

TEMPORARY EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES IN ONTARIO: EXPERIENCES OF SOUTH
ASIAN IMMIGRANT WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

Informed by the feminist political economy perspective (FPE), this study examines the experiences of recent South Asian immigrant women working through temporary employment agencies in Ontario, paying particular attention to how social factors such as gender, race and immigrant status shape these experiences. As FPE pays attention to the interconnection between family, state and market, the study examines how women experience precariousness at work, within the household, and trying to settle and integrate. Based on analysis of twelve qualitative interviews and observations as a participant-researcher, findings indicate that recent South Asian immigrant women are funneled into agency work due to a variety of structural barriers, and that the lack of rights associated with agency work leaves them particularly vulnerable to exploitation and poverty. As such, it is proposed that changes must address a lack of security and enforcement of employment standards, and barriers to employment for women and recent immigrants.

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Chapter One

Introduction

A recent blitz implemented and carried out by the Ministry of Labour to review fifty temporary employment agencies across Ontario revealed that thirty-seven of these agencies had multiple violations related to payments for overtime, public holidays, and vacation pay¹ (Mojtehdzadeh, 2015). With over 1,300 temporary employment agencies and over 700,000 temporary workers in Ontario, this trend of workers' rights violations among temporary employment agencies is alarming (MacEachen et al., 2014). It is especially concerning given that temporary agency employment is already associated with a lack of protection and labour regulations, including but not limited to, lack of job security and benefits, lower wages, and lack of unionization and/or collective agreements (Burgess & Connell, 2004; Vosko, 2010). The issues associated with temporary agency employment have been gaining growing attention due to recent public reports (CCPA, 2014; Institute for Work and Health, Toronto, 2014; PEPSO, 2013; Workers' Action Centre & Parkdale Community Legal Services, 2008) and media coverage (Toronto Star, 2015). Accordingly, research on the effects and experiences of temporary agency employment is currently of crucial importance, specifically due to the growth of temporary agency employment in Ontario when compared to Canada at large (Longhurst, 2014; Arsdale & Mandarino, 2009).

According to Vosko (2010), this industry predominately employs women, especially women who have recently immigrated to Canada and who are 'visible minorities'². My thesis

¹This information was published in a Toronto Star Article on August 12, 2015 titled "Province-wide blitz shows majority of temp agencies on wrong side of the law."

² According to Statistics Canada (2015), **visible minority** "refers to whether a person belongs to a visible minority group as defined by the *Employment Equity Act* and, if so, the visible minority group to which the person belongs. The *Employment Equity Act* defines visible minorities as "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-

focuses on uncovering the experiences of women who have recently immigrated³ to Canada, specifically, to Ontario and have worked or are currently working through temporary employment agencies in Ontario. As recent reports indicate that South Asian immigrants represent one of the largest demographics in Ontario⁴, this thesis is centred on the experiences of South Asian immigrant women (Statistics Canada, 2010). It is my hope that this research will provide further insight into how and why structural factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, and immigrant status shape experiences of temporary agency employment, as well as insight into how temporary agency employment shapes South Asian immigrant women's everyday lives in Ontario.

I situate my research in a much larger body of scholarship on precarious employment. Precarious employment encompasses forms of work involving limited social benefits and statutory entitlements, job insecurity, low wages, and high risks of ill-health (Cuyper et al., 2008; Vosko, 2000; Vosko, 2006). It is multi-dimensional and represents a continuum in which some jobs are more precarious than others (Vosko, 2006). Scholars have found that the number of people employed in precarious forms of employment has been increasing significantly since the 1970s (Kalleberg, 2009; Standing, 1999; Vosko, 2006). Vosko (2006) has noted that the number of people working as full-time permanent employees in Canada dropped from 67% in 1989 to 63% to 2003, and other forms of work arrangements such as solo self-employment, part-time and temporary jobs increased during that time. Additionally, women and racialized persons continue to be overrepresented in all forms of precarious employment (60). Reports by community organizations suggest that newcomers to Canada are also disproportionately found in precarious

Caucasian in race or non-white in colour". The visible minority population consists mainly of the following groups: Chinese, South Asian, Black, Arab, West Asian, Filipino, Southeast Asian, Latin American, Japanese and Korean."

³ Recent immigrants are people who immigrated to Canada within the last ten years.

⁴ South Asian was the largest visible minority group in Ontario in 2006. The South Asian population was 794,200 people, which was 28.9% of all visible minorities in Ontario in 2006.

employment (Law Commission of Ontario, 2012; PEPSO, 2013; Workers' Action Centre & Parkdale Community Legal Services, 2008).

Scholars have found that temporary agency employment is particularly precarious because of the unique way in which the employer-employee relationship plays out (Elcioglu, 2010; Peck & Theodore, 2004; Arsdale & Mandarino, 2009; Vosko, 2000). Because temporary employment agencies involve the contracting out of individuals (workers) to third parties (client firms) by a service provider (the agency), the agencies are characterised by a 'tripartite relationship' or 'triangular relationship' (Cook & Zeytinoglu, 2004; Vosko, 2010). The worker is employed by the agency, but as he/she works on the site of, and under the direct supervision of the client firm, it becomes difficult to identify the "real employer" (Government of Canada, 2006). This often leads to a lack of clarity in terms of which entity covers the various responsibilities towards the employee, and confusion about who can be held liable when responsibilities are not upheld.

The temporary employment model diverges from all dimensions of the standard employment relationship as "the worker establishes occupational connections with several entities rather than one, is rarely party to an indefinite contract of employment, and often may be dismissed with little or no notice" (Vosko, 2010; 634). While the Ontario Employment Standards Act was amended in 2009 in order to deal with concerns regarding temporary agencies, Vosko (2010) finds that the modest regulations that were introduced remain inadequate in preventing the precarious conditions perpetuated by temporary agency work. Workers are still constrained in terms of politico-legal freedoms such as the right to freely choose their worksite and direct employer and the ability to select their preferred type of work. Additionally, research on temporary agency employment suggests that it is characterized by multiple forms of precarity,

including: work is of limited duration with a high risk of termination; there is a lack of control over working conditions and the amount and pace of work; there is a lack of protection in employment; it is associated with low incomes (associated with poverty); it is accompanied by increased debt burden; and the level of precarity increases based on one's social location and social context (Longhurst, 2014). Like other forms of precarious employment, women predominate in this industry, especially recent immigrants who are 'visible minorities' (Vosko, 2010).

The Study

While there is research on precarious and temporary employment and its effects on workers, there remain many issues that still need to be explored. (Cuyper et al., 2008; Quinlan et al., 2001). Methodological concerns include that both categories of 'precarious' and 'temporary' encompass a wide variety of employment arrangements as well as a heterogeneous workforce. While some authors have pointed to heterogeneity in the background variables of workers occupying similar positions such as age, gender, education and tenure, others have pointed to heterogeneity in the choices and preferences of temporary workers. Choices and preferences are important as they may impact how workers experience temporary work and its effects. For example, people who prefer temporary employment may experience different psychological effects to people who are working temporary jobs involuntarily (Cuyper et al., 2008). Among other things, Quinlan, Mayhew & Bohle (2001) find that temporary agency work remains under researched, with much of this type of work disguised by statistical data and available figures which uses a limited definition of labour agencies. Cuyper et al. (2008) find that generalizing results is difficult and point out problems in defining temporary work. They also find that positive aspects and hidden costs of temporary employment, which are often ignored in

literature, need to be explored, and that there is little research between motivations and expectations, and psychological outcomes. They note that it is important to uncover motives for accepting temporary employment as some workers may consider temporary work to be ideal for them. Particularly, the definition of voluntary and involuntary temporary employment needs to be further researched in order to determine whether this status is contingent on employment- or non-employment- related reasons, as this may affect responses on psychological outcomes. Potential hidden costs of using temporary workers include effects on the working conditions of permanent workers. It is suggested that: the hiring of temporary workers may increase the level of responsibility and supervision for permanent workers without a simultaneous increase in rewards; it may affect permanent workers' perceptions of job insecurity; and it may affect their relationships with supervisors and colleagues. Further, while the literature notes the prevalence of racialized immigrant women in precarious forms of employment, little is known about the lived experiences of particular groups in specific precarious work arrangements. It is recognized that immigrant women in Canada are not a homogenous group and their experiences vary based on differences in class, ethnicity/ race, sexuality, English/ French fluency, education, etc. (Preston & Giles, 1997; 159).

My initial curiosity for this research was sparked by my own work experiences through temporary employment agencies at a time when I needed short-term work. I was able to witness what women in the industry experienced, and I noticed that most of the workers I met were racialized immigrants. Unlike me, however, they were not actually seeking temporary work and had few other options. I also began to notice how prevalent temporary employment agencies are as they are easily spotted when driving through the Greater Toronto Area, with multiple agencies often found in the same strip mall. As South Asian women immigrants are particularly

overrepresented in precarious employment in Canada, I chose to focus on this group. They were also selected for methodological reasons as I am able to speak Punjabi and Hindi, and this would allow many of the women to relay their stories in their native languages.

Because so little is known about the experiences of specifically South Asian women in temporary agency work in Ontario, the primary research question for the project was left intentionally broad. The project asks: **What are the experiences of South Asian immigrant women working in temporary employment agencies in Ontario?** In asking this question, the aim was to unpack the ways in which dimensions that contribute to one's social location (e.g. gender, race, ethnicity, immigrant status, education, etc.) shape the experiences of temporary agency employment for South Asian immigrant women. This is important to understand because it may highlight additional barriers faced by marginalized groups which have not yet been documented in sociological research. In addition, the project asks:

- 1) How do South Asian immigrant women experience precariousness in temporary agency work?
- 2) How does precarious employment through temporary agencies affect the household?
- 3) How does temporary agency employment impact settlement and integration for recent South Asian immigrants?

To answer these questions, I interviewed 12 South Asian women who have worked, or were currently working, through temporary agencies. I also engaged in participant-observation research by working through four separate temporary employment agencies, all of which were located in the Greater Toronto Area. Interviews were also conducted with former employees of people who worked directly for the agency, either in administrative roles or selling contracts for

the agency. Additionally, an interview was conducted with a member of a workers' advocacy group in Toronto, in order to better ascertain the types of issues and complaints that are brought forward by agency workers and whether they are able to resolve them.

My study reveals the ways in which experiences of working through temporary employment agencies are informed by social location for recent South Asian immigrant women. Specifically, employment through agencies is particularly precarious. Consistent with findings by Vosko (2006), dimensions of precariousness in temporary agency work included: a lack of control over work schedules and the duration of work assignments; a lack of control over working conditions; low wages and income; and a lack of rights and protections. I also found that the women as recent immigrants faced significant barriers to employment and had little to no alternatives to working through agencies. This informed their experiences as they could not do anything to jeopardize their work with the agencies, and both agencies and client companies were able to take advantage of that. Employment standards were often violated and disrespect within the workplace was common; however, there was little the women could do given their lack of options for other employment. Gender also informed the women's experiences as they were primarily responsible for work within the household, including childcare, and this limited the employment opportunities available to women. Additionally, the gendered division of labour within the workplace also limited women to lower paying jobs where they were less likely to be hired permanently. As such, it was found that South Asian immigrant women faced considerable barriers to employment that essentially funneled them into temporary agency which is deemed the "appropriate" work available for racialized persons, particularly recent immigrants, in the new political economy. Additionally, employment precarity and income insecurity was shaped by the exploitative nature of temporary agency work. Gender was significant as the very way in

which discourses about gender and family organize women's opportunities intersect with the organization of temporary agency work.

