits in rural Ontario than in urban Ontario (Bollman, 2017).

These rural economic realities present an environment which supports precarious employment. To determine the current status of rural precarious employment in Ontario, a review of four indicators was undertaken. The indicators are contract work, involuntary part-time work, low wage work, and self-employment with no paid help. The four indicators are presented in table format below (this table was originally found in Gaspard et al. (2018, p. 3). These four indicators of precarious employment were selected for this investigation because they are measured using reliable longitudinal sources available for

\textsuperscript{20} Retail employment represents 13\% of all non-metro Ontario jobs, this number has been consistent over the last 10 years (Bollman, 2017).
rural Ontario (Census Canada and Labour Force data), and they are consistent with suggestions from the literature (specifically in Lewchuk et al., 2003).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Involuntary Part-time Work</th>
<th>Low Wage Work</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This indicator identifies workers who are working part-time jobs because they cannot find full-time work. Importantly, this indicator deselects for employees who purposefully work part-time. Bollman (2017) writes:</td>
<td>This indicator is defined as jobs with wages less than 1.5 times the minimum wage. Since this indicator is a function of the minimum wage, the actual dollar wage considered to be low will change as minimum wage changes. Bollman (2017) explains:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When a respondent to Statistics Canada’s Labour Force Survey indicates that their major job is part-time (less than 30 hours per week), they are then asked for the reason. Those who state, “business conditions” or “could not find work with 30 or more hours per week” are classified as “involuntary” part-time employees.</td>
<td>In Ontario, the minimum wage was $6.85 per hour from 1997 to 2003 which implied a low wage was $10.28 per hour. In 2016, the minimum wage was $11.25 per hour and a low wage would thus be $16.88 per hour. When the minimum wage is $14.00 low wage is $21.00 and below.</td>
</tr>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term or Contract Work</th>
<th>Self-employment, unincorporated with no paid help</th>
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<tr>
<td>Consistent with the Statistics Canada definition of this indicator used in census data collection, this exploratory research project defines term or contract work as:</td>
<td>There are four kinds of self-employment: incorporated with paid help, incorporated with no paid help, unincorporated with paid help and unincorporated with no paid help. The latter was selected as an indicator because it is a trend that is increasing in rural Ontario and not having paid help means the individual who is self-employed is not an employer, but rather the worker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A job that is not seasonal and in which there is a definite indication from the employer before the job was accepted that the job will terminate at a specific point in time, or at the end of a particular task or project. This includes work done through a temporary help agency.</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 1 Explanation of four indicators of precarious employment, originally found in Gaspard et al. (2018, p. 3).
For the purposes of this investigation, a person working a job which includes any of these four indicators is working precariously\textsuperscript{22}.

### 3.1.1 Fixed-Term or Contract Work

Fixed-term and contract work does not relate to job quality or income but is a function of duration of employment. In non-metro census divisions, there was a slight decline in both number and percent of these types of jobs during the 2008 recession. After the 2008 recession, there was an increase in the frequency of these jobs in rural areas, and then another decline starting in 2012. The number and percent of individuals working these types of jobs have now returned to the pre-recession level of 50,000 (Gaspard et al., 2018). Females in non-metro Ontario are more likely (8%) to work a term or contract job than their male counterparts (6.5%) (Gaspard et al., 2018). Employees with a university degree above a bachelor’s degree are more likely (over 10%) to have a term or contract job in non-metro Ontario (Gaspard et al., 2018). Non-metro individuals who are part of the core labour force (aged 25-54) are more likely than any other age group to work term or contract jobs (Gaspard et al., 2018).

### 3.1.2 Involuntary Part-Time Work

The classification for this indicator links it to a work situation that is identified as undesirable and findings from Gaspard et al. (2018) report youth, women, and individuals with less education are more likely than their counterparts to work an involuntary part-\textsuperscript{\textendash}

\textsuperscript{22} This statistical review is part of a larger exploration into rural precarious employment funded through the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA).
time job. The highest percentage and number of individuals working involuntary part-time jobs in non-metro Ontario was experienced during the fall out of the 2008 recession (Gaspard et al., 2018). Involuntary part-time work in non-metro Ontario is experienced more frequently by females than by males (Gaspard et al., 2018). This discrepancy translates to a 7% difference, a gap that is 2% wider in non-metro Ontario than in the province as a whole (Gaspard et al., 2018). Youth aged 15-24 are twice as likely as their counterparts in the core rural labour force to work involuntary part-time jobs (Gaspard et al., 2018). There are lower education levels in non-metro Ontario than in metro Ontario and since individuals with lower education are more likely to work involuntary part-time jobs, both the number and percentage of this indicator are increased in non-metro Ontario (Gaspard et al., 2018).

3.1.3 Low Wage Work

The trend of low wage work relates directly to changes in the minimum wage. Since low wage work is defined as 1.5 times the minimum wage, as minimum wage increases, so does the hourly rate which is considered low wage (Noack & Vosko, 2011). If workers are paid above a low wage rate and there is no change in pay after a minimum wage increase, they could move to being considered a low wage worker. There was a decrease in the percentage of paid workers with a low wage job in the early 2000s and an increase in years following the 2008 recession.

23 This sample intentionally excludes students.
3.1.2 Self-employment

Self-employment and underground economic activity occur in smaller towns and remote areas throughout Ontario (Reimer & Apedaile, 2000). Recently, there has been a reduction in self-employment with paid help (both incorporated and unincorporated) while there is an overall increase in the number of self-employed Ontarians who have no paid help (Bollman, 2017). Self-employed, incorporated with no paid help represents 3% of the work force in Ontario while self-employed unincorporated with no paid help represents 8% (Bollman, 2017). However, only unincorporated self-employment with no paid help is on the rise. Agriculture, construction, transportation and warehousing, professional, scientific, and technical services, and other services, are all worked by self-employed unincorporated individuals with no paid help at a percentage that is higher than the percent across all industries. Bollman (2017) describes self-employment trends in non-metro census divisions which have remained relatively stable at 10% since 2000. Interestingly, Bollman (2017) reports three factors impacting the likelihood of being self-employed in non-metro census divisions: sex, education, and age. Females (10%) are less likely to be self-employed as opposed to males (14%) (Bollman, 2017).

Bollman (2017) reports in any market condition, agriculture remains the industry with the most self-employment in rural Canada, even though it decreased considerably in years before and after the 2008 recession. Interestingly, during the period of agriculture

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24 Instances of self-employment with no paid help are of interest in the investigation of precarious employment as the labour relationship has the self-employed person in the role of worker, not employer. The findings reported from Bollman (2017) refer to the self-employed with no paid help.
decline in self-employment there was an increase in rural self-employed construction work (Bollman & Alasia, 2012). As an industry, construction work is often associated with employment precariousness, suggesting perhaps an increase in ways of earning income during a decline in agriculture.

Self-employed retail endeavours in rural Canada saw a decline while paid work in that same area did not decline (Bollman & Alasia, 2012). Since self-employment requires entrepreneurship and increased social trust, a move away from it and towards precarious work in the retail sector could signal a strategy undertaken by the working class to manage periods of difficulty during times of market decline (Kim & Kang, 2014).

Individuals with lower formal education are more likely to be self-employed (highlighting perhaps this form of income earning as a last-resort). Increased age is also associated with adopting this style of work. The rate of self-employed workers with no paid help between the ages of 55-64 (18%) and 65+ (30%) are both higher than the average. This could be a reflection of poorer saving plans available at the time of anticipated retirement as well as reduced social securities.

### 3.3 Current Factors

With an understanding of the quantitative trends related to indicators of rural precarious employment in Ontario, this section now reviews what is known to date about factors impacting this kind of work. These factors include age, sex, and a series of circumstantial factors including education, and immigration. Most primary data reviewed in this section are deliverables from the exploratory work in Bollman (2017) and Gaspard et al. (2018) because they are the first exploration of rural precarious employment trends
in Ontario. The perspectives of service providers who support individuals experiencing rural precarious employment are available for context because of work done in Gaspard (2018). The factors are reviewed next in this section.

3.3.1 Age

The relationship between age structure and work in rural Ontario is changing the face of rural precarious employment. A declining birth rate, low immigration, and aging baby-boomer generation means that at the same time in rural Ontario there is a low number of new entrants into the labour force, thus the labour force is not fully being replaced (Bollman, 2017). For example, currently, there is both a decline in the population of workers aged 15 and older as well as a decline in the percent of the rural population that is employed.

Younger employees (15 to 24 years of age) were more likely to have a low wage job (68%) in rural census divisions compared to 23% for employees 25 to 54 years of age. In rural census divisions, one-half of employees aged 65 and older held a low wage position (Bollman, 2017).

Since 2004, the number of working adults aged 25 to 54 has been decreasing in rural Ontario (Bollman, 2017). This decline means a loss of employment opportunities and an inability for some rural employers to find the workers needed to fulfill vacancies. Interestingly, having less rural workers in this core-age bracket also translates to the ability to find reemployment for rural workers when external economic changes occur, such as the 2008 recession (Bollman, 2017). Consider the employment rate: it fell 3% in
rural Ontario during the recession of 2008-2009 – from 82% to 79% and has increased to over 80% since the recession (Bollman, 2017). Although employment rates in rural and urban Ontario are similar, in urban Ontario, the employment rate recovered largely, but not completely following the recession.

In rural Ontario, the population 55 to 64 years of age has been growing continuously over the last two decades – and, similarly, the level of their employment has been growing (Bollman, 2017). The increased number of rural senior Ontarians has caused a small increase in the number of seniors in the rural labour force, perhaps working longer years than anticipated (Gaspard et al., 2018). Although the work force in rural Ontario is aging, and there are more older workers engaged in work for more years, the increase in the number of employed older workers has not compensated for the decline in employment among individuals 25 to 54 years of age (Gaspard et al., 2018).

### 3.3.2 Sex

More women work term or contract jobs, involuntary part-time jobs, and low wage jobs, while also being less likely to be self-employed than their male counterparts (Bollman, 2017). These same general trends are also identifiable with urban Ontario women, pointing to a more marginalized experience for women in the workplace when compared to men. Low wage jobs (35%) and involuntary part-time jobs (9.5%) are more frequently worked by rural women than by rural men, urban men, or urban women. The experience of being a woman in a rural work force can be particularly challenging when paired with any number of other marginalizing factors such as being an immigrant or having low education, more factors related to increased employment precariousness. In
both urban and rural Ontario, the percent of taxfilers reporting social assistance was slightly higher for males and slightly lower for females between 2006 and 2014 (Bollman, 2017).

3.3.3 Circumstantial Factors

The investigation into circumstantial factors which impact rural precarious employment in Ontario is emergent with this exploratory research project. To date, education and immigration status have been reviewed intentionally in relation to precarious employment in rural Ontario through work in Gaspard et al. (2018) and Arora (2017), respectively.

Individuals with lower education are more likely to work involuntary part-time jobs, be self-employed (unincorporated with no paid help) and to report a low wage job (Gaspard et al., 2018). Since there are lower education levels in rural as opposed to urban Ontario, both the number and percentage of individuals who meet this criterion are increased in rural Ontario as opposed to urban (Gaspard et al., 2018). Although perhaps not surprising that low levels of education are related to precarious work, there are two anomalies. Rural workers with a higher level of education, although they make up a small percentage of workers, work fixed-term or contract work more frequently than less educated rural counterparts (Gaspard et al., 2018). Also, there seems to be a critical convergence related to education, where well educated individuals in rural Ontario become more likely to work involuntary part-time jobs. These trends could be related to the job opportunities in rural Ontario and a situation where individuals with higher
education are unable to find work suitable to their education or where individuals choosing to work term or contract jobs in rural communities.

Exploratory work by Arora (2017) with immigrants living in the rural Ontario community of Bruce-Grey area for less than 10 years points to citizenship status and valuation of international experiences as factors influencing rural precarious employment, Arora’s work brings forward rural specific indications of this trend.

Key informants interviewed in Gaspard (2018)\textsuperscript{25} reported the impacts of rural precarious employment on both individual employees and their families. The impacts on individual employees include: a) experiencing a stressful feeling of inadequacy and negative self-view; b) not being offered the same access to support programs as workers who are unemployed; c) having a more difficult experience securing employment as an older worker; d) being unable to navigate the job search system; and e) having to pay job acquisition costs (medical testing, safety equipment).

At the family level, key informants in Gaspard (2018) reported rural precarious employment a) caused scheduling problems; and challenges in arranging schedules to manage needs such as childcare and car use; b) stopped families from being able to make future plans; c) increased stress levels; including the stress of keeping a job, stress

\textsuperscript{25} See Appendix 2 for the question set I used when interviewing key informants in Gaspard (2018). Gaspard (2018) is a deliverable from the ongoing larger investigation into rural precarious employment funded by OMAFRA.
of losing a job, stress of searching for a job; d) increased travel time associated with work; this is exacerbated in the winter, in rural areas, and if working multiple jobs.

Gaspard (2018) summarizes the benefits and drawbacks of both publicly funded and privately-owned supports available to rural precarious employees in Ontario. Publicly funded supports, such as programs provided through the provincial government at Employment Ontario Centres, are reported to be widely advertised and well known among precarious employees. The drawbacks related to these programs centre around accessibility. Youth and the unemployed are two groups reported by key informants in Gaspard (2018) as being disproportionately supported by publicly funded programs. As stated by one key informant, “when you are asked the question ‘are you currently employed?’ and you say ‘yes’ your options are limited by Employment Ontario” (Gaspard, 2018, p. 13). “Although there is consensus among interviewees that public funding for these programs is important, the feeling is that they come from funds that would otherwise be used to support the average worker” (Gaspard, 2018, p. 14). For some, the inability to rely on public programs for access to the supports required while precariously employed means a reliance on private supports. Some key informants discussed relying on temporary agencies. Drawbacks to using them include: a) disruption to family lifestyle; the infrequency with which work is found makes it difficult to plan for family events or needs; b) stifling employee progress in the workplace; there are few opportunities to move beyond the role of entry-level labourer; and c) maintaining precarious employment; if all employees are in a standard employment relationship, the agency is out of work.
Respondents in Gaspard (2018) also provided insight into workers who at one time, had a standard employment relationship in their rural community and who now labour precariously in order to remain living in their community. Key informants reported this group was less confident in their abilities, unable to return to the standard of living attained with the ‘old job’, and perhaps most interestingly, less able to access the resources needed (including job searching techniques and education) to break themselves out of the precarious employment situation.

3.4 Summary

Employment structuring has changed to favour market driven solutions, as exemplified through the rural economic changes discussed above. This chapter begins by explaining elements of the changing rural economy and how the current rural labour environment in Ontario is positioned to support rural precarious employment. Bollman’s (2017) indicators of fixed-term and contract work, involuntary part-time work, low wage work, and self-employment with no paid help are reviewed in the context of rural Ontario. Finally, what is known to date about rural precarious employment in Ontario, including the influence of factors (such as age and sex) as well as reflections from service providers are reviewed.
4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This exploratory research project applies phenomenology to investigate the question, *what is the experience of being precariously employed in rural Ontario?* Beginning with Husserl’s understanding of an experience as a way of knowing, phenomenology hinges on the awareness of human consciousness (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007; Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). Phenomenology, as a methodology, stems from its roots as a philosophy which was articulated by Hegel as, “knowledge as it appears to consciousness, the science of describing what one perceives, senses, and knows in one’s immediate awareness and experience” (in Moustakas, 1994, p. 26).

This phenomenological research project explores the beliefs and perceptions of individuals and their experience of being employed precariously in rural Ontario, and the impact it has on them. Phenomenology was selected for this project because it considers an individual’s subjective experiences, recognizes that individual challenges are experienced uniquely, takes into consideration both the individual and their environment (van Manen, 2017), and allows for lived experiences to denote the essence of a phenomenon which is new to the collective understanding of precarious employment in rural Ontario. At the time of writing, this project is the first known to investigate the lived experience of rural precarious employment in Ontario, as such, this project is exploratory.

A phenomenological investigation into rural precarious employment in Ontario is important because no matter the analysis, evaluation, or assessment done around the
rate of employment or other employment metrics; we are no closer to understanding *the experience of* rural precarious employment in Ontario. This research enables the human experience, widely, to be better understood and provides insights into rural precarious employment for policy makers, politicians, and program developers. Better understanding a phenomenon allows for better decisions around the phenomenon to be made.

As a methodology, phenomenology is not typically associated with projects related to the study of employment trends. Published work related to employment which does use phenomenology is more recent\(^26\) and, from my evaluation, is due to the changing labour environment. Phenomenology was not commonly used as a methodology to investigate employment studies when, in North America, the SER was prevalent (Groenewald, 2004). When SER was prevalent in North America, the investigation of employment trends served to address the employment policy prevalent in a SER work environment. Tools used to report on employment trends still largely use quantitative metrics and include reporting on the unemployment rate, and labour retention statistics. As the work environment changes, and SER becomes less common, investigations of the experience of work may begin to increase. My selection of phenomenology as a methodology serves to not only advance the understanding of rural precarious employment in Ontario, but also adds lived rural experiences to the literature.

In preparing for this exploratory research project, I have positioned myself within the research experiences of phenomenological scholars who assert, and exercise, both descriptive and interpretive phenomenology as a methodology, mainly Giorgi and van Manen (Finlay, 2009). The selected epistemological approach to this exploratory research project was originally articulated by Husserl, the father of scientific phenomenology, who “is credited with founding an empirical philosophy” (Dowling, 2007, p. 134). Husserl asserts that only certain truths come from experiences of consciousness and that perception is the one existing source of certainty (Husserl, 1960). Husserl identified shortcomings with using the reductionist procedures practiced in the sciences, to investigate human experiences (which include understandings of environments, life-histories, consciousness, and perceptions). Husserl sought an approach to research able to provide, with the same certainty as the scientific method, knowledge of the human experience.

Giorgi and van Manen assert the use of phenomenology as a methodology appropriate when human experiences are sought to be better understood. Like van Manen (1990), I will examine my own prejudices and draw, as suggested by Giorgi (2000), on my own learnings in the interview stage of this exploratory research project. As eloquently stated by van Manen (1990), “if we simply try to forget or ignore what we already ‘know’, we might find that the presupposition persistently creep back into our reflections” (p. 47). My reflection during this project is constant, while maintaining my research aim to better understand the essence of rural precarious employment through
articulation by individuals who are experiencing the phenomenon – subsequently, my positionality is explained below.

4.2 Positionality

My own experiences are the ones most readily accessible to me. As a researcher, I recognize these experiences may be shared by others, and they may also be unique to me (van Manen, 1984). Reflecting on my own experiences assists me in the process of understanding the experiences of others, as such, I am using this section of my thesis to present my positionality in relation to the investigation into rural precarious employment in Ontario. The process of writing my positionality has helped to demonstrate the relationship these experiences might have in my role as a researcher in a phenomenological investigation related to rural precarious employment.

My post-secondary degrees in different disciplines (Biology as an undergraduate student, and Planning as a graduate student) have afforded me the opportunity to train as both a natural scientist and social scientist. There are elements of my natural scientist training that have been purposefully ‘shelved’ as I engage with interviewing in this phenomenological study, including a sanitized experiment environment and commitment to replicability of a study. Navigating my own academic training has caused substantial reflection throughout the deliberate crafting of this investigation. I believe that a positivist approach to learning more about a human experience can at best provide a shortsighted limited understanding of the complexities entangled in the human experience. I believe that socially constructed elements (which for example include gender roles and social
class) are not empirical truths and can only be understood and unpacked through meaningful engagement with individuals. My own epistemological beliefs are surely embedded at every stage of this investigation.

4.2.1 Related to Rurality

My interest, intrigue, engagement with, and respect for rural places in Ontario originates in my upbringing in the rural Ontario municipality of Leamington. Leamington was known as the Tomato Capital of Canada and continues to have strong ties to the agricultural industry. From 1909 to 2014 the H. J. Heinz Company – a producer of ketchup and other canned goods – was a major employer in the community. That local manufacturing plant stood at the centre of the community and was a lot more than a factory – it was an emblem for good-paying, unionized, local employment opportunities. Sponsoring local sports team, donating land for the local recreation centre and being the namesake of the local ice pads, Heinz was as much a part of Leamington as its tomato fields. When Heinz closed in 2014, over 700 good jobs in a community of 28,000 went with it. My connection to Leamington as a place and the experience of job loss in that community after the closing of Heinz resonates with me throughout the phenomenological process associated with this work. Relating my rural upbringing to the experiences of participants builds credibility in relationship and often helped me understand rural ‘nuances’.

Another component of my positionality relates to being raised within a strong ethnic community in Leamington. My upbringing is intrinsically connected to the positive association I make with home and comes from the family I have who inspire confidence
in and support for me as an individual. Growing up in Leamington provided regular access to a familial support system and the experience of easily accessing a social support network. My familial support system included weekly Sunday lunch with extended family at my grandparents' house, and active involvement with a church community. Both of these activities established my connections to family firmly and have provided a buffer between me and some of the experiences captured through investigating rural precarious employment. Digesting my experience as a member of a family, both nuclear and extended, that ‘takes care of their own’, allows me to consider how the experience of individuals employed precariously in rural Ontario might be impacted by their own familial relations. Although my connection to family, rooted in Leamington, remains strong, I chose to leave my rural community and pursue post-secondary education in urban Ontario. Being physically removed from my family caused me to develop deliberate communication strategies to stay in touch with them. This experience links me to a broader group of young rural Ontarians who out-migrate for opportunities outside of their rural homes. Although I no longer live in a rural community, I identify as being from rural Ontario. Digesting my own rural-urban experiences helps me articulate the power of a socially constructed rural identity. My engagement with rural issues extends to activities in my life outside of academia. At the time of writing, I am the president of the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation, an alliance lead within the Rural Policy Learning Commons, and project manager for the Precarious Employment Research Team. These connections position me at the intersection of rural scholarship and motivate me to
investigate not only rural precarious employment but urban biases in scholarship more widely.

4.2.2 Related to Relevant Work Experiences

It would be imprudent to present a thesis on precarious employment without first presenting a reflection on my formative employment experiences as they relate to this topic. While pursuing my undergraduate degree, I was employed as a Residence Life Staff member through the University of Western Ontario's Housing and Ancillary Services. There, I actively promoted tools and resources for the success of students as a residence advisor and academic programmer. I felt part of a positive work and student environment when responding to community issues. This job brought forward the feelings of connectivity, and community cohesiveness most closely mirrored by my rural upbringing in Leamington. Working in Residence Life at Western felt like working in a part of a family and provided a bridging transition for me as a rural youth in an urban university setting. Many individuals that were part of that formative work experience are still active members of my life. I recognize the formative experience leaving my rural community provided me and I wonder how this might relate to the experiences of migration presented by participants.

During the summers of my undergraduate degree, when I returned home to Leamington, I worked as a Youth Services Officer with Service Canada. That job was my first formal introduction into experiences with the employment procurement system in rural Ontario, specifically related to youth. My job involved connecting rural youth to employers in the area and being a rural youth myself at the time, that employment
experience made clear that securing meaningful employment in a rural community, as a rural youth, was not easy. I bring forward that experience as I engage with participants who are youth themselves in rural areas.

After completing my undergraduate degree, I spent a summer as a Student Life Coordinator at the Bader International Study Centre in the rural community of Herstmonceux, England. I travelled with faculty members and students on education intensive field studies across Europe and the United Kingdom. This international work experience provided me context for the experiences of marginalization some individuals face when accessing services or programming related to employment outside of their home country and an appreciation for some of the similarities (including limited access to transportation, inadequate communication infrastructure) between a rural community in Canada and the United Kingdom.

Upon returning to Canada I undertook my Master’s degree in Rural Planning and Development at the University of Guelph and was employed part-time as an Assistant Residence Life Manager on campus at South Residence. Within this role, I met privately with students experiencing difficulties (behavioural, transitional, emotional, and interpersonal) and worked with sensitive information to provide referrals and resources. I also hosted and coached professional development sessions on: active listening, program engagement, leadership and team dynamics. This work experience provided some insights into student development theory, restorative justice, and the skillset honed by first year incoming university students. After completing my Master’s degree in Rural Planning and Development and my contract within Student Affairs, I started my first work
experience while not enrolled full-time as a student. This is the work experience that most closely resembles a standard employment relationship. I worked on main campus at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario in the role of a Student Experience Assistant and held this role from May 2013 to May 2015. This role provided the benefits and limitations of full-time employment, while also maintaining an element of precariousness through its funding model. The role was not permanent but rather was reevaluated annually and provided as a contract position. I experienced paying into a benefits package, being unionized, having scheduled vacation time, and working a fixed numbers of hours per week.

In my current role, I am a full-time student and graduate research assistant who undertakes different tasks each semester. Some of my work involves, instructing and overseeing course content and logistics in a fourth-year undergraduate course, grading papers as a teaching assistant, and managing research projects. My work experiences in these roles have not impeded me from participating in community-related activities or pursing volunteer work.

I come to this research project with my own experiences related to work. Other than the two years spent working at Queen’s University, I have annually been enrolled as a full-time student. Each of these outlined personal experiences related to work have shaped my positionality as a researcher engaged with this project. I own this positionality and have reflected on it throughout this research project to more empathetically engage with participants during the data collection process and be transparent in my capacity as a phenomenological researcher.
4.3 Data Collection Method

Primary data for this exploratory research project were collected through 19 individual unstructured interviews with individuals who are experiencing rural precarious employment in Ontario. The following decisions outline the rationale for this methodological approach and the decisions made during the research process.

4.3.1 Interviews

During this phenomenological investigation into rural precarious employment, unstructured interviews were selected for two main reasons: 1) they are the qualitative data collection technique that provides the participant the most opportunity to direct the conversation without interference from the interviewer and 2) they are in line with methodological best practices, “when researchers are more interested in knowing greater details about a phenomenon, unstructured questions may aptly accomplish those aims” (Given, 2008, p.908). Four main open-ended questions were prepared for each interview:

- Can you tell me about the work you do?
- What impact does your work have on your life?
- What would you do if you wanted another job?
- Do you have ideas for ways to improve work situations?

These questions were developed based on the goal of the investigation, to understand the nature of rural precarious employment in Ontario, as an experience from the perspective of precariously employed rural people. These four questions were designed to give the participant opportunity to direct the interview where they saw fit. These questions were developed to start the interview, with the intention of conducting the
interview as a conversation. The questions stem from my understanding of the literature, results of the key informant interviews conducted in Gaspard (2018), and guidance from researchers on my advisory committee.

4.3.2 Site Location

Field research took place in a rural community within an afternoon drive of Belleville, Ontario\textsuperscript{27}. As the researcher, I have no known connections to individuals working precariously from the selected site location. Being an outsider to the rural community where precarious employment was taking place reduces the chance for personal connectivity to participants. The precarious employment literature highlights difficulties associated with this form of employment and not being from the community where individuals are experiencing it, mitigates the potential for discomfort or embarrassment by individuals sharing what might be sensitive experiences. Furthermore, this site was selected because of the connections made to key informants interviewed from the Eastern Ontario region, introduced to me while I was conducting the research related to key informant interviews in Gaspard (2018). These key informants offered opportunities to connect with individuals experiencing rural precarious employment in rural Ontario because they themselves support individuals who work precariously\textsuperscript{28}. Representatives from the East Central Ontario Training Board and the Community

\footnote{\textsuperscript{27}Rural community names are not used in this exploratory research project because participant confidentiality is guaranteed. The combination of low population and specific experiences revealed during the interviews mean confidentiality could be breached if triangulated with community name.}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{28}See section 3.3.3}
Employment Services Belleville were instrumental in connecting me by phone and email to individuals who wanted to be interviewed as part of this investigation by providing contact information and project details. Working with key informants to identify participants is the methodological approach consistent with purposeful sampling (Suri, 2011). Appendix 3 includes content from the Interview Recruitment Script that I used to recruit participants during this exploratory research project.

The process of identifying individuals to interview follows Denzin and Lincoln’s (2008) suggestion that the essence of a phenomenon should be investigated where that phenomenon is taking place. Furthermore, since the researcher is an integral part of the phenomenological process, I was fully present for each instance of data collection and remained in contact with participants where possible and appropriate for clarification during analysis process. Scoping this exploratory research project to take place from one field location, which is a location where interest in the phenomenon was evident from key informant interviews, positions the project strategically to have a robust analysis.

4.3.3 Sample Criteria

The sampling method used was purposeful sampling using precarious employment, age, sex, and rurality as criteria (Patton, 2002). Individuals selected through this sampling method were willing, available, and able to articulate their experiences with the phenomenon (Bernard, 2002). This method is preferable when individuals with knowledge of a phenomenon are being sought out (Palinkas et al., 2015). Attaining benchmarks associated with other research methodologies (such as sample saturation,
or replicable responses) was not the goal of this phenomenological research (Morse, 2000; van Manen, 2014, p.347). The methodology used required tailored meaningful interactions with participants, including email correspondence, transcription review, and phone communication, as participants saw fit. Having 19 participants to manage made that possible in an authentic way for one researcher.

Age, sex, rurality, and experience with precarious employment were criteria for participant selection. Rational for selecting precarious employment has been presented in the previous chapters. Rational for selecting age, sex, and rurality as criteria are described below:

### 4.3.3.1 Age

Participants between the ages of 18 and 64 were selected for this study because Bollman’s (2017) special tabulations of Canada’s Labour Force Survey used 15 to 24, 25 to 54, 55 to 64, and 65 and over as age categories to investigate contract work, involuntary part-time work and low wage work as indicators of rural precarious employment. The University of Guelph’s Research Ethics Board granted permission for this project to investigate the lived experience of individuals who are 18 years of age and older. As a result, no individuals under the age of 18 were interviewed during this project. Individuals 65 and older were not selected because they are beyond the core labour force age in Ontario. Participants within the core labour force age bracket allows for a connection between Bollman’s (2017) statistical review and this phenomenological investigation.
4.3.3.2 Sex

Both men and women were interviewed during this project because both sexes experience rural precarious employment. Gaspard et al. (2018) outlines that women are more likely to work jobs with high indications of precariousness. More women work more term or contract jobs, involuntary part-time jobs, and low wage jobs, while also being less likely to be self-employed than their male counterparts.

4.3.3.3 Rurality

Although the metro, non-metro, and partially non-metro delineation of rural Ontario were useful in describing rural areas when reviewing the literature and preparing for this project, the same terms are not used to describe rural when recruiting participants for individual interviews because they are not terms used by rural people to describe their own communities.29 A social representation of rural (Halfacree, 1993) was used to determine participant eligibility in this project because it captures the dematerialized concept (Halfacree, 2004) of rural which is valuable in a phenomenological investigation (Brown & Schafft, 2011, p.4). Using this representation of rural requires eligible individuals to identify as working in rural Ontario, it does not place upon individuals, external limitation to their experience of rural (Murdoch & Pratt, 1993).

__________________________

29 The empirical statistical delineation of rural, as provided by Statistics Canada is purposefully not being used because it limits the ability for individuals to assert their experience of rural.
4.3.4 Sampling

Accessing key informants in the field who are able to connect the researcher with appropriate participants is a required component of purposeful sampling (Suri, 2011). The process for contacting participants began in January 2018 with phone conversations between myself and two key informants, one from Community Employment Services Belleville and another from East Central Ontario Training Board. Each showed interest in this exploratory research project and offered to connect me, over email and phone, with individuals experiencing rural precarious employment. Some individuals I was put in contact with served as community links, people connected (through community organizations, advocacy work, or interest) with other individuals experiencing rural precarious employment. I followed-up on every lead provided by the representatives and created an interview schedule based on participant availability.

My experience engaging with each participant was unique, some participants showed interest over email, some during phone calls and others showed interest in the field. For example, while I was at a local coffee shop preparing for an upcoming interview, I was approached by an individual who said they had not seen me in their community before. In that moment, I explained the reason for my presence and chatted informally about the rural precarious employment research. After our conversation, the individual asked if I would be able to conduct an interview with them. That unexpected connection with a participant was possible only because I was physically present in place and reflects the emergent nature of this phenomenological investigation.
Different interview locations were used, at the request of participants. Shared community space was used to conduct some of the interviews because it was a welcoming environment identified by participants as being a place they felt comfortable sharing their experiences. A casual community drop-in centre was used to conduct interviews with other participants because it was an easily accessible location in the community for individuals without access to personal transportation. In other instances, I met participants in their homes, or a local coffee shop.

I interviewed 19 individuals in different locations, making myself as the researcher available to connect with individuals where they saw best fit. Below (Figure 1) is a visual representation of the interactions leading to the interviews I conducted. Colours are used to represent different roles. As the researcher, every connection links back to me and my engagement in the sampling process. The two green boxes represent the initial contact made with the key informants interviewed in Gaspard et al. (2018). Connecting with these two individuals over the phone and explaining this exploratory research project's methodology was the first step to tapping into a network of individuals who fit the sampling criteria. Each grey box is a connection to a community link. These individuals were contacted by the key informants and were networked in the rural community where the interviews took place. Both the key informants and community links are subject to the confidentiality agreement bound by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Guelph. As such, their names and identifiers are not used in this exploratory research.

\[\text{Research Ethics Board (REB) #17-02-044}\]
project. The yellow ovals represent the participants and describe the location they selected for our interview. The names in the yellow ovals are the pseudonyms provided during the anonymization process which occurred shortly after the interviews were transcribed. Red arrows are interactions between individuals who were not being interviewed and black arrows are the connections made to individuals who were interviewed. Importantly, arrows are double tipped, reflecting the ongoing nature of the recruitment process and follow-up.