The remainder of my thesis is organized as follows. In Chapter Two, I review theories related to precarious employment. I argue that while before the 1970s strong efforts were made to ensure the labour was not treated as a commodity, the rise of precarious employment has both contributed to, and demonstrated a shift in the way that workers are viewed and treated. This shift has negatively impacted the working and living conditions of many workers. I also review the literature surrounding temporary employment agencies and demonstrate that this type of work is highly precarious in nature and more likely to impact women, people of colour, and recent immigrants. In Chapter Three, I introduce my own research and analysis strategy. In Chapters Four to Six, I review the findings from this research. In Chapter Seven I analyze these findings. Finally in Chapter Eight, I consider the implications of this research.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

To analyze the experiences of South Asian immigrant women within temporary agency employment, the experiences of these women need to be linked to broader political and economic structures with attention to how these experiences are gendered, racialized, and shaped by immigration status. The approach most suitable in this regard is the feminist political economy (FPE) perspective. As such, I begin this chapter with an overview of the FPE perspective and how it shapes my orientation to the review of the literature and, subsequently, my own research study (see Chapter Three). Adopting this perspective, I then proceed by providing historical context, particularly regarding the emergence and rise of the norm of the standard employment relationship (SER). This is necessary to understand how the rise and prominence of temporary agency employment marks a material and ideological shift in the way that labour is viewed and treated as compared to before the 1970s. Then, I discuss the underlying assumptions and justifications behind this ideological shift, focussing primarily on the idea of “labour flexibility.” Next, I examine precarious employment and its rise in Canada since the 1970s, noting how it is both gendered and racialized. I conclude with a discussion of temporary employment agencies (TEAs) in Ontario.

Feminist Political Economy

As noted by Clement (2001), political economy “embodies a holistic undertaking to explain society from a materialist perspective,” in which attention is paid to government and governance, as well as the “social, political, and cultural constitution of markets, institutions, and actors” (406). It examines the interaction between the economic, the political, and the social. For my research, this involves studying economic context (employment practices), political processes (laws and policies), and social

relations (race, gender, etc.), and how they all come together to organize the experiences of immigrant women workers in temporary agencies.

FPE, in particular, is a heterodox but interdisciplinary system of economics that challenges the dominant orthodox neo-liberal economic model. It builds from economics, as well as political science, sociology, history, law, etc. The orthodox economics model assumes that human beings are ‘rational actors’ that make decisions in order to simply maximize gains. Each individual is assumed to be a “rational, self-interested, autonomous actor who desires wealth, avoids unnecessary labor and has the ability to make judgments towards ends,” and this pursuit of self-interest is viewed as maximizing the economic benefits available to a society through the invisible hand of the market (Riley, 2008; 2). FPE, however, recognizes that decisions are often more complicated, and notes that the orthodox model does not take into account motivations that are not based solely on self-interest, such as love, duty, and altruism. It also criticizes the assertion that an unfettered market economy driven by economic rationality is beneficial for all members of society (2).

Gender is a key analytical component to FPE, and careful attention is paid to unequal power dynamics between men and women. As Peterson (2005) notes,

In economics and political economy, feminists have exposed how men dominate the practice of and knowledge production about (what men define as) ‘economics’; how women’s domestic, reproductive and caring labour is deemed marginal to (male-defined) production and analyses of it; how orthodox models presuppose male-dominated activities (paid work, the formal economy) and masculinised characteristics (autonomous, objective, rational, instrumental, competitive) (501).

As such, a focus is placed on uncovering women’s experiences in order to make women’s lives more visible, to highlight the interdependence of both men and women’s stories, and to demonstrate how women and men are differently affected by political economy (Peterson, 2005).

Further, while traditional economics treats the public sphere of production and the private sphere of the household as separate, FPE recognizes that these two spheres are integrated and hold different consequences for men and women. A key concept in the analysis of unequal gender dynamics is 'social reproduction.' Social reproduction is the "processes involved in maintaining and reproducing people, specifically the labouring population, and their labour power on a daily and generational basis" (Bezanson & Luxton, 2006), work that has typically been, and continues to be, done primarily by females. FPE recognizes social reproduction as an economic category and notes that the consequences of not accounting for this work leaves women with greater burdens of work as compared to men, and creates a level of economic vulnerability for women (Riley, 2008). FPE also notes that gendered power dynamics intersect with other forms of power, and thus women's struggles cannot be separated from class, race/ethnicity, sexual preference, citizenship status, and geographical location (Riley, 2008). Insight is also borrowed from Das Gupta's (1996: 2) Marxist, feminist, and anti-racist approach to examine racism in paid work which "begins with an assumption of workplaces being located within a capitalist political economy where class relations and class struggle fundamentally shape the everyday lived relations of human beings" acknowledging that "these lived relations are also shaped and mediated by racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination". Insight from this approach is used to improve upon FPE as it recognizes that race and other forms of discrimination are just as important as class and gender when trying to understand and analyze the lived experiences of people. Further, these various social factors interlock to create unique experiences so it is recognized that each social factor cannot be analyzed distinctly without analysis of the others (Vosko, 2002).

FPE is the main theoretical perspective I adopt in my research interest in South Asian immigrant women's experiences of temporary agency employment. This entire thesis was framed through this perspective. Thus, I present my review of the literature in the remainder of this chapter as contextualized by this lens. In regards to temporary agency employment, this theoretical framework directs attention to a variety of features that shape the experiences of recent South Asian immigrant women working through temporary employment agencies. First, it must be recognized that these women are workers located in a capitalist political economy. As such, attention needs to be paid to class dynamics and the political and economic context in which workers are situated. This calls attention to employment norms and practices, and legislated standards available to workers, as well as the economic opportunities available to them in terms of jobs and security. As such, I review the changes in the labour market regulation of TEAs as illustrative of broader changes in the economy and changes in the laws surrounding TEAs as exemplary of the role of state and politics. Secondly, gendered dynamics must be noted both within the workplace and within the household. Gendered stereotypes at work and at home shape the types of employment opportunities available to women, specifically the kinds of jobs they are able to access and what those jobs mean in terms of pay, security, opportunities for advancement, health and wellbeing, etc. Therefore, I review the gendered norms and assumptions that underlie the standard employment relationship and other employment laws and practices, and pay attention to how gendered expectations shape employment opportunities for women. Thirdly, attention must be paid to race and immigrant status and how these dynamics shape experiences of work. Insights from an anti-racist approach are also fundamental as discrimination within the workforce is necessary to examine, but also the rights available to those who are not full citizens. Stereotypes regarding South Asian workers are important to note,

as well as issues such as the value given to the education and work experience acquired in South Asian countries. Thus, I review the disproportionately large numbers of racialized persons, particularly recent immigrants, living in poverty and working in precarious jobs as indicative of structural barriers. For example, barriers include discriminatory employer practices that relegate workers to specific jobs based on their race, and Canadian certification systems that place immigrants with foreign education at a disadvantage.

These are all important dynamics that must be considered, as each of them shape the opportunities that are available to people and how they experience them. For my research in particular, I wanted to understand how recent South Asian immigrant women experience precarious employment working through agencies, how agency employment affects their experiences within the household, and how it impacts settling and integration for them as recent immigrants. Therefore, I tried to frame my research questions in a way that would help to unpack the ways in which class, gender, race, immigrant status, and other social factors shape the experiences of South Asian women working through temporary employment agencies in Ontario.

The Standard Employment Relationship

The standard employment relationship (SER) is the starting point from which to understand the growing prominence of temporary agency employment. The SER emerged as a norm of employment in a number of Western industrialized capitalist economies after the Second World War. The SER can be understood as a part of the post-War era (1945-mid 1970s) that Standing (1999) characterizes as the ‘era of statutory regulation.’ Following the Second World War, the International Labour Organization (ILO) used the maxim “labour is not a commodity” in its Declaration of Philadelphia in 1944 (Standing, 1999; Vosko, 2010). As such, it was believed that labour should not be bought and sold on the market like it was any other good or

service and that people were entitled to certain rights within the labour market. The SER, therefore, was characterized as a full-time, permanent position working for one employer on the employer's premise, with social and legal benefits as a part of the package (Cuyper et al., 2008; Vosko, 2000).

Equally important to note is that the SER was based on a male-breadwinner model. As noted by Pfau-Effinger (2004), this model assumed a separation between 'private' and 'public' life. It was believed that women would run the private household, with responsibilities for family care and housework. Men were considered responsible for working in the public sphere and earning the family's income. This model was associated with what was considered to be "normal" nuclear family relations and a "normal" division of labour between men and women (Lewis and Giullari, 2005). This meant that women remained dependent on the income of the male breadwinner. However, while this model was imposed at the cultural level, it did not necessarily hold true for social practices in reality. In many working class families, it was not economically feasible for women to stay out of waged work and they often found themselves employed in nonstandard forms of employment such as temporary or part-time work. There was also a system of labour law that supported the segmented nature of the SER, with secondary standards for those who were outside full-time, permanent and unionized positions. As noted by Fudge (1991), labour law is based on norms surrounding ideas about the role of the law and the typical worker that it regulates (75). Therefore, labour law in Canada, particularly involving collective bargaining, did little to protect the majority of women as the belief during the post-war period was that full-time workers were primarily men. Moreover, unions during the post-war era bargained for a family wage for their male members, further entrenching the male breadwinner model. It is also important to note that although the SER was the norm, it was primarily

accessible to white males in core sectors of the economy and typically excluded women, people of colour, and immigrants (Vosko, 2000).

This era was also characterized by a few other features necessary to understanding the SER. Focusing on ‘welfare state capitalism’ in Canada, this model included a prioritizing of the interests of the labouring man through Fordism, Keynesianism and the welfare state (Standing, 1999). Fordism promoted economic growth based on mass production and mass consumption accessible to the working class (Vosko, 2000). Keynesianism advocated government intervention in regulating the economy in order to prevent economic slumps. This included interventionist fiscal policies to stimulate economic growth, trade policies that protected national industries and interests, and a goal of ensuring ‘full’ employment (Thomas, 2009; Standing, 1999). The welfare state was one in which the government assumed responsibility in promoting the social and economic well-being of its citizens, providing programs and services including unemployment insurance, government health insurance, and social assistance for those unable to work, as well as regulations, standards and policies to mitigate class conflict (Broad & Hunter, 2010). There was a compromise between organized labour and corporate capital during this time which involved security for the former group, and increased efficiency and growth for the latter (Vosko, 2000).

Because temporary agency employment contrasts sharply from all of the features of the SER, and the attempt was made to limit the commodification of labour during this time period, TEAs were highly regulated (Vosko, 2000). Part of the reason for the strict regulation of agencies also included the history of abuse and exploitation that accompanied the precursors of the TEAs. These were private employment agents such as padrones and general labour agents which operated for fees. Private employment agents operated in the Canadian labour market as

early as the 1880s, promoting immigration and placing immigrants with employers for fees. At this time, immigration policies were overtly racist, aimed at creating an ethnically pure British settler colony. The pursuit was for a “white Canadian.” However, immigrants were actively sought by employers as much-needed labour for temporary jobs such as day labour, construction, industrial work, seasonal agricultural work, etc. Male contract migrants were viewed as the most desirable employees because they could be paid less, were less likely to strike, could be used as strike-breakers, and reproduction costs rested mostly with the sending country. Additionally, employers desired ‘foreign’ workers who were not British because they felt that British men were not willing to engage in and commit to the menial work they sought to employ people for. Thus, while the recruitment of non-British immigrants was discouraged by immigration policy, the government overlooked many of the immigration policy infringements conducted by employers such as the Canadian National Railway. These workers, however, were used as guest workers or were exempted from the full protections of being a citizen by virtue of their occupations. Immigrants were constantly mistreated by private employment agents primarily through misrepresentation in terms of being promised jobs that were non-existent, inaccurately described, or short-lived, and agencies also faced complaints of collusion and extortion as direct and indirect fees were often charged to workers in exchange for the promised jobs.