Figure 1 Visual representation of interactions in sampling during preparation for individual interviews in February 2018.
The following table (Table 2) describes the research actions taken between sampling and analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Action</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial contact with key informants</td>
<td>January 2018</td>
<td>Key informants, individuals from organizations in green boxes from Figure 1 were contacted via phone and email to discuss the project methodology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community links are established</td>
<td>January 2018</td>
<td>Soon after the initial conversation with key informants, community links were identified. The main forms of contact with the community links was via email, initially introduced by the key informants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field research conducted</td>
<td>February 2018</td>
<td>19 interviews were conducted in the rural communities around Belleville, Ontario. Field notes are available in Appendix 5.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcription</td>
<td>April 2018</td>
<td>All transcriptions were completed by Verbatim Ottawa Services Inc. A transcript confidentiality agreement was signed February 2018.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-going communication with participants</td>
<td>April 2018 onwards</td>
<td>Post-interview interaction with participants. See below for specific interactions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Review of field research actions between interview sampling and analysis.

4.4 Analysis Outline

The following outline is the guide used to craft the methodological approach to analysis for this exploratory research project and is adopted from van Manen (1984, p.5) and Hycner (1985). Guidelines presented by van Manen (1984) and Hycner (1985) advocate non-linear approaches to the process of data analysis and a continuous revisitation of each step during the data collection process. I engaged in this while in the field by listening to each interview conducted, before conducting the next one and taking field notes. The van Manen (1984) approach to analysis captures the exploratory nature
of this research. The van Manen (1984) approach also enables the researcher to engage meaningfully with participants, without hinging the analysis on the researcher’s lived experience. The Hycner (1985) approach recognizes the inability to use a prescriptive step-by-step method in analysis and offers a set of guidelines to effectively use interview transcripts to determine the essence of a phenomenon. The selected approach stands in contrast to the van Kaam (1959), approach which concludes by creating a Composite Description which is meant to represent the experiences of an entire group. Data collected in this investigation are focused on each participant, not a group. Figure 2 shows the methodological outline used in this exploratory research project which draws directly from wording in van Manen (1984, p.5) and Hycner (1985, pgs. 280-287).

Later modified by Moustakas (1994)
Figure 2 Methodological Outline for Doing Phenomenology. Adapted from van Manen (1984) and Hycner (1985).

4.4.1 Turning to the Nature of Lived Experiences

Orienting to the phenomenon and explaining positionality mark the natural beginning of the analysis process. I first oriented myself towards the phenomenon of rural precarious employment in Ontario by being the project manager of the Rural Precarious Employment Research Project at the University of Guelph’s School of Environmental Design and Rural Development. In this role, I was part of the team that, at the time of writing, contributed the first statistical review of rural precarious employment in Ontario. The quantitative review was followed by the key informant interviews reported in Gaspard (2018). My initial orientation to the phenomenon was shaped by my engagement with scholarly literature related to rural precarious employment, and also my own lived
employment experiences and experiences growing up, and working in, rural Ontario. This stage of the analysis was consistently revisited to stay up to date on scholarly literature, review biases and understandings of the phenomenon.

4.4.2 Exploring the Phenomenon

This stage occurred most acutely while in the field engaging with individuals who are describing their experience with rural precarious employment to me during in-depth individual interviews. Here, my own personal experiences as a researcher are reflected upon, interviews are recorded, environmental observations are made and documented through field notes made in my field journal. Written reflections from this stage in this process are found in Appendix 5. Throughout this exploratory research project, I have also been involved in conducting discussions, conferences, presentations, and key informant interviews related to precarious employment.

4.4.3 Analysis

There was a consistent open line of communication between participants and the researcher which is guided by the willingness and engagement of each participant. Once interviews were transcribed word for word\(^{32}\), the post-interview interaction and follow-up with each participant was unique and guided by the participant’s interest in the project, means for communication, and personal preference. Andy, Bianca, Christine, Cindy, Courtney, Jenn, Jill, Lindsay, Margaret, Samantha, Stephanie, Tara, and Tricia (13)

\(^{32}\) By Verbatim Ottawa Services Inc.
reviewed a typed transcript of their interview as a Microsoft Word document attached in an email. Each of these participants communicated with me via email after the interview. No edits were made by participants upon transcript review. Some participants (6) chose to not review their transcript. The reasons for not reviewing transcripts are varied. Fred (1) felt he did not have the mental wherewithal to follow-up after his interview because he was, at the time of the interview, transitioning off a dependency on narcotics. Joan (1) was concerned that follow-up communication or engagement with the project might anger her husband. Denise, Jim, Liz, Rod (4) did not have a regular access to a telephone and/or internet due to the transient nature of their living situations at the time of the interview.

I began the process of analysis by reading each transcript on a laptop screen and making notes on impressions, ideas and potential coding themes by hand in a note book. I then listened to each original interview recording to review the notes made. Next, I reviewed the notes made about ideas, thoughts, and feelings expressed in the interviews and chose to use NVivo 11 as a tool to organize the coding process. I began using the tool by uploading the transcripts to the program. Once uploaded, an open coding process

33 During the ongoing analysis process, the update for NVivo 12 was released and I subsequently used that version of the tool.
began through identifying units of general meaning\textsuperscript{34} from each transcript. Units of general meaning were then connected into nodes.

Once the first open coding was complete, I reviewed the nodes identified, relistened to the audio recordings, and reviewed the hand-written notes made for each interview. The process of analysis was on going weekly from February to December 2018.

4.4.4 Teasing out the Essence

Through the diligent process of coding, the essence of rural precarious employment was teased out by linking the nodes, which are collections of units of general meaning, to the research question and forming clusters of themes. This was completed by first printing out the ‘Coding Summary by Node Report’ produced through NVivo 11 and manually reviewing the nodes as collections of units of general meaning. I placed the ‘Coding Summary by Node Report’ in a three-hole binder and used coloured highlighters and Post-it notes to review the nodes for themes. These themes served to make clearer the essence of the phenomenon of rural precarious employment. During this entire process, I remained committed to using the participants’ own words wherever possible.

For example, below is an excerpt from an interview transcript which will be used to demonstrate the analysis process. A participant stated:

\begin{quote}
...\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{34} Defined by Hycner (1985) as, “those words, phrases, non-verbal or para-linguistic communications which express a unique and coherent meaning (irrespective of the research question) clearly differentiated from that which precedes and follows (p. 282).
I mean that's just… it's a larger scale systemic issue as far as the poverty that comes with precarious employment. That can be rough as a woman. That can be really rough as a woman. I mean I think there's a lot of… I think there's a lot of historical bias still like, you know, “I'm not going to hire a woman in to do a management position because she's going to have a family and be off for a year and a half”. Well I mean that's just ridiculous now and doesn't… that's not even… it shouldn't be within that level.

Firstly, units of general meaning were identified which are identified in this instance by italicizing.

I mean that's just… it's a larger scale systemic issue as far as the poverty that comes with precarious employment. That can be rough as a woman. That can be really rough as a woman. I mean I think there's a lot of… I think there's a lot of historical bias still like, you know, “I'm not going to hire a woman in to do a management position because she's going to have a family and be off for a year and a half”. Well I mean that's just ridiculous now and doesn't… that's not even… it shouldn't be within that level.

Next those units of general meaning were coded using the nodes:

- Being female in the workforce
- Living in poverty
- Work impacts in family life
- Advancement opportunities in the workforce

Which contributed to the emergence of the themes of:
• Self-View
  o Experiences with self-views during rural precarious employment
• Financial
  o Experiences with finances during rural precarious employment
• Social
  o Experiences of socializing during rural precarious employment
• Systems
  o Experiences navigating systems during rural precarious employment

Upon completing the theme emergence, I reread the interview transcripts, my coding notes, and my field notes. I referenced the initial ideas and reflections captured in the field and preformed another pass of coding. When I felt satisfied that the units of general meaning and nodes were articulated, I began preparing my findings.

4.5 Summary

Turning to the nature of lived experiences, exploring the phenomenon, analyzing, and teasing out the essence were not undertaken in isolation or through a linear process. Figure 2 emphasizes that I, as the phenomenological researcher, was engaged in the writing and reflection process throughout the process of analysis and this certainly resonates with the phenomenological process undertaken within this exploratory research project. The process of analysis for this exploratory research project began with coding and emerged as an ongoing interaction between myself as a researcher, the participants, transcribed interviews, and field notes (Appendix 5). I began by following the plan for analysis outlined in the previous section. The results of this analysis are presented in the following findings and discussion chapters.
5 FINDINGS

This section reports project findings. The section begins with a summary of each participant and continues with the emergent themes of financial, health, self-view, social, and systems.

5.1 Participant Introductions

The following summaries present participants involved in this exploratory research project. The participants are identified by the pseudonyms assigned to them shortly after the interviews were transcribed and are listed alphabetically. Participant age, sex, and current work status are listed in italics for reference. The participant’s own words are used whenever possible.

5.1.1 Andy

46, Male, Unincorporated self-employment with no paid help and low wage work

“My mom was unfortunately one of those people caught in that vicious cycle of poverty. I witnessed that growing up and I wanted that to change in my life, I didn’t want to be a poverty statistic. I worked hard, I got married, I had children, I was doing fine. Then, one day, I had a heart attack and I couldn’t work. Then suddenly, almost overnight, I found myself in need of social assistance. I wouldn’t accept that at first. It was my pride. My wife, and my friends said, ‘you just got to go apply’. All our bills were piling up and we were sinking quickly. So that was a huge thing for me. A huge mental thing. I said I would never go on assistance because my mom was on it. And then, I did. I fit into that ugly profile of generational poverty and I felt ashamed”. Andy now earns money by doing a
series of odd jobs in his rural community, like housecleaning, grass cutting and dishwashing.

5.1.2 Bianca

31, Female, Contract work

“I’m a grant writer, I also am an administrator, I also build websites, I used to run an Airbnb, so even the work that I’m doing isn’t totally related to each other, which is kind of funny. I like that because it’s cool for personality development and it keeps your brain flexible but it’s also kind of hard because the cost of living rises but the opportunities don’t grow with that. I have a Master’s degree in Art History. I would say the take away from my Master’s degree is that I can read and write and talk and perform at a very high level – that’s it. The actual meat of what I spent many decades learning, I don’t use that every day. A lot of my work now is marketing, which is totally an art I’ve just taught myself. So that’s kind of interesting, I have no formal training but it’s how I make most of my income”.

5.1.3 Christine

58, Female, Contract work

“I did a lot of sales previously, and business development, I took a little Canadian company to the US market. [I had] a really gung-ho, crazy lifestyle for quite a number of years, but I was a single mom, I had to do what I had to do, I was successful in putting two kids through university. One has two degrees and the other one has three degrees, and so I feel happy that I was able to do that for them. I’ve been fortunate that I’ve been able to pull together my experience and do some really interesting projects… but the reality is, these positions are all based on funding. And so…one does not know for sure
whether there will be more work in that realm. So, it requires a constant hustling of myself to find different organizations within the community that are putting forth contracts”.

5.1.4 Cindy

48, Female, Low wage work

Cindy moved to a rural community in Ontario from the United Kingdom and "didn't really realize how precarious the employment situation is in this area". She explained, “my now ex-husband got a job locally in one of the other villages and got let go after six months and found it really really hard to find alternative employment in this area. He started two businesses and because he didn’t have the expertise in the area that he went into, they failed. Mentally, both my ex-husband and I had a lot of depression and mental health problems around not having enough money through employment to make ends meet. We got into debt. We got within probably a week of losing our house. We were three months behind on our mortgage and somebody gave us a gift to pay off those three months, and that is… it was an amazing blessing. I’m not saying that it wouldn't have happened if we hadn’t been involved in a faith-based organization, but that ‘love gift’ came through our church and it was amazing”. Cindy now raises her two children as a single mother and works a low wage job in her rural community.

5.1.5 Courtney

23, Female, Contract work

At the time of interview, Courtney was "just in the middle of going from a fill-in shift to a full-time position". Courtney explained, “I live with my fiancé and he works too, here and there and we were making ends meet then… at the beginning of January, the restaurant
[where she was working] slowed down, so I stopped working there but then I picked up this full-time fill-in position… I’m doing that plus I have my two clients [as a personal support worker]. So, I see one of them two days a week and I see the other one, one day a week. So, I still have three jobs”.

5.1.6 Denise

48, Female, Low wage work

Denise worked as a cheese maker and suffered a work place injury. Since the injury, she has had difficulty securing stable work. Denise now works a low wage job one day a week, she explained, “we moved in with my daughter because… with my husband’s income it’s just not enough to pay the bills. Our oil bill last month was $2,800. We live in a very old house. It’s not insulated. It’s big, but the daughter… and her husband… and her two kids… and the two of us…[eyebrows raising]. Last fall we had some problems in the family and my oldest daughter, she had to move out of her place and her husband and their five kids moved in with us and her granddaughter. And then my other son and his wife and their six kids moved in with us. We were living in a tent zone. Everybody had sleeping bags in every room. And trying to get groceries and just… struggling”.

5.1.7 Fred

40, Male, Low wage work

When asked what a regular work day looks like, Fred shared, “up until about a month and a half ago, it was waking up sick, coming down here going to see some people down the street and trying to get some pills”. When discussing finding work he explained, “it’s hard to find stuff here, hard to find a place, hard to rent…I spent a night at a Tim Hortons a
month ago”. Fred has hope for future work initiatives which does not include buying or selling drugs, “I was thinking lately, maybe I get a part-time job, especially with minimum wage going up”.

5.1.8 Jenn

48, Female, Contract and low wage work

Jenn identified herself as a farmer and explained that making ends meet on her small-scale operation has become difficult. “For the past four years now, I work off the farm, my farming has actually taken a bit of a back-burner approach. So, I clean houses to make the money and then of course I separated almost four years ago so I had to re-think how I was going to survive”. Jenn explained the difficulty with her farm, “I know there’s lots of funding for all kind of improvements on a farm. ‘Hello’, I need the tractor first and I need a barn, neither of which there is funding for. Those are basic farming infrastructure needs. But once I have my farm built, I can get all kinds of funding to help me design garlic racks or make a certified kitchen or have an eye-wash station. I can get funding for all those, but I can’t get the funding for the barn or for the equipment”.

5.1.9 Jill

29, Female, Contract and low wage work

With work experience from a large urban centre, Jill was “hired in at a higher wage than a lot of people” at her most recent job. After two years of work, she was laid off and now works a low wage contract job. She explained, “you just feel like you’re teetering and then there’s a lot of shame that’s connected to it… a lot of it is trying to keep yourself afloat while trying to not present as it is as desperate of a situation… especially if you’re looking
for work which I always was. So, a lot of resources were put into making it look like I didn’t need the job I was applying for. I’m from a very middle-class working family. I was very used to a working class but a comfortable working class background. I had a very loving family but when I got into the financial state that I did, I had no idea how to talk to them about it. I couldn’t talk to them about it”.

5.1.10 Jim
53, Male, Low wage and involuntary part-time work
“...Raising two children on my own, so my two boys and I moved down here because my dad ended up getting cancer. I was trying to help him out at his place and then eventually, he passed away and just a couple years after that mom passed away, so I just stayed in town. I raised my boys here and after mom my died, the factory where I was working closed, so I picked up odd jobs here and there. Right now, I get subsidized by Ontario Works because I work part-time. Out of my whole $700 cheque, I put $180 of that straight on to my hydro bills. And then they deduct half of my wages so through my Ontario Works, I’m lucky to get a cheque for $400 a month, and people are whining and bitching to bug these people on it, saying, ‘Oh, how they can just sit home and do nothing’, and, no, they can’t sit home and do nothing because they can’t afford to do anything. My friend is on ODSP\textsuperscript{35}. He gets $1,300 a month. And I’m thinking why is that almost double? Like he’s a single male younger than me, he’s on it. He moved back to his

parents’, so I know he’s not paying rent. He doesn’t pay hydro. I got to pay all this shit. You know”.

**5.1.11 Joan**

*52, Female, Involuntary part-time and low wage work*

“I found some part-time jobs doing house cleaning, and that was about all I could find. I did some yard work for a couple of years. But I mean it’s such little money, you know, and when you have children, it just doesn’t cut it. Every year I ask myself, how will I make it through this winter? My husband sometimes on the weekend, if something stresses him out, he’ll buy himself a case of beer and he’ll drink you know. It’s just something that… that’s how he deals with it… he’ll drink. I’ll sit at night and have a few tears and suck it up because it doesn’t do any difference, but you know, that’s the way it goes”.

**5.1.12 Lindsay**

*37, Female, Contract work*

Lindsay has “a significantly more grounded feeling of home than the average person”. She explained, “the property that I live on (I live right beside my parents and my aunts and my uncles), the property that we live on has been in my family since anybody has owned the property, like we have the deed from King George”. Lindsay is a single mom raising her son in her home community. Lindsay explained, “I’ve been working [at a non-profit in the home community] for 17 years and for probably 15 of those, I’ve had the same contract position. So, the opportunity for advancement, so to speak, is not necessarily great”.
5.1.13 Liz

55, Female, Low wage work

Liz described experiencing personal challenges (including the death of her daughter, her son’s disability, her divorce, her post-traumatic stress disorder, and her addiction) that she feels keep her from maintaining standard employment. “I’m a recovering alcoholic myself. Right now, my main concern is debating on what day to go to the food bank this week or if I can hold out until Monday”. Liz currently receives Ontario Works benefits and works odd jobs (such as cleaning hotel and motel rooms). She explained, “sometimes I feel like I failed myself. I failed my kids. But then I think no you didn’t. You did the best you could. And that’s all you can do, right”.

5.1.14 Margaret

63, Female, Low wage work

Margaret has been working in customer support for a small non-governmental organization in her rural community for seven years, "sometimes I feel frustrated, like with any job. There’s frustration. But I really like my job because… it’s a good feeling to help people and 99% of the people are really appreciative of it". Margaret began working outside the home after raising her children. Margaret explained, "I’m kind of making up for what I missed when I was home with the kids. I mean not that I regretted it all. It’s just that it’s nice to have a different focus on things now that my kids are grown up. [My husband] did a lot of jobs...he used to drive transit but because he’s diabetic, and had some health issues with his heart, he gave that up about a year and a half ago. He’s at
home and I think he would probably really like it if I was at home with him all day because he gets a little lonely sometimes”.

5.1.15 Rod

60, Male, Contract and low wage work

Rod works in logging and explained, “in the summer, we work quite a bit. Like anywhere from 60 to 70 hours a week. And this winter I could have worked most of the winter, but I can’t handle the winters too much anymore. Now, I’ve been phoning [my boss] every day and they haven’t got nothing right now, eh, because they can’t log right now because it’s too wet and there’s no snow to be removed so we’re kind of all laid off right now waiting for it to dry up a bit”. Despite the precarious work, Rod and his girlfriend are, “looking for a place right now. We live at a rooming place. So, we’re trying to look for a two-bedroom apartment”.

5.1.16 Samantha

42, Female, Contract and low wage work

“I’m doing a maternity leave right now. I feel like I’m a professional mat leave cover. It won’t last forever and whenever I’m unemployed, I pull out my fitness card and I can at least work until I find something”. As a result of her experiences with precarious employment Samantha explained, “I get really upset when people strike. I’m like, ‘Hello, what’s the point?’ No one has that. You’re hanging on, you know, forever to something nobody else gets. So, I have no sympathy for you. I have never, ever had it. I don’t have benefits. I don’t have vacation. I don’t have anything, and I have no pension coming to me. And that’s all been from having to bounce from job to job because of all the changes...”
to funding. I worked in social services once and everything was dependent on at March 31st, every year on March 31st, they’d let me know if I was still working. Stressful, you know what I mean?".

5.1.17 Stephanie

25, Female, Contract work

Stephanie is trained as an addiction counsellor and “can't get anything full-time”. She explained, “I've only ever had casual, contract or like less than 20 hours”. Stephanie is the only adult earning wages in her household and explained, “I'm never working less than two [jobs]. Sometimes I'm working up to four at a time because my partner’s in school…I also don’t have benefits anywhere… I'm here because I love the job and that’s why I do it, but it makes it very financially straining when you see retail jobs or something that I was doing in high school, hiring for the same amount I'm making after college”. She explained, “there’s a lot of embarrassment, to be honest, because sometimes I have to ask my parents for money and I'm 25 with a kid living on my own and I'm still like, ‘Hey, can you spot me 20 bucks for gas?’ Because it's so pay cheque to pay cheque and the whole reason my parents pushed me through college was to make sure that I didn’t live pay cheque to pay cheque. And it's like no matter… like I'm going to have to go back and upgrade yet again”.

5.1.18 Tara

42, Female, Low wage work

Tara “wrote the user manuals for Blackberry”. She explained, “as we know, Blackberry got a little ahead of itself and I was over 35 at the time, which sort of marks you for death
in a place like that”. When Tara was no longer employed full-time, she used temporary agencies to bridge the gap between employment. “They want to ensure that you’ve got full-time availability and access to reliable transportation. There’s no guarantee that you’re going to get any hours. It’s as close to a zero hours contract as you get”. While working precariously and seeking more stable employment, Tara’s mom became ill. “My mom got her diagnosis that she was terminal and because I was the female single eldest kid nearest by, I was awarded full-time family caregiver. I found in quick succession that there was no way you can have any kind of an outside job under those circumstances…I wasn’t meeting my bills, so I had to file for bankruptcy, and we were dependent on Cancer Society volunteers for transportation and a lot of that stuff. She died five years ago and…I was effectively homeless. She had been on Ontario Disability, so, yeah, there was no estate”. Tara now works odd jobs in her rural community and is on Ontario Works.

5.1.19 Tricia

23. Female, Involuntary part-time and low wage work

Tricia moved to a nearby city for a short time after completing an undergraduate degree in social work. She moved back to her parents’ house because of financial constraints. She now works part-time at Bulk Barn and explained, “my parents are pretty chill about me sticking around”. Tricia continued, “it is kind of frustrating to go through. It’s like a part-time job to look for a job, because you need to look up stuff online…and then, finding a job where you at least have most of the qualifications and you think you might actually have a chance, it’s like you got to find those. And then once you find those, then it’s like, you know, you got to make your cover letter and you got to, you know, try to look up some
stuff online and make sure you’re addressing it to the right person, and like you look at the job descriptions and you want to like throw in some phrases in there that they put in their job description so that they’re like, ‘oh, this girl, she’s legit’, you know, and stuff like that… all while working”.

5.2 Emerging Themes

By undertaking the process of analysis described in the previous section, the following five themes emerged, each a collection of nodes identified through units of general meaning.

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<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
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<th>SELF-VIEW</th>
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<td>Experiences of health during rural precarious employment</td>
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<td>Nodes</td>
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Table 3 Themes emerging from the analysis of individual interviews.
Themes emerging from this analysis on the experience of rural precarious employment are presented in table form above but are not experienced in isolation. The five identified themes are experiences related to financial, health, self-view, social, and systems. Within each theme are nodes emerging from the coded units of general meaning. A discussion of each theme is below.

5.2.1 Financial

Experiences with finances during rural precarious employment

5.2.1.1 Living in poverty

Poverty underscores the experiences of participants precariously employed in rural Ontario. As participants recounted their experiences, few used the term 'precarious employment', most instead described being poor. Participants used the examples of low income levels, difficulty accessing services, and the cost of accessing resources as experiences of living in poverty while working precariously in rural Ontario. Feelings of exhaustion, disenfranchisement, and hopelessness permeated the experiences recounted. Tara summarized the experience of poverty this way,

People twist themselves into pretzels trying to define or quantify poverty, but at the bottom of it, it's no income. You need income. Income is your housing. Income is your food. Income is your health.

For some participants, the experience of poverty related directly to the amount of income earned while working precariously. The following experience was recounted by Liz,
I barely made minimum wage and I was the kind of person that was happy to be working and took pride in what I did. It didn’t matter what it was. I was a housekeeper. I cleaned hotel, motel rooms. Like so what. I have a job, right?

Despite working full-time hours Liz described how, “at one point, I had to decide between heat and hydro, and I chose the heat because I figured we could layer up, cover up”. She continued by explaining,

…that’s just the way it was. And you’re trying to do the best you can, and people don’t know how exhausting it is. You got to get up, you got to get lunches made. You’re thinking oh my God…do I have anything to put in their lunch? Do we have any bread? I mean you can go to a food bank but in all reality, sometimes it’s really difficult to get to the food bank, and not only that, you’re not always getting food that’s actually edible.

Cindy described, “the financial aspects were devastating because the money was just not here to be able to support... we scraped and scrimped”. Exhaustion was expressed by some participants continuously on the cusp of financial disaster. Joan stated,

We’ve never been able to get a cushion. My cushion is my mother. That is the truth. When I’m out of money, and I have no options, I have to call for help because I don’t want to lose my home.
Some participants articulated that financial strain makes future planning difficult. Jill shared, “you might know what you need two days from now, but the more life becomes pay cheque to pay cheque and day to day, the smaller your view becomes about the future”.

Some participants living in poverty expressed disenfranchisement and described feeling left behind by the very social system they thought was meant to support them in times of financial difficulty. Denise explained her experience of not being able to find or access public programs to help her navigate out of poverty while working precariously, There wasn’t a lot we could do because my husband works. And as soon as you work, there are no things that help out. They all come at you and say you’re not eligible for this program. If you’re on ODSP, you could get it. You’re eligible for ODSP but since your husband works, you can’t get it.

The idea of being punished by publicly funded support programs (and the systems that administer them) for working precariously, instead of being unemployed, arose in this exploratory research project and led multiple participants to express the wonder, ‘is it just better to be unemployed’?

Experiences of low income and not qualifying for publicly funded support programs are experienced in rural and urban areas, however, there are experiences with poverty associated with living in a rural place provided by participants. Examples relate to the procurement of resources and the cost of acquiring services. Joan explained,
Because we live in the country, that’s where we lose out on our hydro. We had to use heaters; we couldn’t afford the oil. We had the wood stove for heating most of the house, but in the basement where our furnace is and our pipes… I put a heater downstairs. Because we used that heater the one year, our hydro bill was almost $600 for one month.

The distance to services and cost of services in rural areas were expressed as challenges faced by participants. Some other experiences of poverty while working precariously are related to navigating the rural economy.

5.2.1.2 Navigating the rural economy

Participants identified a changing rural economy as influencing their experiences with rural precarious employment. Changes to farming, failed promises of new developments, and an increase in the cost of living are examples of experiences identified by participants as being associated with the rural economy and contributing to precarious employment. Related to farming, Jenn explained,

Where I live, farming has changed a lot in the 28 years. I mean, we’ve lost all the dairy farmers, there’s none on my road anymore. Fields have grown up or farms have gotten bigger… so fields are rented out.

Lindsay explained how failed promises of new rural developments meant less access to employment opportunities,
For years and years and years after the Tim Horton’s went up on the highway there’s been rumour that there’s going to be a Canadian Tire and there’s going to be another grocery store, which of course has never yet come about.

Related to increases in costs of living, Lindsay frustratingly recounted, “proportionately they’re still high. Our cost of living is high because of the transportation costs. Our grocery store is not inexpensive”.

Lindsay described experiences with the underground economy when discussing the navigation of rural precarious employment. Sometimes, the connection to the underground economy is informal, “it’s $125 but if you pay cash it’s only $100… that sort of thing happens all the time”. Other times, as expressed by Jill, the experience is more cyclical,

When you start working in an informal economy, it keeps you in an informal economy. And then if you do manage to get that identification and you can, cash at a cheque cashing place, you can’t open a bank account because you might have your wages garnished once you start getting regular wages. So even if you do have an account that’s open, it might actually be less beneficial because you didn’t file your taxes on time three years ago because you didn’t have a fixed address where you got your T4s. So, I start working this new job but then I’m getting $200 garnished off my wages every pay cheque. Well then, it’s not worth working the job anymore, right?
5.2.2 Health

Experiences of health during rural precarious employment

5.2.2.1 Mental health in the workforce

Participants expressed dynamic interplay between rural precarious employment and mental health. Participants gave examples of mental health struggles being both the cause of rural precarious employment and the outcome of working precariously in rural Ontario. In some instances, precarious employment is the only type of employment obtainable for a participant struggling with their mental health. Managing anxiety, depression, and addiction has stopped some participants from being able to obtain or maintain the employment of their choice. Fred, for example, shared his struggle with addiction and expressed the challenge he faces finding housing while managing his drug dependency and working precariously, “the only places that are in my price range are full of drug addicts”. The stress of managing a mental health issue, coupled with the lack of benefits and supplemental insurance available to individuals working precariously, and the lack of mental health supports in rural Ontario, can create a cycle of mental health struggles and precarious employment.

Some participants also expressed that working precariously negatively impacts their mental health. Jill related her sense of identity to her experience of rural precarious employment and expressed that she felt a sense of failure, “it’s interpreted as a personal failing as opposed to a failing in there being stable employment or a failure in just accessing employment”. The experience of working precariously also created a sense of
identity loss for some participants, for example, Samantha explained, “there’s a part of me that feels kind of lame that I have nothing to say I am”.

Stress is one component of mental health that was raised by participants. There are stressful situations created because of rural precarious employment both in the labour environment, and at home. Samantha described a labour environment where, “one person is expected to do three people’s jobs…everyone’s expected to be maxed out, stressed out”. Joan explained that at home, “it does stress you out and sometimes you get a little short-tempered. You get upset…some nights I’ve sat and cried when everyone’s gone to bed because I can’t do it”.

Participants identified there is a need for more supports for rural individuals dealing with mental health struggles. Andy explained, “you have to figure out how you manage, otherwise you get depressed and that vicious cycle of depression then leads into addictions, bad behaviours, and anger”.

5.2.2.2 Physical health in the workforce

Physical health impacts of rural precarious employment manifest differently for different individuals. For some participants, the sporadic scheduling of precarious work causes negative health experiences, as Tara explained,

The topsy turvy of going in, working overnights all weekend and then sort of having to become a daytime person again for four or five days and then back into the weekend, I did that for four months, it wreaked absolute havoc on me.
For others, the physical tasks required of them when getting to work and while at work were exhausting, Liz explained, “I walked five miles every day to go to work; 2.6 miles one way and 2.6 miles home and then I had to basically stand… you’re on your feet at my job”. Other participants expressed not being able to take time away from work when they are sick, Samantha summarized it succinctly, “I have no security. If I'm sick, I lose money”.

Further to the impacts of precarious work on physical health, there are physical health trade-offs identified by participants related to food. Cindy recounted, “there were times we didn’t eat very healthily because cheap food is not as healthy…we grew our own vegetables and we could not have eaten more cheaply”. There are also trade-offs made around basic physical needs, Liz made it clear, “I had to decide between heat and hydro”.

5.2.2.3 Physical safety in the workforce

Participants articulated experiences with unsafe precarious rural work environments. Tara explained that working alone and feeling unsafe on the job was a regular experience, “as an overnight security guard… you kind of hope that Joe Criminal out there doesn’t figure out that there is one middle-aged female minimum wage security guard running the whole show from dusk ‘til dawn”. Denise explained how a lack of training resulted in physical injury, “I just pulled the plug and went flying into the wall, knocked me cold, burnt my eyebrows off, burnt my hair off. I was out for ten minutes”.

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Safety concerns about getting to rural precarious jobs were also articulated by participants. Transportation to and from work in a rural area without a personal vehicle was explained as a concern by Tara who said, “I did a lot of four kilometer walk home through the industrial park at midnight… there’s no sidewalk out there so you know, you’ve got tractor trailer tires going past you five feet away”. Participants expressed the danger of navigating long distances in rural areas at night, Liz explained, “it doesn’t really matter if you’re a man or a woman because it’s not safe…if you’re alone, you’re more of a target”. Traveling long distances to work by car was a physical safety concern for Andy who explained “you travel a lot of road kilometers in various weather”; the impact of weather is made more dangerous on rural roads that are not always well maintained.

5.2.3 Self-View

Experiences with participant views of themselves during rural precarious employment

5.2.3.1 Aging in the workforce

Age was a factor in how rural precarious employment was experienced by participants. Both older and younger workers reported experiencing particular benefits and drawbacks to working precariously in a rural community. Older workers described the feeling of being ‘aged out’ of the labour market. As Christine stated, “there’s a discrimination with the older people”. Jim related the discrimination to physical capabilities and said,

You get to be like me, at 53, not too many people want to take you back on. Like I can’t roof anymore, I can’t do any of that. So, now I work at the pizzeria, been there 15 years, but part-time.
Also noted by older participants is the mismatch between skills and needs in the workplace. Samantha explained, “when I was young, I was always able to get jobs that no one else really could get without the credentials or anything”. One barrier to obtaining work, expressed by some older participants is not knowing how or where to look for employment opportunities because of technological barriers. Rod explained,

I don’t know how the people can get more informed about [jobs]. Like nobody [puts] ads in the paper no more. There’s nothing to look at in the paper for a job because not too many people do that anymore because everyone’s computerized now. Everybody goes online looking for it.

There was an expressed concern about financing future needs by older participants. Christine explained,

There are the people that have retired with pensions and there’s the people that have retired without pensions. So, the people that are retiring with pensions, I think are all doing the same thing…they have the luxury of certain levels of stability that maybe the others don’t have.