Under growing pressure to respond to these abuses, the Ontario government passed its initial Employment Agencies Act in 1914 in which the province was able to ban employment agencies, and regulate fees, incorporating a broad definition of direct and indirect fees (Vosko, 2010). In 1927, the Act also recognized business relationships in which agents provided their own workers for a fee as characteristic of private employment agencies, recognizing the implicit triangular employment relationship (Vosko, 2010). At an international level, similar measures

were taken by the ILO, where it called for the gradual prohibition of private employment agencies, advocating that workers should not have to pay for work, apart from a few occupational exceptions (Vosko, 2010).

Following the Second World War, in a time in which extensive measures were taken to limit the commodification of labour, the only way in which the ‘classic’ TEA was able to operate was by finding a way to navigate within the labour market without upsetting dominant ideologies surrounding the SER (Hatton, 2011; Vosko, 2000). As Hatton (2011) notes, TEAs during this time focussed on clerical work and targeted middle-class white females. This was considered acceptable because the SER was based on a male-breadwinner model. Consequently, the work of females who participated in the formal labour market was considered to be secondary or supplemental to a primary male income earner (Gellantly et al., 2011). As such, TEAs marketed themselves as allowing the freedom and means for middle-class wives to be able to work again after marriage while also having the time to carry out domestic responsibilities. These agencies presented themselves as “halfway houses” for housewives who needed help in finding employment (Vosko, 2010). Because white women were presented as the face of these employees, the agencies distanced themselves from the history of abuse towards immigrants associated with earlier private employment agencies (Hatton, 2011; Vosko, 2000). More importantly, these agencies presented themselves as the employers of the workers unlike previous private employment agencies, with employees essentially providing services to other firms. They also claimed that the mark-up that was charged to firms who used their workers was not a “fee.” Racialized women were not made a part of these arrangements. As Glenn (1985) notes, racialized women in the post-war period in the United States, using Chinese-American, Black and Mexican-American women as examples, continued to lag behind white women

considerably in terms of white-collar and clerical positions, instead being concentrated in operative jobs, blue-collar and service occupations. Glenn notes that unlike white women, the role of racialized women as labourers in production took precedence over their domestic roles, and “whereas the wife-mother roles of white working class women were recognized and accorded respect by the larger society, the maternal and reproductive roles of racial ethnic women were ignored in favor of their roles as workers (102).”

Therefore, it is clear that during the post-War era, through the welfare state and efforts of organized labour, some attempt was made to de-commodify labour and to ensure that some workers were provided with a decent standard of working and living conditions. However, it is important to note that these protections and rights were not accessible to all members of the population but rather a select few, and unions also reinforced the exclusion of the SER through their scope of action and politics. As stated, the SER was the norm but applied mostly to white men working in Fordist sectors of the economy (Vosko, 2000). Precarious forms of employment, such as temporary agency work, existed even during this era but were reserved for people considered to be dependent on male breadwinners, specifically women, or people of colour and immigrants. Thus, temporary agency employment was heavily regulated at this time, but continued to maintain a foothold in the labour market by distancing itself from the negative image of its predecessors, and by appealing to sexist ideologies of domesticity and dependence (Hatton, 2011; Vosko, 2000).

The Demand for Labour Flexibility

In the 1970s, the period characterized as the post-war era came to an end as a material and ideological shift regarding work and labour became apparent. This shift resulted in significant restructuring, reducing many of the worker rights, standards, and protections that had

been gained in the previous era. This period is also characterized by the growth of non-standard forms of employment. Temporary agency employment is a part of this trend; however, it will be seen that the growth of the temporary help industry (THI) was not just a result of wider economic trends in which agencies were passively present, but rather that agencies themselves played an active role in facilitating this trend (Hatton, 2011). As these trends occurred under the name of “labour flexibility”, this concept will also be examined.

Industrialized capitalist economies began to face pressures beginning in the 1960s. Among the various pressures was a decline in U.S. productivity, stagflation, rising inflation, rising oil prices, and the breakdown of the Bretton Woods Agreement (Centeno & Cohen, 2012; Standing, 1999; Vosko, 2000). To many, this signified that Keynesian economics was flawed. Keynesianism was criticized for being inherently inflationary, causing periodic credibility crises (Standing, 1999). The 1970s is cited as the point in time when Keynesian economics and the welfare state began to decline and when processes such as the restructuring of the welfare state, the rise of supply-side economics, and globalization became especially significant (Kalleberg, 2009; Vosko, 2006). These changes were underpinned by neoliberalism, an ideology and an economic doctrine contrary to Keynesianism, that advocated for different forms of government intervention (Johnson, 1983), including intervention that sought to ensure the de-commodification of labour (Vosko, 2006). Neoliberalism can also be understood as a form of governance in which it “does not just act on political subjects, but constructs them in particular ways” (Larner, 2000; 19). It is a rationality that advocates for non-interference of the state with markets, and produces “subjects who discipline themselves in the name of individual initiative and responsibility” (Hartman, 2005; 69). As such, many of the changes that have occurred since the 1970s have been underpinned and justified through a neoliberal rationale. Neoliberal policies

have included the re-regulation of the labour market to make it more ‘flexible’; the downsizing and privatization of public sector work; the discouraging of unions and collective bargaining; and non-interventionist fiscal policies to stimulate growth and productivity (reducing regulations on businesses) (Thomas, 2009). A particular feature of neoliberalism that is cited as causing the decline of the SER is the demand for ‘labour market flexibility’ (Standing, 2011; Vosko, 2006). Standing (1999) explains that “the most common interpretation of flexibility is the extent and speed of adaptation to market shocks, the suggestion being that institutional and behavioural rigidities in labour markets and enterprises slow price and quantity adjustments” (49). As such, forms of security that organized labour had managed to secure during the Keynesian era came to be seen as impediments to economic growth (Standing, 1999). Labour flexibility, as a result, came to mean a lack of security for workers.

Supply-side economics called for macro-economic policy to be used to control inflation, while micro-economic policy would influence levels of employment and unemployment, but “full” employment no longer remained a priority (Standing, 1999). Employment levels would be influenced through the establishment of ‘free labour markets’ from which employment opportunities would then be generated. Supply-side economics thus believed in less regulation and intervention on the part of the government. As Johnson (1983) explains:

supply siders believe that the reduced level of government participation in the market economy would allow more ‘room’ for the private sector to grow and since it is assumed that the productive sector is productive (i.e., it can add to real out-put) and the government sector is non-productive, the long-run path for real output growth would be expected to shift upward (189).

As such, government intervention was viewed as inhibiting economic growth, and it was believed that allowing the private sector to grow would be most beneficial. One of the ways in which government intervention was viewed as prohibiting growth was through the regulations

and protections provided to workers, which were deemed to prevent the “flexibility” necessary for firms to respond quickly to market changes.

Standing (1999) notes that while supporters of supply-side economics and labour market flexibility advocated for supposed ‘de-regulation’ in this era, the reality in fact became an ‘era of market regulation,’ in which some regulations just displaced others, particularly those that were pro-individualistic or anti-collective. Standing states “regulatory reforms have been intended to restrict voice regulation and collective action, decentralize labour relations and wage bargaining and promote subordinated flexibility” (76). As such, the regulations enforced within this new era have aimed to restrict the rights of workers and their ability to demand better conditions for themselves.

For Vosko (2000), labour flexibility equates to the “commodification” of labour, where labour becomes treated like any other good or service that is bought and sold on the market without really taking into account the human elements and well-being of the person that is providing the labour. As Polanyi (2001) states, labour is “only another name for a human activity which goes with life itself, which in its turn is not produced for sale but for entirely different reasons, nor can that activity be detached from the rest of life, be stored or mobilized” (75). He argues that “the alleged commodity ‘labor power’ cannot be shoved about, used indiscriminately, or even left unused, without affecting also the human individual who happens to be the bearer of this peculiar commodity” (76). As such, Polanyi stated that in conditions where labour power is treated as a commodity, the human being will perish, and Vosko (2000) points to this problem with the changes occurring under the name of greater “flexibility.”

TEAs were thus able to market themselves as providers of this sought-after flexibility, particularly ‘numerical flexibility’ or ‘temporal flexibility’ in which the quantity of labour being

used can be varied easily in accordance to demand at any particular time (Peck & Theodore, 2002; Vosko, 2000). Other forms of flexibility TEAs provided include ‘functional flexibility’ through which specialized skills can be accessed for selective and temporary use, and ‘regulatory flexibility’ which reflects “the imperative to liberalize, deinstitutionalize, and deregulate the traditional employment relationship” (Peck and Theodore, 2002; 468). Further, while TEAs gained conditional legitimacy in other countries, there was no fixed legal status of agencies at the national or supranational level until the late 1960s (Vosko, 2000). This lack of legal certainty helped agencies gain legitimacy in Canada by allowing them to establish footholds and niches within the labour market that went unquestioned (Vosko, 2010). To further increase their legitimacy, agencies in the 1970s began to provide services that went beyond just providing workers, to “staffing services.” Agencies also began to assume responsibilities related to hiring, dismissal, health and safety, and the provision of benefits, reducing these costs for firms (Vosko, 2000).

Hatton (2011) recognizes that while agencies were in an environment where labour flexibility increasingly became valued, she also notes that the popularity of this model and spread of this ideology is in large part due to the efforts of TEAs themselves. She provides many examples of this phenomenon in the United States where the modern THI in North America originated. This includes THI leaders putting great effort into producing a variety of scholarships including “published books, advertisements, articles, newspaper columns, newsletters, legal guides, pamphlets, and billboards” in order to establish their expertise and help create a cultural shift in the dominant model of work (7-8). Hatton notes that while previous business owners were likely to follow theories that propagated that worker productivity can be increased if workers are provided with working conditions in which they feel valued, have incentives, and are

satisfied, the model that agencies began to sell was the liability model of work in which workers are just seen as burdens that detract from the bottom line.

Temporary agencies, therefore, presented themselves as experts in providing the answers to running more efficient and profitable businesses. Temporary agency workers (TAWs) were marketed as the solution to a problem that agencies called “overstaffing” in which unnecessary permanent workers “drain[ed] away profits in salaries, benefits, and overhead” (10). TAWs were a solution because they did not require any of those additional costs. TEAs also played an active role in growing the industry by expanding into every type of occupation that they could, including nursing, ‘consultants’ in fields of law and computer programming, providing workers to nuclear plants, and also by expanding internationally (Hatton, 2011; Vosko, 2000). Additionally, TAWs were used to undermine unions and permanent work by advising firms to cut permanent employees, switch permanent employees to temporary ones on the agency’s payroll, and use temporary workers as strike breakers (Hatton, 2011). Therefore, the THI was not only able to thrive because of a changing environment in which worker security became devalued and “labour flexibility” championed, but agencies themselves played an active role in producing this transformation.