When discussing precarious workers, like herself, who are 55 and older, Christine articulated,

We don’t care to have the crazy great salaries that we had when we were in our glory days but working for $14.00 an hour isn’t really something that we really want to do either. It won’t sustain us, then it puts us under stress if we’re trying to extend
our working years so that when we do retire, we still have funds to take us through whatever those remaining years are because we’re all living longer and healthier than we ever have in history.

Concern for future protections is where the experience of older and younger participants converged. Jill expressed concern about the future by articulating,

One of the most striking things, to me, was seeing how deeply in poverty you can be when you retire on OAS\(^{36}\) and CPP\(^{37}\) and you have no business pension. And I think about the majority of the people in this space like people my age, when they retire, they’re still working in the conditions that they’re working here now, they won’t have anything, right? They will be on OAS and CPP. So, you have spent your whole life basically trying to balance and make ends meet to… to retire into poverty. It sounds very… it’s not very hopeful.

### 5.2.3.2 Attaining goals at work

Participants discussed goal-setting and goal-attainment at work, both in relation to the work they currently do, and their aspirations outside of their current role(s). It can be easy to assume that individuals working precariously are working towards the same goals, but the expressed desires related to work were as unique as the individual participants. Some participants expressed a dissatisfaction with the work they are

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\(^{36}\) Old Age Security (https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/publicpensions/cpp/old-age-security.html)

\(^{37}\) Canadian Pension Plan (https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/publicpensions/cpp.html)
currently doing and desired a change in industry all together. For example, Jenn, working precariously as a house cleaner said, “I’d really rather farm. I’d rather have my chickens and maybe even a couple of cows”. Courtney was seeking work that has a more permanent schedule, for her, a “Monday to Friday 8:30am - 4:30pm” job was her goal. For Christine, a work-related goal does not yet exist, she explained, “it’s hard for me to think about what it is for sure that I really want to do because it doesn’t exist, that I’m aware of”. Other participants are attempting to turn the precariousness of their current work into a new opportunity. Bianca’s reflection led to the rhetorical question, “what do I have to lose?" – she explained,

I’ve literally lost everything... I’ve had jobs, I’ve changed jobs, I’ve lost jobs, I grew a business, I got rid of the business… now I’m at a point where I’m about to have the confidence to do this [business venture], I couldn’t have been this person four years ago.

While some participants viewed living in a rural community a barrier to their goal setting, Samantha offered a story as a reflection on goal setting at work in relation to retail jobs in the rural labour force. She explained,

I was talking to this girl and she’s my age and she works full-time at Pharma Plus and I always see her at Pharma Plus and I said, ‘Oh, do you work full-time there?’ And she says, ‘Oh yeah. I was so lucky. I did my co-op in high school there and then it just worked out that when I was done high school they offered me a full-time job and I said, hell yes and I’ve been there ever since.’ And she’s so happy
and proud of it. Now she has benefits and vacation and she doesn’t make minimum wage. It’s a little bit above. But if I was living in Toronto, I don’t think I would have a friend who was doing their co-op at the local drugstore to be on cash and excited for their life to have a Pharma Plus full-time job and think you made it.

5.2.3.3 Being female in the workforce

Examples of sexism permeate the narratives shared by female participants experiencing rural precarious employment. From frustrating experiences with the job-finding process, as exemplified by Tara who said, “I go in and interview and they see middle-aged female when they’re really looking for strapping young guys…so I got the message” to the expectation of earning lower wages, as articulated Cindy who shared, “I think that women have been prepared to take the lower paying jobs”; precarious employment is experienced differently by women. Joan surmised, “it sounds terrible, but this is still a man’s world. When certain things need to be done, you talk to the man”. Some experiences shared by women showed increased stress related to the traditional role of a woman in rural Ontario. Childrearing, for example, is made more difficult when working precariously. Liz shared, “I was working 14 days in a row and you just can’t do it when you have children too”. Further examples of strain experienced by women were emotional burdens because of their husbands’ precarious work. Joan gave a story as an example, she recounted,

At one point [my husband] was working 12-hour days and then over the winter months it slows down to 8-hour days and losing that four hours a day, you know, four times five is 20 hours. There’s 20 hours of pay that you don’t have any more.
And it does impact you. You know, you watch your groceries. You watch whatever you have. Like I say, I need another vehicle, so does my husband but at the same time, we have to wait ‘til our finances get a little bit better before we could start looking for something. And of course, it won’t be brand new. It’ll be used.

Some female participants shared experiences of challenging the antiquated role of the woman in their rural community. Lindsay, for example, described her experience leaving her husband because of precarious employment, “with my husband being self-employed, I’ve pretty much been used to carrying the load. So, it didn’t have a huge financial impact on me without him around”.

Jenn explained leaving her husband of 20 years,

I’ve always been strong, things just got derailed, back on track now, doing it on my own, I don’t need anybody’s help. I’ll pay for it, that’s the way I look at it. I’m very much a feminist. You can do this, you can do this.

5.2.3.4 Identifying successes while working precariously

Despite the overwhelmingly negative stories of work experiences shared by participants, there were some stories of success associated with work being done precariously in rural Ontario. For some, identifying success is a way to assert optimism during a difficult work experience. Stephanie captured the ‘silver-lining’ of her job through sharing a success story. She is working a precarious job in the health care sector and enjoys the work because she finds value in the help she can provide her clients. The
challenge for her is the rate of pay and the number of hours she is contractually able to work, she explained,

I know tonight this person is sleeping inside for the first time. You don’t get that at the other minimum wage jobs. Hence, while I’m not working 40 hours a week, I’m still here. I’d rather struggle through it and not be miserable every day than do something that I hate.

Other participants have created work that works for them. Andy shared, “I started doing house cleaning and rental, vacation rental cleaning, which I love, because you go in, you do it, you leave, and it looks great”. Courtney described how working precariously led her to a full-time job. She explained, “I’m just in the middle of going from a fill-in shift to a full-time position. I start soon in the full-time position, which is unionized and all that. I’m really excited”.

5.2.3.5 Returning to school

The assumption that increased education translates to stable work has led to individuals working precariously being told (by well-meaning individuals including friends, family, and employment counsellors) to ‘just go back to school’. Participants expressed not being able to afford to return to school, Tara gave the example of a recent attempt to further her education, she said, “I looked at going into studying health informatics and found out the ‘ghosts’ of student loans past were between me and a new career”. Not obtaining the credentials desired by rural employers is another barrier between returning to school and a person employed precariously in rural Ontario. Stephanie shared, “I have
to go and upgrade yet again because even if I had my university, they're like, 'and we want your college'. So now instead of one, it's now they want both because it's so competitive around here". These compounding factors have led some participants to be disenfranchised with the whole idea of returning to school when living in a rural community. Lindsay said,

Over the years I tossed around the idea of going back to school to get my Master's, but knowing that I’m here and that I'm not going anywhere else, I haven’t taken that plunge because I think that’s a whole lot of money that’s not necessarily going to bring me any advantage. So that has impacted my own choices there, because why would I spend $50,000 to do something that is not going to put me in any better a position than I am now, other than it would be really fun to go back to school.

5.2.3.6 Unexpected life events

Experiencing unexpected life events led some participants into precarious employment in rural Ontario. For Andy, the unexpected life-threatening illness of a spouse, coupled with their own health complications, moved standard employment out of the realm of possibility as he explained,

I had a heart attack in April and then my wife discovered a brain tumour in the end of August. By January of that year... she went from being a loving caring mother of seven and a wife to myself, to not being able to function.
Some individuals unexpectedly relocated to rural Ontario to care for a family member. Samantha shared, “I have an aunt here who is aging and she’s alone and I don’t want her to be alone”. For others, unexpected life events take the shape of financial instability, requiring unplanned supplementary income. Cindy gave the example of a life event as common as fixing a vehicle, “I haven’t got any money to buy food because I’ve had to pay for car repairs”. Sometimes, the financial instability is related to the industry in which the person is working. Jenn took up off-farm work after a bad growing season, “I lost two years of income, so I have to rebuild that and pay all my expenses regardless whether I had a crop failure or not”.

5.2.4 Social

Social experiences during rural precarious employment

5.2.4.1 Identifying supports

Participants identified supports they rely on to mitigate the negative impacts of rural precarious employment. Some supports identified took the form of programs offered publicly such as Ontario Works (OW) or the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), but those supports were articulated as having short-comings, such as not providing enough funds, and being difficult to access. Jim articulated, “ODSP, you can apply all you want. They turn everybody down so I’m fighting with them now. I’m already five months into the battle with them”. Paired with the difficulty associated with obtaining social

38 Participants were critical of these programs and spoke of them in absolute terms. Explanations of experiences participants had with these programs are outlined in the section relating to experiences with poverty.
benefits, Jill explained that “if you apply for OW or ODSP you are immediately referred to the food bank”. It was clear from the tone and content of responses, that the current public supports offered to help mitigate the negative impacts of rural precarious employment were perceived by participants as inadequate. Tara summarized, “people realize that the government or a system isn’t there to save them and you do see more cooperation. You do see more neighbours looking out for neighbours and stuff, imperfectly, but it’s there”. Samantha explained, “it’s all community people getting together and doing it for each other… it’s not any help from funding or any programs that are established”. The supports described most vividly by participants and articulated as being most important came from family members, individuals in the community, and social groups.

Participants identified experiences of support from groups common in rural communities like faith-based groups, social clubs, neighbours, and members of their industry. The faith-based organization identified in the interviews was a Christian church. Andy stated, “for us, our church was a good support and is a good support”, there are examples of church members helping to secure housing and find work. Margaret summarized her experience as a reflection on the importance of a church community as a support for those experiencing precarious employment in a rural community,

I know that being associated with the church is not everybody’s cup of tea, so… there’s not that background there that a lot of people have. And some people, especially if they’ve come to a small area from a larger town, they don’t really… I don’t think that they really realize that there is that, you know connection that they can make if they just sort of put their self forward.
The following story about support from members of the agricultural community was shared by Andy, he recounted,

I would meet farmers. They would come in and they would bring me in a little bushel of potatoes or a bushel of carrots, or they would say ‘do your kids eat lettuce’? Well, all of a sudden, I'll have five heads of lettuce there, because they know that I struggle. Even though I get paid really well…I still struggle because it’s just a two-day a week job.

Jill articulated how she joined a social club in her rural community in order to benefit from the physical resources it offered. She explained,

I got involved with the theatre so even things like, you know, you have no hydro in your home, okay, so I'm going to go to the theatre and get ready in their makeup room so that I can go out to my job interview and look okay.

Samantha, who moved from Toronto to a rural community so that she might care for an aging family member, described how the new rural community embraced her and provided support when she herself had to undergo medical care,

When I lived in Toronto I was not physically doing well. I was working from home. I had a broken hip and I was travelling around in a wheelchair. No one helped me. No one helped me. I'm struggling. You don't realize how hard it is to get up the slightest incline and your own neighbours walk right by you even though you're trying to get your kid to school. And here, I wake up to my neighbours who don't
even know me, weeding my garden after I have a surgery. ‘I thought you wouldn’t be able to do it.’ You know, people coming down the street, ‘my extension is blah if you need me to read you a book or something if you’re bored,’ you know… so it’s really nice here.

Stories of support from families were extensive and emotional. They include experiences of support with everything from housing and childcare to everyday expenses. Participants shared stories of moving back in with family (both children moving back with parents, and parents moving in with children) when housing was not within financial reach because of precarious work. Cindy explained the process of her and her then-husband working precariously,

We moved out from my dad’s. We stayed there for ten months, he had supported us in that time. We bought the house, had a mortgage and we could not make ends meet. So all the savings went and we had nothing left. And I had to go to the food bank and I never ever thought that I would be in that position.

Joan explained relying on family for childcare was her only option, “looking after a baby was kind of hard because unless you had family close here who can do it, there wasn’t a lot… you couldn’t afford day care for a little girl”. She explained her experience relying on family support,

I have a mother who’s 88 years old. Fortunately, she has a good pension plan, she’s a schoolteacher, I’ll be honest. I had no pride. I had to go and ask her for help on several occasions. And it’s because… as she said, she’s got the money
to help me and she will... it’s not something you, you know... you’re, what, 60 years old and you’re borrowing money from your 88-year-old mother because your mortgage is due, and you have no money. But you do it. So, it’s hard.

5.2.4.2 Scheduling in the workforce

Scheduling in the workforce was identified by participants as being a struggle brought on because of rural precarious employment. Managing different tasks at work, consistently looking for more work, and not having their situation understood by other workers were three distinct set of experiences expressed by participants.

The struggle to balance the many moving parts at work was articulated clearly by Stephanie when she said, “I feel like I’m being torn in 100 different directions” while working precariously. Not being subject to workplace protections made some participants feel like they could not say no to tasks being asked of them, for fear of being replaced at work, Jim conveyed, “one person’s going to do four jobs instead of having two or three people do those four jobs”. At the same time, constantly being on the lookout for another job was a difficulty expressed by participants. Stephanie stated, “I keep an eye open. I’m constantly applying for jobs. I’m keeping an eye out” and Tricia explained, “I started looking for work again related to social work. So I’ve been looking for like almost a month now I guess, and haven’t heard anything yet, which is kind of frustrating”. For some individuals, the uncertainty of contract renewal makes scheduling an immediate financial challenge. Stephanie explained her experience navigating contracts with her employer,

They’d say, ‘we’re going to give you a three-month contract and in three months
you might not have a job. You might. We’ll find out’. Three months comes and goes and it’s like, ‘Okay. We’re going to give you another month and then at the end of the month we’ll decide if you have a job.’ And it’s frustrating and stressful to not know if I can pay next month’s rent… I’ve got two pay cheques guaranteed and then I’m done. And I think that’s what’s frustrating.

For some, working from home alleviates some tension, Christine explained, “fortunately, with my contracts I can work from home, I don’t have to be in the office all the time so that helps”. For some individuals, the stress of scheduling could be alleviated by a wage increase. Stephanie articulated this feeling by saying,

I wish I could just quit everything else and focus on what I love to do…but financially I can’t. And that’s where I get so frustrated, because if I just made a few dollars more an hour… I wouldn’t have to work 15 or 14-hour days.

In other instances, the limitation comes from the number of hours offered in a contract. Lindsay explained that an increase in the stability of her hours would be most beneficial,

I mean I started out as a part-time person there… depending on funding that’s available, sometimes I got more hours, sometimes I got less hours. I’ve worked full-time. I’ve worked three days a week, and it just has fluctuated over the year.

Participants expressed that the struggle of balancing scheduling needs is not well understood by individuals who are not currently experiencing rural precarious
employment, as summarized by Liz, “it’s really hard for people to understand the logistics of things”.

5.2.4.3 Work impacts in family life

Working precariously in rural Ontario was described by participants as not only impacting their lives, but the lives of their families as well. Stephanie stated, “I feel like I can’t give 100% because I’m working two or three or four other jobs plus being a mom, plus being everything else on top of that”. Participants discussed how working precariously causes stress for their families because of finances and scheduling. Interestingly, female participants often recounted these stresses in relation to their husbands. Cindy recounted, “both my ex-husband and I had a lot of depression and mental health problems”. Courtney articulated, “it was stressful – it did put a lot of stress on the two of us”. Describing the impact of scheduling on the relationship with her significant other, Courtney described, “I was so stressed, here and there and everywhere. We didn’t see each other very often; it was literally in bed, goodnight. In the morning, goodbye”.

Participants made clear that a connection to family informed the decision to stay living in their rural community and work precariously, even if another job was available outside of the rural community. Sometimes, the connection is to a person in the family, like an aging parent, as it was in the case of Jenn who said, “the only thing that would stop me from moving is my aging mom and I’m looking after her”.

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5.2.5 Systems

Experiences navigating systems during rural precarious employment

5.2.5.1 Advancement opportunities in the workforce

Participants expressed difficulty advancing in the workforce when working precariously in rural Ontario. Experiences within the labour environment, and external forces acting on it, led to the challenges expressed by individuals. The labour environment of some participants stunted their opportunity for advancement. Participants gave examples of not being able to advance because employers could not secure resources to pay them. Some participants expressed being in a complacent labour environment with a collective lack of ambition as being limiting. As expressed by Samantha, “all the expectation people probably have over here, other than waking up, is to have a coffee and go back home”. Lack of financial compensation was also noted by participants as inhibiting advancement at work. Stephanie explained, “I make less a month than people on disability do, working, as a working person”. She explained the increase to minimum wage erased the wage dollar amount accrued above minimum wage. Stephanie articulated,

January 1\textsuperscript{st}, 2018 was my three years at [my job] which bumped me into a new pay category. So, I went from $12 to $14 per hour. January 1\textsuperscript{st}, 2018 minimum wage went up to $14 so the three years of seniority that I just put in are now gone.