Precarious Employment

While temporary agency employment signifies the growth of a form of nonstandard employment, it is not the only form of employment that deviates from the SER that has been developed. While authors have used various concepts such as contingent employment, casual employment, non-standard employment and atypical employment to capture the growth of employment that deviates from the SER, this review uses the concept of “precarious employment” (Lewchuk et al., 2006; Quinlan, Mayhew and Boyle, 2001; Vosko, 2006). While it

consists of different forms of work that vary considerably, precarious employment as a broad category is important to examine because it provides a framework to investigate the ways in which temporary agency employment represents a part of a larger change in which the norms and conditions surrounding work have changed. It also demonstrates which types of people are more likely to be found within precarious employment.

According to Vosko (2006), precarious employment is defined through a direct comparison to the SER and encompasses forms of work involving limited social benefits and statutory entitlements, job insecurity, low wages, and high risks of ill-health. Additionally, Vosko recognizes that precarious employment does not represent a dichotomy of jobs, but that it is multi-dimensional and represents a continuum in which some jobs are more precarious than others. It encompasses many forms of work including temporary employment, workers subject to organizational change resulting in job losses and increased job insecurity, outsourcing/ home-based work, part-time work, and small businesses (Quinlen, Mayhew & Bohle, 2001).

As was recognized earlier, the SER never applied to all members of Canadian society and excluded marginalized groups including women and racialized persons. Therefore, precarious employment was in existence even before the 1970s but was more typical of marginalized groups. Precarious employment now, however, has been spreading in the last few decades to encompass greater portions of the population, leading Vosko (2006) to state that the growth of nonstandard work can also be viewed as the “racialized gendering of jobs.” Vosko (2006) notes that the number of people working as full-time, permanent employees in Canada dropped from 67% in 1989 to 63% to 2003, and other forms of work arrangements such as solo self-employment, part-time and temporary jobs increased. Between 1989 and 2003, solo self-employment increased from 7% to 10%, and full-time temporary jobs increased from 4% to 6%.

Additionally, in a recent report on precarious employment in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and Hamilton, it was found that only 60% of people in this area have stable, secure jobs and that precarious employment had increased by almost 50% in the last twenty years (PEPSO, 2013). Further, there is still a “strong relationship between racialized-gendered social locations and dimensions of precarious employment, regardless of form” (Vosko, 2006; 60), meaning women and especially those of colour, continue to be overrepresented. The same report on the GTA-Hamilton region found that women were paid less than men in similar employment, and that people from racialized groups were paid less than white people in similar employment relationships (20). Additionally, the report found that white people were more likely to have secure employment (most closely resembling the SER), while racialized persons were more likely to be found within vulnerable and precarious employment, particularly new immigrants (PEPSO, 2013).

To explain the high prevalence of women within precarious employment, Vosko (2009) points to social reproduction, which is “an array of activities and relationships involved in maintaining people both on a daily basis and intergenerationally” (Glenn, 1992; 1). Under capitalism, the responsibility of social reproduction falls primarily on women. As discussed, this gendered division of labour was initially entrenched in Canadian society with the dominance of the male-breadwinner model and the standard employment relationship, along with policies that explicitly and implicitly excluded women from working formally in the labour market (Vosko, 2000). While women’s participation within the labour market has now significantly increased, women still continue to bear the brunt of household and childcare responsibilities. In 2005, women of prime working age in Canada spent 7.3 hours on average on unpaid work daily compared to 3.5 hours on average for prime working age men (Vosko, 2006). As such, women

are less able to participate in full-time jobs because of their heavy workload within the household, coupled by a lack of social policies and programs that help to alleviate this workload to make working full-time easier (Vosko, 2006). Because of this, women are more likely to be found within temporary or part-time jobs, which tend to be less secure, pay less, and less likely to have union coverage (Vosko, 2006). Additionally, gender also intersects with other social locations such as race, ethnicity, and immigrant status. A snapshot of racialized poverty by Employment and Social Development Canada (2013) shows that while poverty rates have been decreasing for non-racialized persons over the last couple decades, they have actually been increasing for racialized persons. Over half of the racialized persons living in poverty are residing in Ontario. Additionally, a majority of the racialized persons in poverty are immigrants, with recent immigrants most at risk. South Asians are second in terms of the percentage of a visible minority group that makes up the total number of racialized persons in poverty in Canada. Moreover, racialized women are more likely to be living in poverty than racialized men (Block and Galabuzi, 2011; Wallis and Kwok, 2008). Vosko (2006) cites research that finds that women, particularly those from racialized groups, tend to be “confined to jobs in the market that reflect the sex/gender division of domestic labour, such as child-care, nursing and service occupations” (46). These jobs have many features of precarious employment including low wages, few benefits, limited regulatory protection, little control over the labour process, and are often of short duration (Vosko, 2006).

Literature on immigrants and work in Canada demonstrates that racialized immigrants face two particular problems in the Canadian labour market, which helps to explain their prevalence in precarious work arrangements: first the devaluation of their skills; and second, the requirement of “Canadian experience” (Bauder, 2003; Man, 2004; Ralston, 1991; Vosko, 2000).

Bauder (2003) finds that immigrants see fewer returns on their education and it has been found that education is not an accurate predictor of labour-market outcomes among immigrants while it is for Canadian-born. In addition, he notes that professional bodies that regulate upper-segment occupations in Canada have rigorous certification systems that favour individuals with Canadian education, training and experience and disadvantage to immigrants. In his case study with South Asian and Yugoslavian immigrants, Bauder found that these groups faced significant barriers in working in their desired occupations. The requirement of “Canadian experience” is also another way from either banning entry into particular jobs or a convenient reason used to pay immigrants less despite their extensive job experience from their home countries. Man’s (2004) study on immigrant Chinese women in Canada confirmed this by finding that gendered and racialized institutional processes in the form of state conditions marginalized Chinese women and channelled these women into precarious forms of employment. This included state policies and practices, professional accreditation systems, employers’ requirement for “Canadian experience”, and labour market conditions.

Research also points to the need to examine immigrant class in determining conditions of work for racialized immigrant women. This includes whether the immigrant arrives as a skilled worker or family dependant (Das Gupta, 1994). It is argued that the points system on which immigrants are evaluated for the skilled worker category disadvantages racialized immigrant women, making it more likely for them to migrate as family dependants (Das Gupta, 1994).

Goldring and Landolt (2011) in their study found that precarious legal status has long-lasting effects on employment for immigrants residing in Toronto. Defining precarious legal status as “the absence of key rights or entitlements usually associated with the full or nearly full status of citizenship and permanent residence,” the authors noted that even after transitioning to a

more secure legal status, immigrants still found themselves stuck within precarious employment (328). Based on quantitative and qualitative data collected on Latin American and Caribbean immigrant workers, findings indicated that 21% of the immigrants were first employed in jobs considered highly precarious based on indicators of precarious work. Gender was a significant factor as women were more likely to work in highly precarious jobs at the time of the survey in comparison to men, along with volunteering experience and language competence. Those who had volunteered in the last twelve months, along with those who had higher levels of language competency, were less likely to be in highly precarious employment. However, language competency achieved through language classes was a less significant predictor than language competency gained prior to coming to Canada, or through work or life experience. Education was not a significant predictor, confirming findings that higher education for immigrants does not correlate to better working conditions. The authors found this result troubling given that the Canadian points system is highly selective and geared towards favouring highly educated immigrants, but as their research demonstrated, does not protect these highly educated immigrants from precarious employment (334). Goldring and Landolt concluded that immigrants have little recourse to better jobs despite the amount of time spent in Canada, and despite the transition to a more secure legal status, and that immigrants' first jobs were highly indicative of their long-term employment outcomes.

Theodore (2003) notes that in major cities in the U.S., such as Chicago, the conditions that allow for the spread of low-wage contingent employment, such as temporary agency employment, include the flexibilisation of work, processes of regional industrial restructuring, and uneven development at the urban scale (1812). One reason why temporary agency employment seems to be prevalent in Fordist industries is because these industries, when

confronted with increasing market uncertainty and growing income inequality, seek to become more competitive through quick fix solutions which are provided by temporary agencies.

Through the use of temporary agency workers, work hours and wages can immediately be decreased, and numerical flexibility becomes available both short- and long-term in order to more closely match the supply of labour with changes in demand (1816). Precarious work conditions and low employment, however, are not evenly distributed across the urban labour market, but are rather concentrated to particular segments of workers, particularly inner-city residents, recent immigrants, and welfare recipients. Theodore also notes that low-wage contingent work tends to follow a “path of least resistance,” exacerbating precarious conditions in existing low-wage labour markets. As a result, the growth and spread of contingent work tends to reproduce patterns of inequality along lines of socioeconomic status and race, labour market segmentation and social exclusion. In cities such as Chicago, Theodore notes that restructuring of the manufacturing sector is resulting in increasing polarisation, where some firms adopt high-performance models and others adopt low-road modes of competition. While the former model focuses on product quality, customisation and on-time delivery, the latter is based on strategies that revolve around low investment, wages, skill and cost (1814). Milkman (2008) notes that when low-road forms of competition take place in an industry, others are likely to follow suit and engage in similar practices. Additionally, as cities such as Chicago experienced large losses in the number of manufacturing jobs in the 1980s and 1990s, temporary agencies were able to tap into these underemployed labour pools in which minority communities tend to be overrepresented. Agencies are also able to market themselves as being able to recruit these underemployed inner-city workers for new industries propping up in suburban areas outside of the traditional Fordist geography of production. As such, Theodore (2003) notes that agencies

tend to be located in areas with a high concentration of unemployed workers, and that many of the workers who seek such employment do so as a last resort but are unable to escape poverty.

The growth and effects of precarious employment are important to note. In a report on the Greater Toronto-Hamilton region (PEPSO, 2013), authors found that at least twenty percent of people were employed within some precarious form of employment, and compared to those with secure employment, faced more income variability. Moreover, they rarely received employment benefits beyond a basic wage, faced constantly changing schedules with little advance notice, had limited career prospects, had more weeks without work, were less likely to be unionized, often held more than one job, and often worked on-call. Additionally, the report found that precarious employment has significant effects on household well-being with anxiety about employment, insecure employment and uncertainty over work schedules, and low incomes interfering with personal and family life. It was also found to affect the well-being of children.

Therefore, the growth of precarious employment, including temporary agency employment, raises legitimate concerns. Not only does it have significant effects on working and living conditions, but it also serves to exacerbate social inequalities along lines of gender, race, ethnicity and immigrant status. Additionally, it represents an erosion of a “standard” of work and security for all workers (Vosko, 2010).

Temporary Employment Agencies in Ontario

Burgess and Connell (2004) have found that international employment agencies are growing, as well as the number of temporary employment agencies in most Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries including Canada. A shift from standard employment arrangements to non-standard forms of employment, including research from Canada, the United States, Australia, and European countries, though not limited to these,

has been recognized as crucial to understanding this phenomenon (Burgess & Connell, 2004; Cuyper et al., 2008; Longhurst, 2014; Peck & Theodore, 2002; Standing, 2011; Vosko, 2000).