Similarly, Tara shared how she was performing so well at her job that she was asked to remain in a precarious role, she explained,
I got a job at a call centre…I get on the phones and I’m great on the phones. I’m pulling down 95s and 100s quality scores left, right, and centre. So, they gave me the ‘needs of the business have changed’ and, you know, if I wouldn’t mind just staying on the phones, like forever.

5.2.5.2 Experiencing othering

Participants expressed feelings and experiences of othering. In this context, othering means being left out, targeted, or made to feel less-than by another person or group of people. There are any number of attributes that cause othering (age, education, gender, housing) however, this section does not focus on the attributes (which are themselves topics of other sections in this exploratory research project) but rather targets the experience itself. Denise summarized her experience of othering while working precariously in rural Ontario as, “you feel less than a person. You feel second class. Like you’re the dirt on somebody’s feet”.

Othering is experienced by individuals working precariously in rural Ontario when they are unable to access parts of a system. Tara experienced this within the financial system and recounted,

There is no steadiness, you know. I think that’s probably the worst thing about precarity. You know, your energy and your time are in demand, but you can’t for example, get a mortgage. You can’t get auto financing. You can’t.

Not being able to get a mortgage or auto financing stops the person who is working precariously from accessing the housing and transportation required, often keeping the
individual in a cycle of precariousness. Another experience centres around accessing support programs. Cindy explained her experience accessing a food bank,

They [food banks] were made to feel uncomfortable. They [food bank volunteers] are scrutinizing all your income and expenditure and, on every visit... they ask for your income statement. Whether it's a job or ODSP\(^\text{39}\) or Ontario Works, and then they want your rent receipts, your heat and hydro bills, your phone bill, and any other pertinent outgoings that you have.

This kind of othering experience is articulated as being harmful to the dignity of the person and can be stressful. Jill summarized one outcome of othering in relation to dignity,

I think that’s why a lot of people don’t access those services, because of that demeaning feeling. And people will say, ‘I’d rather starve than go to a food bank.’ And it's very easy for other people to say, ‘Well then I guess you'll starve, you know, if you don’t want to go to a food bank.’ But how dare you say that somebody can't live in dignity the same way that you live in dignity... you have to trade your dignity for your basic needs, that doesn’t make sense.

Adding to the stress of othering is the notion of being marginalised when speaking out about experiences of precarious employment in a rural community. As explained by Jill, who was ostracized in her place of work after publicly sharing her struggle with poverty

in her rural community, “speaking out can be a hindrance. Being public about it can be a hindrance”.

5.2.5.3 Experiencing temporary agencies

Participants shared their experiences working for, as well as their feelings about, temporary agencies. Feelings attributed to temporary agencies were predominantly negative, whether or not the participant worked for one themselves at the time of the interview. For example, Jim stated, “I don’t trust the temporary agencies no matter what” and “they’re making money off people and also basically using them as slaves”. Jill expressed, “temp agencies are the worst in the world, they’re the devil”, and “I don’t understand how they’re still legal”.

Participants with experience working for a temporary agency expressed challenges related to the work performed and their scheduling arrangements. Stephanie expressed not finding jobs suitable to her skillset, “I haven't really found a job through a temp agency that was suitable for my skill set. It's like I'm an addictions counsellor and they're like, ‘Okay. How’s general contracting?’ And I'm like, ‘Not well’”. Jim explained why the scheduling arrangement with a temporary agency was not working for him, “if you don’t answer the call… they cut you off. They don’t call you anymore. You have to sign an agreement that you’re ready and willing to work at any time, day or night, weekends”. 
5.2.5.4 Exploring entrepreneurship

Some participants have explored entrepreneurship as a response to precarious employment. Some started a house cleaning business, others started offering cooking classes, some farmed, while another purchased a restaurant business. Being an entrepreneur in the face of experiencing rural job loss was not easy or rewarding for many individuals. Jill explained, “we have this push to be an entrepreneur, be your own business person… but if you have a lack of work and you’re self-employed, you’ve got nothing. You’re completely afloat. Like there’s nothing”.

Specific challenges experienced by individual participants who have explored entrepreneurship in rural Ontario included financial challenges and resource limitations. The financial burden of being an employer was expressed by Andy who at one time himself was in the role of employer, he said,

Being an employer, you’re responsible for others and when they’re struggling, you’re struggling, and you want to help – so we did. Many of our employees got lots of help from us and we don’t regret it, but it was a burden.

Participants explained experiences dealing with financial instability related to entrepreneurship, Lindsay articulated “it was challenging, particularly in that I had a young family… it was exceptionally stressful at times”. Acquiring the skilled labour needed to move entrepreneurial activities forward were also difficult for some participants. Jenn explained being unable to hire the labourers required for a task on farm, “I hire students for two to three weeks. I can’t afford to hire them longer”. Limited access the reliable
highspeed broadband stopped some entrepreneurial activities before they began. Cindy explained, “my husband was looking at working from home for an organization, but our internet was too slow for him to be able to do it”.

Samantha connected the low wage associated with her rural precarious employment experience to the financial uncertainty associated with entrepreneurship. From her experience, entrepreneurship provides the best of a poor set of options, “I think in the end, it’s the only way. If I’m going to work for that amount of money I might as well run my own show”.

5.2.5.5 Housing situations

Housing was highlighted as a challenge for some participants. Although market home values were understood to be higher in urban Ontario than rural Ontario, the experience of making mortgage payments, paying rent, or establishing reliable housing was expressed as a component of the stress related to working precariously in rural. As Fred stated, “it’s hard to find stuff here, hard to find a place, hard to rent, it’s all high here”. Sometimes, housing was experienced by individuals working precariously as being unstable. Stories of unstable housing were woven into the experiences shared by participants, examples include Fred sharing, “I spent a night at a Tim Horton’s a month ago”, Tara explaining, “I was effectively homeless”, and Lindsay describing “people couch surf, you just kind of cycle around”. There is systemic stress that comes with the insecure housing situation experienced by some individuals working precariously in rural Ontario. Jill explained,
You can't get ID if you don't have a fixed address. You can't have a fixed address unless you have some means to pay for a fixed address. You can't get the means to pay for a fixed address unless you have a fixed address and have ID for the fixed address.

One experience highlighted as a tool to navigate housing insecurity is turning to private supports. Andy shared his housing story,

We also go to a local church and so in that process people retired and wanted to sell their house and they didn’t want it to go to a vacation rental person outside. They knew I was looking for that, but we wanted a house for ourselves and we wanted to be able to have a business out of it, which we can do now. So, we got a house for a fraction of the cost as a result and her lawyer thought she was losing her mind. My lawyer thought there was something wrong because we got a house for a third of what market value was, which is unheard of, but it’s because of our faith and because of who we associated with. The wife worked with me in the kitchen at the church for many years and liked me. The husband and I did lots of different work in the community together, volunteering, and so he liked me before he died. But now she was ready to go to a retirement home and wanted to let go of the house but didn’t want it to go to somebody from outside.

5.2.5.6 Insurance and benefits plans

Access to supplementary insurance and benefits plans is not typically associated with rural precarious employment. Some participants highlighted how their decision-
making was impacted by not having the peace of mind associated with access to supplementary insurance. Jenn shared, “I have no benefits. This is why I’m not divorcing\textsuperscript{40} my husband, because I get at least his health insurance” she continues to explain, “I’m living with my mom and I’m working really hard now so that when she does go, I’m ready to take over the bills…if I break my back or something, then I’m doomed”. At the time of interviewing, no participant had extended benefit packages through any of their employers. Andy had benefits through his employer in a previous role and lost his benefits, he explained,

Benefits are hard. So, in Ontario we’re lucky with OHIP\textsuperscript{41}, but if you have anything above that, you got to pay for it yourself and it’s unattainable for most folks here. And again, before I came here, I had, you know, extra insurance. I had all kinds of stuff. Coming here, you know, I had to let it go because I didn’t have those funds, and you had to readjust your budget.

5.2.5.7 Labour environments

Denise explained, “they really don’t want you co-existing. And they don’t want you fraternizing with the bosses”. This statement captures the type of labour environment described by some participants; a labour environment that keep employees and their

\textsuperscript{40} Italics added for emphasis – separated, but not divorced.

\textsuperscript{41} Ontario Health Insurance Plan; https://www.ontario.ca/page/what-ohip-covers
concerns at bay by favouring employers at the expense of employees. As stated by Samantha, “in the end, all I am is a puppet for a director”.

Andy highlighted the need for precarious employees to self-advocate, “if you don’t have the grit to stand up, then you get rolled over”. With weakened labour unions, this type of individual self-advocacy is described as coming with its own set of challenges. For example, if a worker gets a bad reputation from a rural employer, they may find it difficult to secure future employment in that community, Tara explained, “let it be known that you’re out there talking about what it’s like, and you will never have another assignment in this town again”.

5.2.5.8 Pursuing education

The connection between pursuing education and the experience of rural precarious employment was expressed as frustration by participants. Some participants find themselves frustrated for having acquired a post-secondary education, and still having to work precariously in rural Ontario. Stephanie explained, “I think that’s really frustrating to know that I have to work two or three jobs after college to still not be able to make ends meet”. At the same time, Lindsay explained, “it’s equally as difficult for people who do have a higher skillset and end up here to find employment that they feel is, commensurate with their skill set”. These frustrations relate back to the kinds of jobs available to individuals in rural. Cindy expressed, “they don’t want to move away and what would be the point of them going and getting an education because what would they be coming back to? There’s nothing here for them”.
5.2.5.9 Rural specific experiences

Participants identified rural specific experiences related to an urban comparison which included transportation, kinds of work available, and connection to place. Some participants live in rural Ontario and have work experience from urban communities. Cindy, for example, lived in Toronto and moved to rural Ontario to support an aging family member. She offered a reflection on how her role as a fitness instructor was experienced differently in rural versus urban Ontario. Cindy explained,

I would get paid $50 an hour to teach a [fitness] class. I worked for the City of Toronto, they were unionized, so whenever I had an hour, I got paid an hour and a half. I come here and … the instructors are volunteer. They want to be able to offer cheap [classes] to the community… so, I said it's better if you get teenagers to do that, not mothers who need to bring home the bacon. If I leave my family, I need to bring something home.

Participants reported experiences of transportation needs, and struggles, that are different in urban and rural Ontario. Participants working precariously in rural Ontario explained these limitations in the stories shared throughout the interviews. When discussing a lack of reliable public transportation Jill explained, “you have people that are getting off at 10pm, midnight, 1am, those are all normal shifts. You walk or spend a couple hours’ wages on a cab and you just hope that there isn’t inclement weather”. The problem caused by a lack of public transportation is exacerbated when paired with the limited financial ability to secure reliable personal transportation because of low wage work. Courtney shared, “if it wasn’t for financing, we wouldn’t have our truck. We’re very, very...
lucky to have it… A lot of travelling is the new thing, you have to travel a lot to get anywhere to work”.

For some participants, transportation stops them from taking on employment opportunities. Margaret articulated a common sentiment,

It costs money to maintain and operate a vehicle. If you’re on a tight income and you have to travel a distance to get to work, it just isn’t always feasible…especially at minimum wage… if it’s not a big paying job, it’s hardly worth putting out that money to try and operate a vehicle to get to work.

Jenn, facing the same transportation barrier cut back on social activities because driving costs too much money, she explained, “I was involved with NFU\textsuperscript{42} and some other organizations, but I’ve had to scale own, just too much driving”. Andy contrasted his experience accessing amenities when living in Toronto, to the experience while living in their rural community. He said, “well, you get creative and you learn to live a different type of lifestyle”. Stephanie identified how the challenges associated with accessing a centralized service is exasperated by rurality “what I would have done for a mental health resource in [my rural community] as a teenager. Without having to drive 45 minutes in for an appointment”.

\textsuperscript{42} National Farmers Union
For other participants, the changes to work available in their rural community was particularly difficult. Liz summarized, “realizing we’re living in a different age or era where there isn’t the manufacturing jobs that there used to be and so you’re trying to figure out where do you fit in, you know, and that’s really hard”. Despite the hardship, expressed connections to place are articulated and summarized by Stephanie,

I loved the area I grew up in. I grew up 45 minutes to a grocery store. Like in the middle of nowhere, and I loved it. I wanted to affect the area I lived in. So, I didn’t want to go work where I never knew anybody. I want to work with the people that I know I’m going to affect in this area. So that’s why I’ve chosen to stay.

Connection to place was expressed as a limitation to accessing a service by a participant who sought support at a foodbank. Cindy explained,

I went to the food bank in [the neighbouring town] because I did not want to be seen at the food bank here locally because you know everybody in the village, walking into that food bank, there’s no way that I could do it.

Another rural experience articulated by participants is the perception of being an outsider to the community. Andy, who moved from a city to a rural community explained,

Moving here from another area and seeing people moving to [this community] you’re an outsider. You are absolutely 100% an outsider. And you could be living here for 20 or 30 years, but if you’re not born and bred in the area then you’re an outsider. And I’ve chosen to ignore a lot of that and get stuck in to whatever is
going on and to embrace the rural activities and everything, and to get the kids involved in them as well, to earn acceptance. And people that don’t do that are alienated without a shadow of a doubt.

Andy made clear that integration is not automatic, “my children, out of the seven, five were born here and even they are considered outsiders because I wasn’t born here”. This leads to the important realization that experiencing precarious employment in a rural community while being considered an “outsider” can reduce the opportunity to rely on support from the community.

5.3 Field Reflections

My field reflections centre around the concept of hope, and how destructive its loss can be to a person, family, and community. Some participants expressed that working precariously made them lose hope, made them feel less than human, and made them feel unable to change their work situation. These sentiments, I surmise, spill over into other areas of life, have direct impacts on the mental health of workers, and are harmful to community wellbeing. When a person gives up trying to change a life situation, when they view their lived experiences as happening ‘to them’ not happening ‘because of them’, disenfranchisement and isolation can permeate, making interaction with a public support program more difficult to access. A loss of hope can render the services provided by a publicly funded program ineffective.

While in the rural community within an afternoon drive of Belleville, Ontario, I spent time where key informants identified that individuals working precariously spend time. At
these locations, which include a food bank, and community drop-in centres, I presented myself to an on-site coordinator and made myself available with resources about the project. At every location, I was prepared to conduct individual interviews if the opportunity presented itself, although, that was not the main goal. The main goal of being present in the community outside of interviews was to collect field notes for reference during the ongoing process of analysis for this exploratory research project.

I spent time in a community drop-in centre serving meals to people who came through the door. A middle-aged man picked up his meal from the community meal program and told me he would like to talk about his work situation, but, he “works both at Walmart and a fast food restaurant and only has enough time to scarf down his meal at the Salvation Army before heading to another shift”. In that same venue, individuals gathered to share a meal at a meal-program all greet one another by name. There is a sense of community and connectivity which is evident through the interactions of individuals.

I also spent time volunteering at an area food bank between interviews. One food bank volunteer learned about this exploratory research project and said, “I am two pay cheques away from using the food bank myself”. The volunteer explained the in-take process for individuals who are accessing the foodbank. They explained the Canadian Food Bank Association is concerned with use, zoning, and funding allocations for food banks across the country. Knowing who is using what service and where they live, is perhaps important for administrative purposes, however, it seems to have come at the cost of individual dignity. An individual accessing a food bank is made to disclose personal
details about funds, family, food use, and housing history, in order to get a box of food meant to last 28 days. Some food bank clients explained they stay on Ontario Works when they would rather be working because the jobs they get don’t have medical and dental coverage. There is a need created by not having secure, reliable employment – a need experienced by food insecurity, housing insecurity, and medical coverage insecurity. Interestingly, the food bank in this community was located in an area designed to be accessed only by personal vehicle. The geographic location of the food bank meant it was not accessible to pedestrians or by public transit.

The importance of implementing publicly funded supports, programs, and public policies in a dignified way cannot be overemphasized. Participants discussed the shame and stigma that can come with accessing publicly funded programs in their rural communities. These lived experiences further amplify the need for dignified publicly funded service delivery. An excerpt from my field notes describes an observed scenario where a program information session is ill-delivered,

I am sitting in on an information session about a provincially funded job placement program (which links individuals who are not working full-time to full-time minimum-wage labour jobs in the food processing industry). During this session, I observed distinct clusters of individuals forming, one cluster of service-providers, and another of service-users. The providers are at the back of the room, speaking loudly amongst themselves and users are at tables sitting individually and quietly. At the front of the room, the presenter explains the program and outline the typical layout (3-weeks in class, 2-weeks unpaid job placement, 1-week class
wrap-up). To get a sense of who is in the room, the presenter asks users to disclose their financial status and other personal information out loud, to the group. For example, a service-provider says, “raise your hand if you’re on Ontario Works”. The situation leaves me uncomfortable.