Temporary agency employment in Ontario is particularly precarious for a variety of reasons. It is important to note that temporary agency employment deviates from all of the characteristics that define the SER. Temporary agency employment is not a full-time permanent position, does not involve working for one employer, and is accompanied by limited social and legal protections. Temporary employment agencies are further characterised by a ‘tripartite relationship’ or ‘triangular relationship’. It involves the contracting out of individuals (workers) to third parties (client firms) by a service provider (the agency) (Cooke & Zeytinoglu, 2004; Vosko, 2010).

On November 6, 2009, The Employment Standards Amendment Act (Temporary Help Agencies) came into effect. As a response to growing concern over the changing dynamic of work in Ontario, this Act was passed in order to help temporary agency workers achieve a fairer standard of work in relation to workers hired on a permanent basis. The Ontario government acknowledged that work in the temporary help sector had grown drastically, and that legislation needed to reflect that change. The Ministry of Labour at the time reported that over 600,000 people in Ontario held temporary jobs, many through the approximately 1,000 temporary employment agencies (Ministry of Labour, 2013).

While the Employment Standards Act in Ontario in 2009 was adopted in order to deal with concerns about temporary agencies, Vosko (2010) finds that the modest regulations that were introduced remain inadequate in preventing the precarious conditions perpetuated by temporary agency work. The main measures in the amendments to the Employment Standards Act (2009) included that:

- workers are considered employees of the agency whether or not the worker is on assignment with a client business
- workers have a right to public holidays and public holiday pay and a right to notice of termination and severance pay
- workers cannot be charged fees by the agency for being its employee or for obtaining help finding work; an agency cannot stop a worker from being given a job reference or from being hired directly
- information must be provided about the agency, the assignment, and the ESA; a worker cannot be punished for asking about or exercising ESA rights
- the agency and client business must keep records and both may be liable for a worker's wages (Ministry of Labour, 2015)

However, Vosko (2010) finds that workers are still constrained in terms of politico-legal freedoms such as the right to freely choose their worksite and direct employer, and the ability to select their preferred type of work. It should also be noted that agencies can charge client businesses a fee for directly hiring an agency employee within the six-month period that the employee began their assignment. Additionally, the temporary employment model continues to diverge from all dimensions of the SER so that “the worker establishes occupational connections with several entities rather than one, is rarely party to an indefinite contract of employment, and often may be dismissed with little or no notice” (634).

Another shortcoming in Employment Standards (ES) policies in Ontario, particularly for precarious workers such as temporary agency workers, is highlighted by Gellantly et al. (2011). The authors critique the enactment of the Open for Business Act (OBA) in 2010 that focuses primarily on administrative efficiency for businesses and government. The Act was intended to ‘modernize’ government and streamline the Employment Standards Act in order to help reduce a backlog of 14,000 claims (1) but the authors argue that the Act undermines workers’ ability to access justice against employer abuses. Additionally, the OBA does little to proactively prevent

employment standards violations by businesses as it assumes that few employers will intentionally violate standards, and those that do are the rare “bad apples” who simply misunderstand the ESA and its workings (83). Most importantly, the OBA places onus on workers to prove that violations have occurred. Of the new measures that severely limit workers’ ability to seek recourse, the following are some of the most concerning. First, workers must try and enforce their ES rights with their employer (or former employer) before filing a complaint with the Ministry of Labour. This requires worker to have significant knowledge of their rights and the complaints process, but also places them in a vulnerable position when approaching employers. There is nothing to protect workers from any long-term effects such as differential treatment or from not being rehired if they are working on a temporary basis, or as a temporary agency worker (92). Second, workers must provide documentary evidence in a specified period of time or the claim is dismissed. A critical issue is that workers may require assistance in interpreting the meaning of complex legal information, and the Ministry of Labour requires that a form is completed properly before it can be accepted (93).

Gellantly et al. (2011) find many other additional barriers that workers now face that further tilt power in the favour of employers and that make low wage workers vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination. For example, the onus is primarily on workers to provide evidence that their rights have been violated as opposed to putting the onus on the employer to prove their innocence. It treats workers as the suspicious individuals who must prove their claims and workers are thus forced to risk employer retaliation when making a claim (14). This is problematic given that employers already have greater power in terms of resources and money. Additionally, Employment Standards Officers (ESO) are given the power to mediate settlements in order to expedite the process, but this can reduce the value of the settlement that a worker may

receive. It also does not suggest guilt on the part of the employer and places a great deal of power in the hands of the ESO, whose practices of settlement are neither open to public scrutiny or appeal (12). Given that low wage workers are disproportionately overrepresented by women and racialized workers, these measures are particularly concerning for these groups of workers. Temporary agency workers are seriously impacted because ES violations are an issue among agencies in Ontario. As mentioned previously, the Ministry of Labour recently found that 37 out of 50 agencies had multiple ES violations (Mojtehdzadeh, 2015). The OBA makes it easier for agencies to commit violations and makes it more difficult for workers to seek recourse.

Bernhardt et al. (2008) find that the use of temporary agencies, as well as the practice of subcontracting, has contributed to the spreading of what some authors call the ‘gloves-off economy’, which is characterized as a “set of employer strategies and practices that either evade or outright violate the core laws and standards that govern job quality in the U.S.” These authors note that the use of TAWs by firms in order to cut costs is leading to the increased erosion of both legal and normative standards of employment. Using a structuralist approach to explain this trend, they confirm an ideological shift in the treatment of labour, as beginning in the 1970s businesses sought to find new ways to avoid labour standards and laws (5). Bernhardt et al. (2008) find that temporary employment agencies are used to both evade employment and labour laws, by creating distance and confusion in regards to the employment relationship, and to reduce legal obligations. Legal liability is lessened through the use of TAWs and social welfare contributions are reduced. Further, they are used to erode normative workplace standards of job stability in order to gain wage and numerical flexibility. Additionally, the triangular employment relationship experienced by TAWs makes it virtually impossible for them to unionize (Zatz, 2008). Moreover, costs to employers when getting caught for evading laws are less than the costs

of using TAWs, and the chance of getting caught is very low. Meanwhile, the costs of litigation for a low-wage worker makes them less likely engage in a lawsuit when employers engage in unethical or unlawful practices (Zatz, 2008).

Qualitative interviews with temporary agency workers used by researchers reveal many of the problems that temporary agency workers face. Arsdale and Mandarino (2009) found that workers would work extremely hard hoping to impress employers and get hired permanently, though this rarely occurred. Workers became stuck within temporary agency employment, involuntarily finding that “temporary help is not a means to find a fulltime job, but rather, a means of supplying a permanently flexible on-demand workforce” (7). Additionally, work assignments can be as short as a few days, even though workers must constantly keep their schedules free in case an assignment may come up. Workers are not given any rewards for remaining on call and are rather forced to wait for work they often desperately need without getting paid. Moreover, workers have reported being afraid to turn down assignments for fear of not being called back later. These people are then unable to make important life plans given uncertain future schedules and incomes (Longhurst, 2014).

Many of the complications for TAWs result because they are engaged in a triangular employment relationship (TER) as opposed to the direct, indefinite employment relationship working under the supervision of one employer which is characteristic of the SER. This is problematic because it raises questions of who is held liable when workers’ rights are infringed upon or even what rights workers have access to. For example, a report by the Institute for Work and Health, Toronto (2014) found that TAWs are more likely to be injured on the job due to a combination of the TER and structural legal incentives. Because workers are sent to various worksites, they are often unfamiliar with the equipment and processes used, leaving them more

vulnerable. While generic training is provided by the agency, this training may have limited utility because of varying conditions at worksites. Further, agencies usually know little about the worksite and may be ill-prepared to match suitable workers to jobs. Finally, TAWs are often engaged in agency work as a last resort and are thus more ready to accept any work provided to them. While client firms are supposed to be responsible for worksite safety and agencies responsible for general health and training, the report found that the actual coordination of these shared responsibilities was problematic and practiced poorly in reality.

In terms of structural incentives, client firms benefit by using TAWs for more dangerous jobs because as the agency is the employer of the worker, any accidents do not appear on the client firm's accident record. Additionally, financial incentives are present because for a number of rate groups, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board provides TEAs with lower workers' compensation premium rates than client firms, meaning accidents cost the agency less than the firm. Finally the report also found that when fines become unaffordable, smaller agencies are able to easily close and re-open leaving work and health fines behind.

In a report on TEAs in British Columbia, Longhurst (2014) found temporary agency work to be characterized by six dimensions of precarity, including: work being of limited duration with a high risk of termination; lack of control over working conditions and the amount and pace of work; lack of protection in employment; low incomes (associated with poverty); increased debt burden; and increased precarity based on social location and social context. Longhurst notes that TAWs across Canada in 2004 had a median hourly wage of \$11/ hour, with a yearly median income of only \$7,850. He found that TAWs universally reported low wages and having to live in poverty as a consequence. Agencies, however, charge a 'mark-up' fee, which is the "difference between the hourly wages" of temp workers and the billing rate charged

by agencies” (Peck and Theodore, 2002; 152). Peck and Theodore (2002) found that whatever evidence there is suggests that mark-ups in the United States at least have fluctuated around the forty percent level for decades (152). Longhurst found this to be a frustrating factor for agency workers who were aware that a large portion of their wages was taken by the agency. Because of the combined factors of limited duration of employment, periods of time between assignments without an income, lack of control over when work is available, and low wages, the report found that many agency workers had to take out loans and accumulate debt as a strategy to cope with these difficulties.

There is also literature that discusses the tribulations of day labourers in the United States and Canada that closely resembles temporary agency employment. Informal day labour is “a term used to convey an unauthorized and temporary form of employment, characterized by the daily search for employment in public spaces, such as street corners or parking lots” while formal day labour occurs through temporary agencies or labour offices (United Way, 2007: 3). Research from the United States on day labourers suggests that these workers are systemically subjected to violations of labour and employment laws including nonpayment of wages, hazardous working conditions, and more (Melendez et al., 2014; Theodore et al., 2009; Valenzuela et al., 2006). Annual estimated earnings of these workers remain low, typically below \$15,000 (Melendez et al., 2014). While a report by the United Way (2007) on day labourers in Calgary recognizes that both formal and informal day labour lends itself to exploitation and abuse, informal day labourers face even greater exploitation and abuse due to the fact that informal day labour is not regulated. Thus, both forms of day labour are similar in many ways, but informal day labourers face greater challenges due to a complete lack of regulation.

Finally, it is important to note that as precarious work has a gendered and racialized component to it, so too does temporary agency work. Not only do women and immigrants face barriers that make them more likely to turn to temporary work, but Vosko (2000) found that work through agencies itself is often segregated based on gender and race, noting agencies were more inclined to place people within certain jobs based on their gender and race. It was noted that women are more likely to be placed within jobs such as reception or executive assistant, secretary, file clerk, etc., thus maintaining the high prevalence of women within clerical work. Longhurst (2014) also found in his study that women were segregated into such work, thus preventing them from obtaining higher-skilled and higher-paying occupations even when women had the experience and desire to work in such jobs such as construction.

Vosko (2000) also found that for immigrants, TEAs market themselves by claiming to provide “Canadian experience.” This is commonly a requirement asked by employers of racialized immigrants. Agencies present themselves as a solution to this problem, and social assistance departments also direct recent immigrants to agencies. However, it ends up creating a vicious cycle for immigrants in which they become trapped within this type of work. Moreover, as was the case with private employment agencies at the start of the 20th century, employers often request immigrants from agencies claiming that “white Canadian men” lack the work ethic of immigrants. This maintains a racialized division of labour in which people of colour are funneled into lower paying, low-skilled jobs. Most notably, Vosko found that agencies engaged in two overtly racist practices that maintain racial inequalities: first, the grouping of workers with the same background intentionally; and second, the refusal to provide reference letters to immigrants.