5.4 Summary

Nineteen participants explained their experiences with rural precarious employment through in-depth individual interviews. Five themes emerged from the experiences shared by participants. These themes are experiences with finances during rural precarious employment, experiences of health during rural precarious employment, experiences with participant views of themselves during rural precarious employment, social experiences during rural precarious employment, and experiences navigating systems during rural precarious employment. These themes were not experienced in isolation and themselves are emergent from nodes which overlap between themes. The next section reviews the findings in relation to experiences identified in the literature, and experiences identified as being specific to rural.
6 DISCUSSION

This exploratory research project was undertaken because the experience of being precariously employed in rural Ontario had not yet been investigated. This discussion is divided into three sections, each with a different purpose. The first section links the project findings, which focus specifically on the experiences of the participants, to the broader precarious employment literature. Connections to age, the employer, health, and social outcomes are discussed in the first section. The purpose of the second section of this discussion is to highlight connections between the findings of this exploratory research project and the literature which articulate a rural specific link to the experiences of participants. These links describe how experiences of rural precarious employment in Ontario shared by participants are connected to rural literature and include support programs, transportation, the experience of women, and youth. Finally, the third section of this discussion is a summary which presents one of the main deliverables from this exploratory research project, that the experiences of rural precarious employment in Ontario do not occur in isolation. The connection between the emergent themes from this exploratory research project are mapped visually and discussed in the summary.

6.1 Experiences Related to Literature

6.1.1 Age

Participants expressed challenges faced by precarious workers at every age. Older participants described feeling aged out of the work force, needing to work longer, and being unable to retire. These findings are consistent with Tiessen (2014). On the other hand, younger participants gave examples of difficulty finding stable employment
which translates to difficulty making life decisions, such as pursuing personal relationships, starting a family, or buying a house (Lewchuk, 2013). Carmo, Cantante, and de Almeida (2014) highlight the cyclical nature of precarious employment, and indicate precarious employment is viewed by some youth as a required step, or rite of passage, before gaining full time employment. These challenges were articulated in the interviews, are consistent with the literature and are not necessarily unique to living in a rural community. What is apparent from the experiences of participants is there is no ‘good age’ to be precariously employed in rural Ontario.

6.1.2 Organization

This exploratory research project focused on the employee experience of being precariously employed in rural Ontario, not that of the employer. Although there are many reasons given in the literature which suggest hiring precariously is not ultimately beneficial to an organization’s bottom line in the long run, precarious employment still happens. An in-depth investigation into the role of employers in mitigating the negative impacts of precarious employment, especially precarious employment in rural communities, is outside the scope of this project but could be a valuable future investigation. Notwithstanding the actions of employers, some participants explained that their engagement in rural precarious employment was because of a perceived responsibility or situation outside of their control. For example, moving back to a rural community to care for an elderly family member was a decision made by some participants and led to

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43 For example, they create increasingly isolated work environments (see Seifert et al., 2007).
precarious employment. In some situations, explained by participants, working precariously was the only option that provided the worker the flexibility required to provide care.

These findings and resulting actions are consistent with Parker et al. (2002) and Seifert et al. (2007) which point to disengagement between precarious workers at work, their superordinate, and their commitment to an employer. For some participants, this is welcomed, and creates an opportunity to ‘leave work at work’. Some participants expressed wanting a job that requires low commitment and little critical thought because focusing on a task (such as caring for a family member) outside of work was of primary importance. For others, disengagement at the work place is limiting and frustrating.

6.1.3 Health

Consistent with findings from Lewchuk et al. (2003) and Ferrie (2001), participants in this exploratory research project expressed the negative impacts that precarious employment has on experiences with both their mental and physical health.

Experiences with mental health struggles articulated by participants in this project can be analyzed into two broad categories, the cause of precarious employment, and the result of precarious employment. For example, one participant explained how their struggle with a drug addiction kept them from maintaining employment. The mental health issue was identified by this participant as the cause of their precarious employment. Conversely, another participant expressed how both she and her husband endure depression because of not having the funds necessary to meet their basic needs while
working precariously – in this instance, the mental health issue is trigged by precarious employment. These connections are consistent with the findings of scholars investigating precarious employment, including Bertilsson et al., 2013, Clarke et al., 2007, Kim et al., 2008, Marmot et al., 2001, McGann et al., 2012, Menéndez et al., 2007, Min et al., 2015 and Morissette et al., 2007.

Consistent with Block (2010), some participants expressed how their physical health was negatively impacted through health and safety practices at work. For some participants, a low investment in them from their employer resulted in a task not being taught to completion, and an injury resulting. Physical health was also reported by participants as being negatively impacted because of missing supports built into the precarious work environments. For example, participants identified not taking time away from work, or taking sick days, because of the negative financial consequences that would follow. The connections between negative physical health outcomes and precarious work are conveyed in Virtanen et al. (2005a) as well as Benach and Muntaner (2007).

Bridging the gap between the impacts of mental and physical health, is stress. Experiences of stress and anxiety were expressed by participants and are substantiated by the literature (in for example, in Clarke et al., 2007; and Menéndez et al., 2007). Participants expressed experiences of stress induced by their precarious working conditions, including the expectations of their employer at work, the inability to secure their financial needs, and scheduling. Consistent with findings from Virtanen et al. (2005b) this exploratory research project finds stress is a negative experience for rural precarious employees.
Ferrie (2001) describes the spillover effect in relation to the negative health outcomes stemming from precarious employment. Findings from participants are consistent with Ferrie’s (2001) assessment, that health outcomes from precarious employment are not uniquely experienced as health issues, they indeed spillover into other aspects of an employee’s life, which often includes impacts on families and communities.

6.1.4 Social

Participants reported that the demands of scheduling an inconsistent work schedule contributes to stress and feelings of social isolation when working precariously. The inability to confidently schedule social activities, commit to responsibilities, or make personal appointments because of a changing work schedule, was highlighted by participants as an outcome of precarious employment, is consistent with the literature, and has deleterious effects.

A precarious employee’s inability to be in control of their own work schedule directly determines how their social time is spent (Woodman, 2012) and contributes to being less able to contribute to their social surroundings because of scheduling demands and uncertainties (Bohle et al., 2004; Seifert et al., 2007).

Participants described that the most reliable supports for precarious employment come from individuals in their social surroundings, (which include family members, neighbours, and community members). These are the very individuals with whom a
relationship suffers because of the scheduling demands of precarious employment (Ferrie, 2001).

6.2 Rural Experiences

Although there are commonalities between experiences of precarious employment regardless of rurality, there are some rural specific considerations that are important to highlight when discussing the results of this investigation. These considerations are often experiences intensified because of rural factors such as low population and distance to density (Bollman & Reimer, 2009). To put it simply, if being employed precariously is hard, being employed precariously in a rural place is harder. This section brings forward rural specific links to experiences of precarious employment.

6.2.1 Rural Supports

Publicly funded supports, programs, and public policies (such as Ontario Works, publicly funded health care, and minimum wage legislation) are important channels through which tools can be provided in Ontario to help mitigate the negative impacts of precarious employment. Results of this investigation describe participant experiences with publicly funded supports that are inadequate, difficult to access in rural areas, difficult to move forward from once obtained, ill-conceived, and lacking in focus. Although publicly funded supports are available in rural Ontario, participants reported relying substantially on private supports (which include for example, family, community groups, and faith-based organization) to mitigate the negative impacts of rural precarious employment. This reliance suggests publicly funded supports, in rural Ontario are not adequately meeting the needs of some rural Ontarians working precariously. This section begins by
discussing publicly funded and private supports, then addresses the historic connection between rural Ontario and reliance on private supports, and finally, provides observations from the current Ontario context.

In this investigation, participants who could not access publicly funded supports while working precariously in rural Ontario turned to private supports. Along with the frustration of not being able to access publicly funded supports, participants expressed feelings of being left-behind, forgotten, or stuck in their situation. For some participants, frustration arose while discussing specific publicly funded programs (mainly ODSP and OW) because the programs were viewed as being paid into with their tax dollars while working, but inaccessible to them at their time of need because they were working precariously.

The public supports referred to by participants are provincially run and as a result, are impacted by provincial politics (Wallner, 2008), are typically not created in rural areas (Nieguth, 2009; Boudreau, Hamel, Jouve, & Keil, 2006; Lapping & Fuller, 1985), and do not respond in real-time to the needs of workers (see for instance Mahoney & Thelen, 2009). Rather, publicly funded supports are subject to the political motivation of the

44 As well as in some cases, participants discussed turning to privately funded resources for employment assistance (such as job placement organization or temporary agencies). This area of focus is suggested as a future research topic.

45 Presently, in Ontario and in other democracies in the global developed west, political elections are being won by candidates who speak to individuals who feel left-behind (Rooduijn, 2019).


administration in power (Chouinard & Crooks, 2005). Unlike the private supports, publicly funded supports in Ontario are not endogenous to the communities in which they are accessed.

Prior to the onset of the Keynesian welfare state, relying on private supports was the norm in rural (Bonanno, 2006; Preston, 2013). Before publicly funded supports in rural communities, private supports provided connections to potential employment opportunities, social connectivity, security, and service exchanges (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000; Putnam, 1995). During the onset of the Keynesian welfare state, publicly funded supports flourished (Blinder, 1988) the standard employment relationship was the norm (Vosco, 2010), and the perceived need to maintain the private supports which were historically relied upon, decreased (Bonanno, 2006). What has emerged from the experiences identified by individual participants is that currently, where publicly funded supports are not meeting the needs of individuals, rural residents working precariously have returned to relying on the types of private supports which were prominent in rural communities before the Keynesian welfare state (Vosco, 2010) – during a time when precarious employment was the norm (Burgess & Campbell, 1998; Tompa et al., 2007).

To create publicly funded supports, programs, and public policies that meet the needs of rural individuals, including those working precariously, better engagement between rural residents and political structures in Ontario is required. It cannot be overstated how publicly funded supports, programs, and public policies can be experienced differently in rural as opposed to the urban areas in which they are typically crafted (Cloutier-Fisher & Joseph, 2000). This requirement should invite a re-visitation of
the role municipal governments and civil society have (Douglas, 2005) in provincially funded public supports.\(^{48}\)

Presently in Ontario, the opposite of engagement with municipal governments and civil society is happening. The current Progressive Conservative government has presented a political platform hinging on the centralization of services and cost reduction\(^{49}\) of programs which could be beneficial to individuals working precariously. While this dissertation was being written, for example, Ontario’s Bill 148, *Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act, 2017* and the Ontario Basic Income Pilot began and were suspended.

Ontario’s, now cancelled, Bill 148, *Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act, 2017* used language that recognized precarious employment and ensured equal pay for part-time workers and increased vacation entitlement (Government of Ontario, 2017). There were multiple components to the bill, including the change to Ontario’s minimum wage. The bill proposed a 25% increase to the current minimum wage, bringing it from $11.40 per hour to $14.00 per hour in 2018, an action that occurred while the Liberal government was in office\(^{50}\) (Government of Ontario, 2017). The initial increase was to be followed by a

\(^{48}\) See reflections on dignity

\(^{49}\) https://www.ontariopc.ca/plan_for_the_people

\(^{50}\) Corresponding changes to minimum wage for specialty groups such as students and homeworkers are also proposed. The exact figures can be found here https://news.ontario.ca/mol/en/2017/05/proposed-changes-to-ontarios-employment-and-labour-laws.html
second increase to $15.00 per hour in January 2019 (Government of Ontario, 2017) which was cancelled by the Progressive Conservative government.

Furthermore, in the Spring of 2017, the Ontario Government announced the Ontario Basic Income Pilot (OBIP) – a three-year pilot program taking place in the Hamilton area, Thunder Bay and the surrounding area, as well as Lindsay. The program was designed to investigate,

whether a basic income can better support vulnerable workers and give people the security and opportunity they need to achieve their potential. It will also study whether giving people a basic income can be a simpler and more economically effective way to provide income security support to people living on low incomes. (Ministry of Community and Social Services, 2017, para. 1)

The OBIP had potential to mitigate some of the insecurities associated with precarious employment while incentivizing work. Although the pilot project in Ontario was stopped during this exploratory research project, the inherent value of the program still merits discussion. Unlike the current Ontario Works\(^5\) (OW) program, workers on a basic income would not become ineligible for benefits in the program when funds are earned by working. OBIP also provided an opportunity for displaced employees to retrain in a new field or find meaningful work in their field, the outcome of which has positive rippling benefits at the individual, family, and community levels (Ministry of Community and Social

Services, 2017). Beneficial outcomes of OBIP which relate to the findings from this exploratory research project include alleviating some of the stigma associated with OW because OBIP is allocated through tax credit, providing funds for displaced transitioning labourers who are geographically far from a support or retraining centre, and support during retraining opportunities for workers whose jobs are phased out\textsuperscript{52}.

There is a mismatch between the lived experiences of individuals employed precariously in rural Ontario and the current structure of publicly funded supports. The available supports reflect the needs of individuals experiencing the standard employment relationship, not the needs of individuals who are employed precariously in rural Ontario. Available public supports should be reconsidered through collaborative consultation with rural municipalities and civil society. The current Ontario government’s platform is not an adequate response to the needs of rural precarious employees.

\subsection*{6.2.2 Rural Transportation}

Without access to, or funds to support the use of, a reliable personal vehicle, transportation can be limiting in rural Ontario (Marr, 2015). Transportation as a barrier is not unique to individuals employed precariously in rural Ontario but it is important to discuss because it relates directly to experiences with job access and service access.

\textsuperscript{52}Interestingly, this is not the first time an investigation into a basic income program was terminated early due to the change from a Liberal to Conservative government. A minimum guaranteed income program (known as Mincome) was jointly administered through the provincial and federal governments in rural Dauphin (Manitoba) between 1974 and 1979 (Calnitsky, 2016). Although anecdotal evidence suggests the program was overall beneficial, resulting in better health outcomes, decreased hospital visits, and overall poverty reduction, a change in political power at the federal level (from Liberal Prime Minister P. E. Trudeau to Conservative Prime Minister Clark) ended the program and its analysis as well (Forget, 2011).
expressed by participants. Participants articulated difficulties getting to a job without personal transportation. Examples given by participants include describing how the time they spend getting to a job stops them from being able to take on another job; the funds required to pay for transportation (by taxi for example) from home to work can take away from net earnings; and the lack of reliable active transportation (not being able to walk to work during a thunderstorm) can be a reason for missing work. For a person working precariously, this means there is increased responsibility to schedule in advance, the multiple moving parts required to get to work. Along with the transportation barrier associated with getting to work, there are also limitations related to accessing the support services required when working precariously. Participants, for example, identified transportation limitations with accessing the food bank in their community, and accessing medical appointments outside of their community. Although the service may be present, not being able to get to it renders the service useless.

Although barriers to service accessibility in rural communities are real and pressing, they are not new (McCulloch & Lynch, 1993). Innovative programs to better link rural communities to central services occur in Ontario, one example is the Ontario Telemedicine Network program. This initiative brings health care services to individuals in rural areas using technology. This program, and others like it, are beneficial in rural areas (Saqui et al., 2007) and are subject to limitations. For example, reliable broadband connectivity is required for the program to function, an amenity not ubiquitous in rural Ontario (Pant & Odame, 2017; Roberts et al., 2017). Furthermore, the centralization of
programs can replace human capacity building and job opportunities for skilled professionals in rural communities (Mungall, 2005).

However, remote work, techno-commuters and artificial intelligence become possibilities in a rural labour environment when employment is not contingent on physical presence at work (Hambly & Lee, 2019). Understanding that transportation options are limited in rural Ontario and recognizing that infrastructure changes to usher in reliable public transportation in rural Ontario is not a priority, creates the opportunity to rally behind access to reliable highspeed internet as a mechanism for job creation in rural (Kolko, 2012). Circumventing the issue of transportation through digital connection is one way that work opportunities and service access in a rural labour environment conducive to precarious employment can be thought of differently.

6.2.3 Rural Women

Statistical reviews make clear that women experience rural precarious employment in Ontario more frequently than their male counterparts (Bollman, 2017). Female participants discussed experiences of sexism and experiences of being subject to a preconceived archaic notion of the role a woman should have in the home, in a rural community. These kinds of experiences are not novel, not unique to precarious employment, and are consistent with a wide-reaching body of literature relating to women in work (Carver, 2004). Female participants who are moms expressed particular difficulties with rural precarious employment, especially when they are primary care givers for children. Balancing work-life schedules and providing the material goods needed for children while navigating a rural labour environment which favours men, are factors
making it difficult to be a mother who is employed precariously in rural Ontario (Noack & Vosko, 2011). Evans (2007), describes how single Ontario mothers are impacted by precarious employment and makes clear that the jobs becoming available in Ontario serve to further marginalize those Ontarians already predisposed to engagement in a cycle of poverty. Deconstructing the gendered make-up of the labour market could be helpful in identifying the barriers women face to exiting the precarious employment cycle (Lewchuk, 2013).

6.2.4 Rural Youth

The discussion of rural youth and work are intrinsically linked to the sustainability and prosperity of rural communities now and in the future. Youth retention is a challenge in rural areas (Christie & Lauzon, 2014), amplified because typically investments are made in the rural youth who leave (Lauzon, 2013). These claims substantiated by the literature connect to the experiences of the two youngest participants in this investigation. Both individuals highlighted that their work interests are related to the purpose of their work not the style, or sector of employment. They both suggested that they would rather ‘do what they love’ than work Monday to Friday from nine to five. Also, these participants identified having less structural commitments outside of work, for example, they were not caring for aging family members. These examples provided by youth, demonstrate a key point in Foster and Main (2018), that crafting opportunities for rural youth to have meaningful employment experiences can support rural youth returning or choosing to stay in their rural communities.
6.3 Summary

The emergent themes and contributing nodes are visually presented in the concept map below (Figure 3). Visually depicting the interactions between findings from this exploratory research project conveys their complex interactions and solidifies that they are not experienced in isolation.

To prepare this map, I began by placing the five emergent themes, financial, health, self-view, social, and systems in rectangles at the centre of the map. Next, I added ovals to depict each of the 23 nodes which informed the themes\textsuperscript{53}. Finally, I linked the nodes and themes to one another based on the experiences articulated by participants. As demonstrated by the map, there are multiple interactions between each of the five themes.

The connections between themes identified on the concept map reflect the complexities between the themes which emerged from participant experiences. The impacts of the experiences are not isolated and transcend the limitations put in place by thinking about employment issues in isolation. For example, the summary map depicts the connection between mental health in the workforce and living in poverty however, public policy, and the programs that are products of public policy support these two issues

\textsuperscript{53} I identified each theme in a colour and used a lighter shade of that colour to identify each node. Colouring financial, health, self-view, social, and systems, green, orange, blue, purple, and yellow, respectively, was done only for clarity and has no bearing on the outputs of the findings.
separately in rural Ontario. Aside from the funding, resource, and distance to service limitations that make dealing with mental health and poverty issues particularly difficult in rural areas (Fitzpatrick et al., 2017), simply conceptualizing the intrinsic links between the different themes makes clear the connection between complex lived experiences related to rural precarious employment.

The ongoing difficulties experienced by individuals who are employed precariously in rural and the interaction between the impacts of rural precarious employment in relation to public policy, demonstrates a key point made by systems theory thinker Donella Meadows (2009): when a problem is solved independently of the system within which it operates, bigger problems surface. Thinking of precarious employment as a systems issue is one unintended deliverable from this exploratory research project. Meadows (2009) discusses creating policy as a meaningful systemic component in support of an end goal. Meadows’ extensive discourse on system reform, reflects the need for systemic change to break the cyclical impacts of rural precarious employment. The literature explores a way of thinking about precarious employment that is not systemic. Connell and Burgess (2006) view employees as individual actors within the labour market system, able to contest the systemic nature of precarious employment through self-improvement (namely education and skill development). Connell and Burgess (2006) list, “the family,

54 For more details on the publicly funded programing available in rural Ontario though the Canadian Mental Health Association https://ontario.cmha.ca/documents/rural-and-northern-community-issues-in-mental-health/

55 See Appendix 4

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individual, the firm, the industry, the community and the state” (p. 498) as sources for employee skill acquisition, enabling them to propel themselves out of precarious employment. Placing ownership for change on the calls for adaptation from within the system requires the most work from the actor in the system with the least power. Findings from the individual interviews did not point to a support for the suggestion made in Connell and Burgess (2006). Exploring precarious employment as a systemic issue, and not as an individual issue requiring action for change from individual actors, suggests the need for systemic reform as a response in rural Ontario.
Figure 3 Visual representation of the connections between emergent themes and nodes.
7 CONCLUSION

Rural precarious employment is a dynamic labour market issue, taking place within a changing labour environment. In an attempt to reduce cost, and respond to market weaknesses, a system of employment corroding the livelihood of people and communities was created (Benach & Muntaner, 2007; Ferrie, 2001; Noack & Vosko, 2011; and Tiessen, 2014). The impacts of precarious employment on individuals, families, organizations, and communities are well documented in urban areas, and this research explores the experience of precarious employment in rural Ontario.

This exploratory research project begins by nodding to the current labour environment, while alluding to the changes caused to it by neoliberalism and technological advancements. It unpacks what is known to date about the impacts of precarious employment and reviews the changing rural economy along with trends in fixed-term or contract work, involuntary part-time work, low wage work, and self-employment conveying what is known to date empirically about rural precarious employment.

The original contribution to the literature is a qualitative investigation into the experience of rural precarious employment, filling a need in the literature both related to rural studies and employment trends. Firsthand accounts of experiences from 19 participants who are precariously employed in rural Ontario reveal experiences with finances, health, self-views, socializing and navigating systems during rural precarious
employment as emerging themes. Themes emerging from this analysis on the experience of rural precarious employment are not experienced in isolation.

A reimagining of elements in the employment system such as hiring practices, wage minimums, and upskilling are components of plans for reform that are only the beginning of how precarious employment can be reshaped and reconsidered through the lens of public policy. Understanding the experiences of individuals living the trend are critical to the long-term sustainability of deliverables from studies involving precarious employment. Policy pertaining to the labour market of the future in rural Ontario must consider neoliberal trends, increases in automation, and ongoing labour market needs as new jobs are crafted. There must also be consideration for the systemic impact of precarious work on those who live in rural Ontario and an understanding of the support systems used by individuals working precariously. The complex relationship between impacts of rural precarious employment resounds prominently from this exploratory research project and implies there is no one size fits all solution about to mitigate the negative impacts of precarious employment in rural Ontario. Stemming from this exploratory project are a series of opportunities for future research.
7.1 Opportunities for Future Research

7.1.1 Cost of Living

Precarious rural workers typically earn a lower wage than their urban counterparts\textsuperscript{56}. Participants in this study, however, identified high food prices, high transportation costs, and high energy fees as being more expensive in rural Ontario than in urban Ontario. An updated investigation into the cost of living in rural Ontario which considers the experiences of living in rural Ontario, would be beneficial for future investigations which hinge on the "low cost of living" assumption.

7.1.2 Reviewing Self-Employment

The decrease in self-employed workers with paid help in rural Ontario could reflect the difficulty associated with maintaining a small business in the face of a changing labour market in Ontario. There are perhaps more stresses, such as an increased minimum wage, placed on the self-employed who themselves are employers when paid help is hired. Better understanding the use of self-employment as an adaptive tool in a labour environment suitable for precarious employment, can help usher in the most appropriate future publicly funded programs.

7.1.3 The Role of Employers

This exploration focused on individuals who are working precariously in rural Ontario. A future investigation into the experience of employers who hire individuals to

\textsuperscript{56} See Chapter 3.
work precariously in rural Ontario would help unpack another role in the experience. There are perhaps opportunities for employers to mitigate the negative impacts of rural precarious employment.

7.1.4 The Underground Rural Economy

The underground economy is an active part of rural Ontario life which is difficult to study. From ‘cash only’ aestheticians providing services in well-lit basements to ‘under the table’ handymen completing in-home renovations, the exact financial impact of rural Ontario’s underground economy is not advertised or reported and is virtually impossible to measure. This strategy disqualifies workers from relying on Employment Insurance if their work ceases and would be an important future area of research to better understand rural precarious employment.

7.2 Summary

Results of this exploratory research project move forward the understanding of the nature of rural precarious employment in Ontario, from the perspective of precariously employed rural people. Both rural scholars and individuals crafting policy for rural areas can benefit from a better understanding of the experiences articulated by participants and the emergent themes discussed. This research provides policy makers with rural specific experiences which can be used to better understand how precarious employment might be investigated in the rural areas their policy impacts. This work provides context and opportunities for exploration of the repercussions of precarious employment on rural individuals. Opportunities for future research have emerged through the deliverables from this project.
8 REFERENCES


Chouinard, V., & Crooks, V. A. (2005). ‘Because they have all the power and I have none’: State restructuring of income and employment supports and disabled women’s lives in Ontario, Canada. *Disability & Society, 20*(1), 19-32.


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There are a variety of ways to define rural and no one definition captures all aspects of rurality. For the purposes of this investigation into precarious employment in rural Ontario, the statistical delineation related to metro, non-metro, and partially non-metro is the most reasonable definition. The definition captures the difference in distance and density between geographic locations in Ontario, is available consistently over an extended time period, provides language that is consistent with Statistics Canada, and is reflected in the Focus on Rural factsheet set prepared by Bollman. Consistent with the categorization, there are more differences between metro Ontario and non-metro Ontario as well as partially non-metro Ontario than between non-metro and partially non-metro Ontario. For this reason, partially non-metro and non-metro Ontario are grouped together and named rural or non-metro when compared to metro (also named urban) Ontario in within this project. By using this definition some of the unique richness of each individual rural community is lost. It is recognized that providing any type of grouping in rural communities diminishes the unique experience of workers in a particular location. The key informant interviews, case studies and individual interviews undertaken for this project bring the individualized component to the project. The image below, sourced directly from Bollman’s brief about the definition, gives population breakdowns and identifies the census divisions used for consideration:
Table 1

Number of census subdivisions by population size class, for each census division, Ontario, 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Division identifier</th>
<th>Census Division name</th>
<th>Population size class of the census subdivision</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Less than 100</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
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<td>3519 York</td>
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<tr>
<td>3520 Toronto</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3529 Brant</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3526 Niagara</td>
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<tr>
<td>3539 Middlesex</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3530 Waterloo</td>
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<tr>
<td>3545 Peterborough</td>
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<tr>
<td>3546 Thunder Bay</td>
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<tr>
<td>3560 Renfrew</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-metro (subtotal)</td>
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<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix 2 Key Informant Interview Question Set

The following interview question set was drafted and shared with participants before the interview:

Demographic

1) What organization do you represent?
2) Tell me about your capacity within this organization?
3) What do you understand precarious employment to be?

Content

1) How pervasive do you think precarious employment is in rural areas?
   a. Can you give me examples you are aware of? Is this new or ongoing?
2) What do you think is specific about rural?
3) Given your experience, what do you perceive the impacts of precarious employment to be?
   a. On individuals/families/communities? How is the impact measured?
4) Tell me about out-migration
5) What are challenges associated with mitigating precarious employment in rural communities?
6) Do you know of any strategies for mitigating precarious employment – useful? Why, why not?
7) Can you tell me about the current resources and policies that are assisting in mitigating the negative consequences of precarious in your community?
8) What supports do people experiencing precarious employment have?
9) How well used are the programs you have?
   a. Where do people go to use the programs? Do you have ideas about other action that can be taken to help mitigate precarious rural employment?
10) Who else do you think I should talk to?
   a. Initially, when you heard about this interview, what did you think I would ask?
Appendix 3 Individual Interview Recruitment Script

**Study Name:** Investigating Precarious Employment in Rural Ontario  
(Research Ethics Board Number: 17-02-044)

**What you will be asked to do in the research:** You will be asked to share your experience with precarious employment in rural Ontario through a recorded interview. Interviews will be audio recorded. The interview will last between 45 and 60 minutes.

**Purpose of the Research:** The purpose of this research is to understand the experience of precarious employment in rural Ontario.

**Benefits of the Research:** This research will benefit rural communities in Ontario and their residents. Also, provincial policy makers will benefit from the rural specific focus on precarious employment.

**Confidentiality:** All identified information you supply during the exercise will be held in confidence and your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

**Funding:** This research project has been funded by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in the exercise is completely voluntary. If you do not wish to communicate with researchers or participate you are more than welcome to do so. If you do wish to participate, you may choose to stop participating at any time.

**Risks and Discomforts:** There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study that you would not encounter in your day-to-day conversations at and during work. However, please note you are free to not answer any questions asked.

**Withdrawal from the Study:** In the event you withdraw from the study, you can opt to have all of your associated data collected to be immediately destroyed. In order to withdraw the study contact by email any of the researchers listed above before May 1, 2018.
Appendix 4 Systems Theory

Systems theory considers the relationship between behavior and structure of a system. Below are terms used within the theory as presented in Meadows (2009):

**Stock:** the foundation of any system. Stocks are the elements of the system that you can see, feel, count, or measure at any given time (p.17).

**Reinforcing feedback loop (or runaway loop):** generates more input to a stock the more that is already there (and less input the less that is already there) (p.31).

**Balancing feedback loop:** A stabilizing, goal-seeking, regulating feedback loop, also known as a "negative feedback loop" because it opposes, or reverses, whatever direction of change is imposed on the system (p.187).
Appendix 5 Field Notes

Research

- February 20, 2018 – The rental car employee who picks me up from the hotel at 7:35am arrived in a hoodie and unlaced work boots. Kind, and tired, he asked why I was in town. When telling him about the project, he told me a story of his mom who moved with him from Brampton. “She was making $70 000 a year over there and here, everyone said she was over qualified. The jobs that are easy to find are for people like me – young and able to work hard labour… all the factories want me, and she had to go back to school”. The employee, in his early 20s started working from the rental car company last week and wasn’t scheduled to work in the morning after a long weekend but, “I just started so I couldn’t say no”. I gave him my card and asked that he invite his mom to connect with me. I wonder if she will.

- February 21, 2018 – I’m reflecting on my day yesterday and in particular on the interview and dinner. The interview was my first and overall, I feel it went well. Personal experiences with rural precarious employment were given and direct questions about it were asked. There were some points where more of a description of the current state was given, this could be less prominent in subsequent interviews. I can bring the interview back to lived experiences by asking the question, “what is your experience with that?”. I will listen to the recording in full again to begin a deeper analysis.
February 24, 2018 – The notion of ‘settling’ or ‘just being ok’ comes through prominently with many participants. I am left wondering why drive and conviction are not found. Has the ‘system’ taught rural individuals to stop aspiring?

Informal Economy

Engaging in the informal economy arose as a theme by both participants and community informants. Showcased below are examples of how engaging in the informal rural economy was presented:

- February 21, 2018 – A community member has access to funds meant to support and advocate for poverty reduction. A community member accessing Ontario Works is doing work for that poverty reduction project and gets paid in cash from the individual with the funds. Paying the individual in cash maximize the financial benefit for the recipient.
- February 21, 2018 – Representative from Community Advocacy and Legal Centre describes experiences with individuals who are paid cash and find themselves unable to access employment supports (such as Employment Insurance) which they would otherwise be entitled to.
- February 21, 2018 – Individuals working at a centre supporting individuals in poverty themselves use the meal service and laundry facilities. One employee explains, “what does it say when your staff need the program they themselves are offering?”.
Initial Feelings

- February 19, 2018 – A Family Day event at a local hotel has a sign posted, “if money is an inhibitor to you, let us know”. Perhaps an attempt to make the event more accessible to low income families.

- February 20, 2018 – The town is tired and so are the people in it. Pot holes, unkept and vacant store fronts, unhappy employees (at the Walmart I stopped at to get groceries, the rental car company where I picked up the car, the hotel I’m staying at) paint an unwelcoming picture.

- February 20, 2018 – In a large parking lot, the only car clusters are concentrated at a Tim Horton’s and an employment services centre. There are two vacant store fronts next to the employment centre.

- February 21, 2018 – There were points during the day where I changed my behaviour to feel safer. For example, I did not write notes in my car after a meal program because the parking lot was not well lit.

Othering

- February 21, 2018 – A meal program volunteer makes clear to the individual asking for a meal that there are no seconds.

- February 22, 2018 – A food bank is placed in an industrial area which requires a vehicle to access.
• February 22, 2018 – The baked goods being distributed to individuals at the food bank are labeled as ‘day-olds’.

• February 22, 2018 – Individuals line up before the doors to the local food bank open and form a line inside to acquire an in-take form. After filling out an in-take form, individuals line up to hand in the form and receive a number. Individuals wait for their number to be called and meet with an in-take volunteer, one on one in an office setting. During the office setting meeting, individuals are asked a series of personal questions including identifying information (current address, summary of monthly expenses, employment details). Volunteers then determine the allocation of food an individual will receive.

Supports

• February 21, 2018 – Some individuals providing support to those working precariously have been working within a full-time standard employment relationship since the mid-1980s. There is sometimes a lack of appreciation for the changes and challenges faced on the ground in the current job market.

• February 21, 2018 – Offering of $1 lunch program at community drop-in centre.

• February 21, 2018 – Community Advocacy and Legal Centre representative provides interesting commentary on rural employment experiences. Potential for social impact and isolation are examples of reasons some rural individuals choose not to proceed with legal action against an employer, even when employment law suggests there is a case.
• February 21, 2018 – Salvation Army meal programs offered regularly throughout the year.

• February 24, 2018 – There are undistorted signs of a need for better mental health supports in this area. There are individuals whose behaviours would be different if given the help or opportunity to manage that aspect of their wellbeing. This is known because individuals state that need verbally.