Summary

Using a FPE lens, this chapter reviews the rise of temporary agency employment and demonstrates how this trend is linked to broader political and economic changes that represent a significant shift in the way that workers were once viewed and treated. During the post-war era, labour security was valued, as depicted by the (gendered and racialized) norm of the SER, along with regulation at the international level that advocated, “labour is not a commodity.” The 1970s, however, witnessed a shift in this ideology and “labour flexibility” came to be valued over labour security. This was, in part, influenced and propagated by TEAs themselves who made great efforts to claim expertise in the field, and to market their services along with a model of work in which workers were seen as liabilities. The legitimization of agencies on the part of the Canadian government, as well as international bodies, when they were once seen as undesirable and exploitative, demonstrates the complete shift in how labour and labour rights are now viewed. TEAs have been legitimized and are allowed to continue to grow at a rapid pace despite the inherently precarious nature of this form of employment. A review of literature demonstrates that temporary agency employment is highly precarious and it deviates from all of the characteristics that define the SER. Specifically temporary agency work: is of limited duration with a high risk of termination; offers little control over working conditions and the amount and pace of work; is characterized by a lack of regulatory protection; provides low income (and is associated with poverty); contributes to increased debt burden; and is additionally made more precarious by social location and social context (Longhurst, 2014). When looking at regulation specific to Ontario, particularly the 2009 amendments to the Employment Standards Act, Vosko (2010) finds the regulation of TEAs to be lacking in many areas including a lack of coverage for all types of employees employed by temporary agencies, the maintenance of barriers to labour mobility for workers, and a lack of holding both client firms and temporary help agencies jointly

and severely liable for most violations of the Act. Having established this context, the next chapter discusses the methods that guided my study and provides some details about the women I interviewed.

Chapter Three

Methodology

In this chapter, I begin by reviewing the Feminist Political Economy approach and the particular ways in which it guides my study. I then restate and explain my major research question and the three subquestions that address various aspects of South Asian immigrant women's experiences. Next, I describe my recruitment strategy and eligibility criteria for data collection and highlight the demographics of the respondents in my sample. I follow with a discussion of data collection methods used where I explain how the ethnographic method of participant-observation is used to supplement and inform my interview data. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of my analytic strategies.

Overarching Framework

Recall that the theoretical lens that guided this project was primarily a feminist political economy perspective, linking the experiences of South Asian immigrant women to broader political and economic structures with attention to how these experiences are gendered and racialized. From this perspective, women's experiences with temporary agency employment are interpreted within the larger context of the political economy in which they live. As such, I use this theoretical framework to guide the methods of data collection that I employ, and the types of questions that I ask, in order to unpack the ways in which social factors of gender, race and immigrant status intersect to create unique ways in which precarious employment is experienced. Additionally, through a FPE lens, I situate the narratives of women engaged in temporary agency employment within the Canadian neoliberal political economy, pointing to how political economy influences the employment opportunities and conditions of employment available to women. Specifically, I examine how social factors such as gender, race and immigrant status

shape the experiences of women as a result of political, economic, and social processes and practices that disadvantage immigrant women of visible minority status.

Research Questions

The major research question that guides this thesis is: **What are the experiences of South Asian immigrant women working in temporary employment agencies in Ontario?**

Additionally, subquestions are asked that seek to address the various dimensions of the experiences of these women.

The first subquestion is **how do South Asian immigrant women experience precariousness in temporary agency work?** This question seeks to unpack the ways that temporary agency employment is precarious and the ways in which this precariousness affects these women's experiences of work.

The second subquestion is **how does precarious employment through temporary agencies affect the household?** This question seeks to unpack the more gendered aspects of precarious employment in trying to discover ways in which household dynamics shape the decision or need to work for agencies. It also seeks to explore how temporary agency employment affects household dynamics, such as childcare and eldercare decisions.

The third subquestion that will be asked is **how does temporary agency employment impact settling and integration for recent South Asian immigrants?** This question seeks to understand whether or not temporary agency employment creates opportunities for economic security. This is important because current trends demonstrate that while poverty rates are declining for Canadian-born citizens, the poverty rates for racialized persons are actually increasing, particularly for recent immigrants. Additionally, racialized women are most likely to be living in poverty (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2013). Given that racialized

immigrant women are more likely to be found within precarious employment, it is important to determine if temporary agency work creates opportunities for economic security.

Recruitment and Sampling

To answer these questions, I conducted twelve semi-structured qualitative interviews with South Asian immigrant women working through temporary agencies. To be eligible for the study, the women had to be recent immigrants who migrated to Canada within the last ten years and identified their origin as either Bangladeshi, Bengali, East Indian, Goan, Gujarati, Kashmiri, Pakistani, Punjabi, Nepali, Sinhalese, Sri Lankan, Tamil, or South Asian⁵. Recent immigrants were selected as previous research demonstrated that this group is particularly vulnerable to precarious work (Vosko, 2010). South Asians were chosen as the immigrant group as they represent one of the largest visible minority immigrant populations in Ontario, but also due to methodological reasons. As I am fluent in Punjabi and Hindi, I felt that giving South Asian women a chance to speak in their native languages, particularly for recent immigrants, would allow them to feel more comfortable and express their narratives with greater detail and clarity. While the category of “South Asian” includes women from multiple countries, all of my participants ended up being from India and spoke Punjabi. I believe this turned out to be the case due to the use of mutual contacts who were also Punjabi Indians and because the majority of the South Asian women I met at worksites were Punjabi Indians. The latter may have been because the agencies I worked through were largely owned by Punjabi people and that may have resulted in a larger Punjabi clientele. Additionally, Punjabi Indian women may have felt more comfortable speaking to and befriending me in the workplace environment because I myself am Punjabi Indian and this resulted in a greater likelihood of my recruiting them.

⁵ The 2001 Census of Canada defines people to be South Asian who report their origin as at least one of Bangladeshi, Bengali, East Indian, Goan, Gujarati, Kashmiri, Pakistani, Punjabi, Nepali, Sinhalese, Sri Lankan, Tamil, or South Asian.

Participants were recruited through mutual contacts, purposive and convenience sampling, and snowballing. As I also engaged in participant-observation when employed by multiple temporary employment agencies, I also recruited women that I met at work by directly approaching them after work hours. In order to ensure that their participation in this project would not affect their employment opportunities, careful precautions were taken to ensure that their participation remained confidential. For example, I only approached the women after the shift was over and we were alone and had left the building. I would tell them a little bit about my project and ask for their phone number. I would then call at a later time to ask about a potential interview. Additionally, interviews were conducted at locations away from the workplace that were convenient for the participant. Two interviews were also conducted with former employees who worked for temporary agencies, one who had the job of selling employment contracts to firms and another who worked as a secretary at an agency office. Another interview was conducted with a member of a Toronto-based workers' advocacy group.⁶

Of the twelve women interviewed, three of the women were married with young children, two were students residing in Canada on a student visa, two were women living with their adult children, and five of the women did not have children and were living with their parents. Each of these groups of women had unique characteristics and reasons for working through temporary employment agencies that influenced their experiences of agency work and also the way they felt about it.

Data Collection

⁶ The aim of the interview was to learn more about the types of complaints and challenges that were expressed to the group by agency workers, and also to understand how effectively they were able to overcome these challenges.

Data was collected over a period of five months between late-August 2015 and early-January 2016. All of the women I interviewed resided and worked through temporary employment agencies in the Greater Toronto Area, specifically Brampton, Malton and Mississauga. Interviews were conducted at locations away from the worksite as a precaution, either at a coffee shop or at the women's homes. The interviews were semi-structured and lasted typically between half an hour to forty-five minutes. All but one interview was conducted in Punjabi as this was the language that the women were most comfortable speaking in. The other interview was conducted in English. The interviews were later translated into English during the transcription process. The primary goal of translation was to allow readers to better understand the meaning of the original statements as opposed to a word-for-word translation that would have resulted in the loss of meaning. This is because there are certain words and idioms used in Punjabi, as there are in other languages that cannot be translated word-for-word into English without losing the essence of the meaning of the words.

Participant-Observation

As discussed above, I also engaged in participant-observation research for my project. Participant-observation is a method of data collection that is part of the larger "method" of ethnography. According to Spradley (1980), ethnography allows us to understand a way of life from a native point of view and is about learning from people as opposed to simply studying them (3). It allows us to obtain an insider's view to a particular culture and to understand the meanings that are held by insiders. Participant-observation, in particular, is the process of learning about the activities of people under study in a natural setting through observing and participating in these activities (Kawulich, 2005). As such, participant-observation allowed me to better understand the experiences of working through a temporary employment agency and I was

able to use my experiences as a guiding tool for the types of questions to ask the women I interviewed. It also allowed me to get a better understanding of the meanings that the women construed out of their experiences by witnessing this work first-hand, and being able to talk to the women about it as it happened. For example, my own experiences highlighted that there were particular agencies that did not pay their workers the amounts that they were legally entitled to, and that often times a written record of payment was not provided. As such, this guided me to ask women how much they were paid by the agency, through what method payment was made, if they were aware of the minimum wage, and if they knew how much of their paycheque was being deducted in taxes. It also helped me to better understand how and why the women chose to act or not act after being underpaid. I also got to witness workplace dynamics such as internal competition between agency workers to try and get hired permanently, and interactions between supervisors, permanent workers and agency workers. Additionally, going to worksites as an agency worker gave me a chance to meet women that I could potentially interview. I believe that getting to know the women at work before the interview also allowed for more authentic and detailed accounts of their experiences during the interview as it gave me a chance to build their trust.

While doing the participant-observation, I did not tell anyone at the agency or worksite that I was a student writing my thesis on the topic of agencies unless I approached them after work. As such, I engaged in “covert” participant observation. As noted by Hilbert (1978), this strategy involves analysts participating fully within settings while generally concealing anything to do with their research interests. This was done for three primary reasons. The first reason was to obtain access. After asking the owner of an agency if I could be sent to work with my identity as a researcher being disclosed, it became clear that agency owners would not feel comfortable

with this as they assumed that their clients would not be comfortable with this arrangement. The second reason that I did not disclose my identity as a researcher was to ensure that the women I interviewed would not have to fear any adverse consequences for participating in this project, and in particular that their employment would not be jeopardized in any way. In addition, if they feared that their participation could affect their ability to work, then they may not have participated and/or the answers they provided may have been different. For example, the one agency owner that was willing to provide me referrals for women I could interview wanted to see a list of the questions that I would ask them beforehand. As such, ensuring that no one within the agency or client firm knew that the women were participating in the interview was a priority. Other precautions⁷ that were taken in order to ensure privacy and confidentiality included keeping any hard copies and written notes in a locked cabinet. Additionally, any digital data was kept on a password-protected laptop. All identifying information was removed and pseudonyms were used instead of real names. The final reason for not disclosing my identity was to try and make my experience as realistic as possible. If agencies or client firms knew that I was conducting research I may not have gotten access to the same types of work experiences that I did. For example, I encountered some practices by agencies that were illegal and I would probably not have been able to witness this if they had known I was a researcher.

For the participant-observation portion of my research, I worked through four separate temporary employment agencies located within the Greater Toronto Area over the span of four months. Two were located in Brampton, one was located in Malton and one was located in Mississauga. I used a mutual contact who knew the owners of various agencies in order to obtain work with three of the agencies. I worked through each agency between two to five days

⁷ I obtained ethical approval from The Office of Research Ethics at York University prior to the recruitment of respondents and research procedures were consistent with their expectations.

depending on how many of the days I was sent to work.⁸ After three days I typically stopped actively pursuing work with the agency.⁹ At the last agency, however, I was only able to acquire two days of work before I chose to stop collecting data. This was because they were primarily seeking people who could work the afternoon shift and I was not available then. I also had a mutual contact that helped me obtain work through the first three agencies but I did not have a contact at the last one. While I originally thought that obtaining work through a mutual contact was untrue to the experience of an actual agency worker, I later realized it was a process that was common for many of the women that I interviewed in terms of how they first started working through agencies. Working for an agency was often suggested by a family member, or neighbour, and then work was obtained through a mutual contact who knew someone at the agency.

I was either contacted by the mutual contact or the agency owner when work was available. I was usually told that there was work a day in advance, but the phone call could come at any time during the day before, sometimes as late as 11 pm. I once received a text at 6 am asking if I was available for a morning shift that was starting in a few hours. I was only given general labour work as I only listed 'previous general labour experience' or 'no work experience' on the agency registration form. During the days that I was given work, I would arrive at the factory or warehouse a few minutes before my shift started or I was told that I would be docked pay for being late. I would usually meet with a supervisor who would have a sign-in sheet for the temporary agency workers. Permanent workers would use punch clocks while agency workers used the sign-in sheets. The supervisor would then tell you which line or area to work at. At the

⁸ The agency would often let me know if they had work for me the next day on a daily basis, even if it was for the same location. Sometimes I was sent for a few days simultaneously and sometimes I was told not to go on days in between.

⁹ Some agencies suggested that you call every day and ask if they have work. As such, after receiving three days of work from the agency I would stop calling.

first factory, the work involved packing alcohol bottles into boxes. The second factory involved cutting and packing vegetables. The third factory printed and put together boxes and boards for other companies. The work also involved stripping cardboard¹⁰ and gluing pieces together. The last factory I worked at made plastic bottles and I had to pack the bottles in various arrangements as they were being outputted from the machine. There were various limitations at the worksites that sometimes made it difficult to try and talk to fellow workers. This included loud noise generated by machines, working alone, and being moved between different lines or areas constantly. Another challenge was when workers were not given breaks at the same time in order to keep machines running at all times.

While at the factory, I would take notes on my phone either during lunch or right after work. I recorded voice notes after work as well so that I could make a record of the day as soon as possible before forgetting details. I also took notes when I received phone calls from the agency and when I went to the agency offices to pick up cheques. I also took pictures of any written records of payments that I received. One of the possible limitations that I faced was that I also worked a part-time job in the afternoons and weekends, so I could not take any jobs that required shifts at those times.

Analysis Strategy

Narrative analysis was used for the interview data. As described by Bischooping and Gazso (2016), narrative analysis is a qualitative approach used to analyze talk data, particularly narratives, or stories, that are the recounting of experiences that have taken place over time. This type of analysis pays particular attention to individuals' perceptions, experiences, and interpretations of their circumstances (3). Understanding how individuals and communities

¹⁰ The factory printed company logos and designs on rectangular cardboard and plastic sheets but the final shape was often not intended to be a rectangle. Stripping, therefore, meant removing the extra pieces of cardboard or plastic from the rectangular sheets.

derive meaning from their experiences is central to this approach as “narrative analysts understand themselves to know the social world through their research participants’ subjective reconstructions of their experiences of ‘knowing’ and ‘being’” (15). The goal was to allow the women to shape their own narratives in response to the questions I generated in my interview guide (see appendix A).

After I completed translating and transcribing the interviews simultaneously, data was coded according to topics generated by the women. Once the data were coded, I grouped the codes from an individual women’s interview with similar codes that materialized across multiple interviews. I was then able to analyze the common narratives that emerged. In particular, I looked for the ways in which women felt about their experiences and the meanings that they gave to these experiences. Many common stories emerged regarding particular challenges that the women faced and I also searched for ways in which social factors such as gender, race and immigrant status were fundamental in defining the experiences of the women as a group.

Bischoping and Gazso (2016) note that when using interview-based data, it is important to reflect on how well interview methods addressed the insufficiencies of language to convey complete meaning, and the researcher’s capacity to be trusted with narrators’ self-reflections (16). One way to do so is to reflect on differences between my own standpoint and the standpoints of the women interviewed. Standpoint “refers to how a person’s consciousness and interpretations develop according to the experience of being socially located in particular categories, performances, and intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, citizenship, ability, and so forth” (45). While I was socially located in similar categories to the women I interviewed, particularly as a South Asian woman, one of the largest differences was that of citizenship. While I am born in Canada and have lived here for the majority of my life, all of these women

immigrated to Canada in their adult years. As such, one of the differences in perspective that I noted was surrounding questions of the share of housework between married women and their husbands. When asked about how much help the women received from their husbands in regards to household chores and taking care of the children, the women would often admit to little help, though this was not a concern to them. One of the women told me “it’s okay...because it’s our habit as Indians to adjust accordingly. We’re not Canadian.” As such, it was difficult to get women to expand upon the topic of the division of labour within the household because their greater share of the work in the household as women was so normalized for them. Additionally, women were given the opportunity to comment on the interview once I had asked all of my questions, and any suggestions about questions that they felt should be asked were later incorporated into the interview schedule.

Document analysis was also used for sources including documents produced by government and community organizations, as well as newspaper articles. Government documents that were analyzed included those published by the Government of Canada, the Ontario Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Development Canada, and Statistics Canada. Reports that were used that were published by community organizations included those from the United Way, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, the Institute for Work and Health, and the Workers’ Action Centre. Newspaper articles that were used were from the Toronto Star.

Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed and justified the methods that I used to gather my data. In the next three chapters, I present the findings from this research. This information has been organized into three sections that correlate directly with the project’s research questions. Chapter

Four discusses women's experiences of precarious employment working through temporary agencies. Chapter Five examines dynamics with the household and how they informed women's decisions to work through agencies, as well as how working through agencies informed household dynamics in return. Chapter Six looks at whether working through agencies allowed women to achieve economic security and their experiences of trying to obtain employment as recent immigrants. Chapter Seven analyzes these findings.

Chapter Four

Findings: Experiences of Precarious Employment

When I began this research, I sought to discover the experiences of South Asian women engaged in precarious employment and how these experiences were affected by various social factors such as gender, race, immigrant status, etc. This chapter focuses on the findings that pertain to dimensions of temporary agency employment that make it precarious, and how these dimensions affected the women's experiences of work. Before presenting my findings, I begin by providing a brief statistical overview of temporary employment agencies in order to help contextualize this industry in Canada and Ontario. I also give a description of the workplaces that I went to as a participant-researcher.

Temporary agency work has been growing on an international level. According to the International Confederation of Private Employment Services (CIETT) (2015), there were 260,000 agencies around the world in 2013, with a global penetration rate¹¹ of 1.6%. To put Canada in perspective, CIETT stated that 800 of these agencies were in Canada, with 450,000 workers employed through agency work on a yearly basis. In Canada the penetration rate was 0.6%. Comparatively, it was 2% in the U.S. and 1.7% in Europe. While the market in Canada is still relatively smaller than in other countries, it is continuing to grow. In 2012, Statistics Canada reported that the operating revenue for employment services¹² in Canada was \$11.5 billion dollars, rising over 70% since 2002. 51.1% of this revenue was generated in Ontario, followed by Alberta at 25.4% and Quebec at 12%. Temporary employment agencies contributed to 60.7% of sales. The business sector was the main client of employment services in 2012, accounting for

¹¹ According to CIETT, the penetration rate is the amount of agency workers as a share of the working population.

¹² According to Statistics Canada, the employment services industry consists of establishments primarily engaged in the permanent placement, executive search, contract staffing, temporary staffing and co-employment staffing services.

87.8% of sales, and was followed by government and public institutions at 10.3%. In 2014, there were over 1,300 temporary employment agencies in Ontario and over 700,000 temporary workers (MacEachen et al., 2014).

Where Women Worked: Four Sites

The firsthand knowledge that I was able to gain as a participant-observer informs how I understood women's stories as I knew what the work entailed through my own experiences and observations. The women's stories in the remainder of this chapter are reflective of working in these sites. Over the course of four months, I went to work through four separate agencies. Two were located in Brampton, one was located in Malton and one was located in Mississauga. I worked through each agency between two to five days depending on how many of the days I was sent to work.¹³ I went to one workplace for each agency that I worked through, though it would have been possible to be sent to multiple workplaces. With the first agency, I was sent to work in a warehouse in Brampton. The work itself involved packing bottles and there were four stations that workers could be placed at. Each station involved the packing of different types of bottles which ranged from small sample bottles, to bottles that were packed in groups, to large bottles that were packed individually. The actual work involved assembling cardboard boxes, removing cardboard dividers, putting connected plastic rings onto bottles to hold them together, placing bottles into boxes, and gluing or taping boxes once the bottles had been packed inside them. About three to six people worked at each station. Because the process involved a variety of steps that had to be done in order, the overall pace was dependent on each worker completing their step quickly, and sometimes one person was in charge of multiple steps. This added to the

¹³ The agency would often let me know if they had work for me the next day on a daily basis, even if it was for the same location. Sometimes I was sent for a few days simultaneously and sometimes I was told not to go on days in between.

pressure of working quickly as the slowest people were easy to identify and essentially slowed down everyone else.

The working area itself was small as most of the warehouse was used for storage. I saw around ten to twelve workers on each day that I was there, and the workers were not always the same. Based on conversations that I had with fellow workers, I was unsure if any of the workers were actually permanently hired, though I met an agency worker that had been there for over one year. Most of the workers were women and they did the majority of the packing while men did the heavy lifting and the operating of machinery and forklifts. The work day lasted from 8:30 am to 5 pm. There were two 10 minute breaks in between and a half hour lunch. This was the most difficult assignment that I had as the pace was pushed extremely fast, the breaks were the shortest, and there was little conversation or friendship between workers as they were constantly changed on a daily basis and made to compete with one another.

Through the second agency, I was sent to a factory that cut and packed fruits and vegetables. Like the other factories and warehouse, workers entered the building from a side entrance as opposed to the front door. From there, workers had to sign in and this involved signing a piece of paper with the time that you arrived. Workers also signed out at the end of the day. Usually, there was a supervisor either directly watching people sign or they were sitting close by. This factory employed what appeared to be at least fifty people during each shift, and there were multiple shifts of work. Because we were working with food, no jewellery could be worn and jackets, hairnets, sleeve covers, and two pairs of gloves were worn. It was also very cold where the actual work was done so it was advised that we wear sweaters and jackets. Whenever we left the work area for break or lunch, everything but the jackets were discarded, and new equipment was provided again before entering. Hands were always washed prior to

entering the work area as well. The work area had many lines, which each involved cutting a particular fruit or vegetable in a specific way so that it could be packaged. Some lines involved multiple people doing the same thing and other lines required multiple people doing various steps of the process. For example, cauliflower required everyone to take out the center piece and throw it back onto the line, while bell peppers had some people cutting the stem, and others cutting the bell peppers into quarters. I only worked in the lines that required cutting vegetables and there was a short time where I helped place packaged salad into cardboard boxes. I was asked to switch lines constantly along with other workers based on what was needed. This required having to learn new techniques of doing things regularly. This workplace employed a mix of permanent and temporary agency workers, and it was difficult to know which type of worker was which unless I asked them directly. Though the shift was from 7 am to 4pm, all agency workers were sent home at 2pm on the first day of my assignment.

With the third agency, I went to a factory where cardboard and plastic signs and boxes were made for various companies. The work here involved stripping,¹⁴ folding and assembling boxes, gluing pieces, and making skids.¹⁵ This factory employed a mix of permanent and temporary agency workers, but there were approximately 50 workers from four different agencies working there during my shift when I first arrived. I saw this by looking at the sign-in sheets as each agency had their own. I believe there were fewer permanent workers than agency workers, and many of the permanent workers that I spoke to had been working there for over ten to twenty years. On the second day that I went to work there, more than 15 people, including

¹⁴ The factory printed company logos and designs on rectangular cardboard and plastic sheets but the final shape was often not intended to be a rectangle. Stripping, therefore, meant removing the extra pieces of cardboard or plastic from the rectangular sheets.

¹⁵ A skid is a material handling platform made of wood, with slots engineered to allow forklifts to pick up and transport the skids. Making a skid is loading finished products onto this platform and preparing it to be transported.

myself, were asked not to come back the following week and were told to wait until the company called them before returning for work. I was then asked to return to work the next week as they needed more workers again. When I returned, I saw many new agency workers that had been employed through a different agency.

The fourth agency that I was employed through sent me to a factory that made plastic bottles and pieces. This was the only agency where I did not have a mutual contact who knew the owner of the agency. The work that I did at this factory involved assembling boxes to pack the plastic bottles in, taping them, making skids, checking plastic bottles for any deformities, and loading plastic pieces onto a moving line. This factory also employed a mix of permanent and temporary agency workers, and had multiple shifts. Many permanent workers had been working there for over ten to twenty years as well. In fact, I found out after the start of my assignment there, that my mother had worked in the same factory 27 years earlier and some of the women still working there remembered her. The factory was closing shortly and moving to another city and this was upsetting for some workers as they would have to travel a much further distance now if they chose to continue working with the same company. Calls for work were not constant or routine for this factory and I was only sent to work for two days in two weeks. I would be called to go sometimes but then be called back and told that I was not needed that day.

Based on my observations as a participant-researcher and the stories told through interviews with recent South Asian immigrant women who worked through temporary employment agencies, findings demonstrate that the women's experiences of precarious employment are defined by: a lack of control over work schedules and the duration of work assignments; a lack of control over working conditions; low wages and income; and a lack of

rights and protections. Social factors such as gender, race, and immigrant status were found to influence and exacerbate dimensions of precariousness.

Lack of Control over Work Schedules and Duration of Work Assignments

It was found that women had very little to no control over their work schedules and the duration of their work assignments. The agency would call the women when work was available but very little notice was provided. Typically, notice was given less than a day in advance. This was concerning for the women as nine of them expressed wanting permanent, full-time work as opposed to a fluctuating schedule or a temporary work assignment. The three women who did not want to work full-time hours at the time of working through an agency still expressed wanting a predictable schedule with a guarantee of work. Jasmine stated, "...they only send you when there is work. We sit here just waiting. Will the agency call? Will they not? We're just waiting all the time. Then they send you for two days and then not the next day. The work is not regular." Because many of the women arrived to Canada with little to no savings, the lack of regular work was a great source of stress and anxiety. Preeti recalled, "they would call sometimes, you're ready to go and then they say they don't have work today. It's stressful."

As a result, many women reported having to call the agency, or multiple agencies, on a frequent basis asking for the availability of work. Kajol, who formerly worked as a secretary at an agency, confirmed that this was a regular occurrence where she worked, saying "we had people who call every single morning. Do you have work for me today? Do you have work for me today?" She also said that people would show up to the office itself in order to ask for work, adding "Every morning. Be waiting when the doors open. Do you have work today? Do you work today? Do you have? Same thing as calling."

An assignment is when a person is sent to a company that requested a worker, or multiple workers, from a particular agency. The agency then calls their employees and sends whoever is available. This assignment can be as short as one day. When the assignment is over, the person may have to wait several days or weeks to be called again. It is common for people to get sent to the same company either on a regular basis or occasionally. It is also common for people to get sent to multiple locations on different assignments in a short span of time. Seven of the women were able to receive at least one work assignment where they were expected to work at one site every day unless it was indicated otherwise. For these types of assignments, the women did not find the scheduling to be as much of a problem because the company they were sent to, and the hours that they were expected to work, remained consistent. However, they reported having weeks where the company would have less work, and they would be asked to stay home during those weeks. Additionally, they might be sent home early on days where there was less work and they would be called back when the company needed more workers again. For the women interviewed, these types of assignments lasted anywhere from three months to a year and half, after which the women either left the job or the assignment was terminated. Only one woman reported being hired directly by a client company after working there for one year.

Apart from needing work on a regular basis for the income, all of the women also expressed wanting a predictable work schedule for the sake of being able to plan their day-to-day activities. With the exception of longer assignments where the person was expected to go every day, very little notice was given for work. The women reported being informed of an assignment typically the day before if the shift was the next morning. If the shift was in the afternoon, they would be informed in the morning of the same day. However, it was also common for agencies

to provide even shorter notice of an assignment, sometimes asking the women to go to a worksite immediately.

Throughout my being employed with each of the four temporary employment agencies, I also experienced a lack of control over my work schedule and the duration of work assignments. For example, despite explicitly stating that I was only available for morning shifts, I received calls the day before the shift and phone calls would range anywhere from 3pm to 10pm, less than 24 hours' notice from the time of the start of the shift. One agency sent a text message at 6:59 a.m. requesting that I do not come in for the morning shift that I had received confirmation for less than twelve hours prior to the message. While the agencies informed me that I would get a few days of work at the client company they specified, I was expected to wait for a confirmation call each evening from the agency regarding whether or not I would be working the next day. This occurred with the three of the agencies that I worked through. If you tried to ask a supervisor at each of the companies if you would have work there the next day, they all informed you to wait for a call from the agency. Other women reported encountering the same situation and Kajol confirmed that this practice was customary:

...even to give their paycheques, even to do, like our agency workers would go on site to talk to them. They were not allowed to speak to anyone from the company. Like, like the direct, like no HR. You weren't talking to HR. You weren't talking to anyone giving you a paycheque. You weren't talking to anyone like that. We would go specifically, and even tell them what time they're working, like the person obviously who sees them every day at work can easily tell them okay can you come in tomorrow. But that was not allowed. We would call them and let them know.

- Kajol, former secretary at an agency

There was only one work assignment where the supervisor at the company told me whether or not to come each day. However, after working there for three days, I was told by management, along with at least a dozen other agency workers, that the company did not need as

many workers anymore and that we would be called if our services were needed again. The person approached each of the agency workers that were going to be let go to inform them and also apologized. This was a unique experience as all of the other companies simply referred you to the agency regarding such matters. I was then asked to come back to the company a few days later. That one company stood out in terms of how workers were treated, and through conversations with other workers, it became apparent that such treatment was rare for agency workers. The workers there expressed feeling lucky and knowing that this was a unique workplace. The lack of notice for all the assignments, however, made it very difficult for me to plan my schedule, and I found myself cancelling plans and appointments often, or feeling unable to make plans at all.

Similarly, many of the women reported having to deal with uncertain schedules on a daily basis. They stated that it was very challenging for them to make plans or that it forced them to cancel their plans often. Not being able to maintain a regular routine, or having constant disruptions in their daily routine, was found to be particularly stressful. It also interfered with other responsibilities that they had such as housework and childcare. This stress was exacerbated by the fact that all of the women reported knowing that if they refused to come into work more than two or three times, the agency would stop calling them with work. This practice was confirmed by Kajol who stated that the agency would drop people to the bottom of the list if they refused to come in to work more than a few times. As such, refusing to work because of prior plans did not feel like an option for most of the women.

It's like sometimes we have plans to go somewhere and suddenly you get a call saying 'can you go to work?' You need to work and if you say no to them today, they won't call you tomorrow. That's the main really big issue with that. So like that's the thing I thought of, like let me know a day before so I wouldn't make any plans. Then you have to go through one thing, either you cancel your plan or

go to work. Either you go there and the plan wouldn't work, but going to work is the more main thing to go to.

- Jasmine

Along with knowing that refusing to work could jeopardize employment, I found in my own experience that I was pressured to come into work as well, even on the days that I had indicated that I am not available. For example, with the first agency that I worked through, I told the agency that I could not work on Friday because I had a previous appointment. I was called three times after 9 pm to try and pressure me into coming because the company needed more workers and the agency did not have other employees available. At the second agency that I worked through, I was told by the owner that if I did not show up to work the next day after confirming that I will, four hours of my pay would be deducted. The final agency that I worked through also tried to convince me to go to work on a day that I had class despite my having specified that it was the only day I could not work. While agencies could therefore cancel work assignments at a moment's notice without having to provide any explanation, they expected workers to always be ready and show up when asked. Sonia, a woman who sold employment contracts for the agency stated that the benefit of working through agencies is that "you don't have to commit, just like they can call you on the same day, you can call an agency on the same day and just work for like a week right?" This, however, was not the case as women reported being unable to turn down work assignments if they wanted to be called in for work again.

For women with young children, in particular, receiving last minute notice was also a big concern as preparations often had to be made regarding care for the children. For women that had children with grandparents living at home, or had an arrangement with a family member or friend, this was less concerning. But for women that did not have that support in place, it was reported as being very difficult. As Jasmine explains:

Yes yes that was a big problem. Because when you know you are working the next day, you have a schedule in place. You go to sleep early. You cook beforehand so you have your lunch ready in the morning. And when they tell you right before, you have nothing cooked for your kids or yourself. You just grab whatever you can find and run out. And whatever clothes you are wearing, you just get your safety shoes and go. We couldn't take a proper lunch, nothing. Couldn't make proper food for the kids either...sometimes the babysitter would mind too that you're telling me at this time. She'd say I already had plans, I already have kids here. I can't keep them. So many problems.

- Jasmine

Another reason that the little notice was upsetting to many respondents was because it meant that they had to turn down other potential work because they did not know whether or not they would be called in. Many of the women reported switching agencies or using multiple agencies in order to try and piece together more hours of work, but this was made difficult as well by the lack of notice provided by the agencies.

Sometimes we miss days where we are able to work. There is no guarantee with them in terms of whether they will call or not. Sometimes they say there's not enough work and then they don't call you. In the meantime, you can't try to find work anywhere else either because they either call you the night before or the morning of.

- Baljot

Along with there being no guarantee of the availability or length of work assignments, it was also found that there was no guarantee of getting a full day's work when sent to client companies. Nine of the women referred to incidences where they were sent home before the end of the shift they had been told to work. It was upsetting for the women when this occurred because they always went to work with the intention of working the entire shift and being sent home early meant that they would not be able to make the money that they had originally been expecting.

Yeah, sometimes they sent us home early three hours and sometimes four hours before. Whenever they thought we weren't needed they would send us home right away...It felt bad because we would be tired, and then we would wake up

so early and didn't do anything or make any money because we came home early. It felt very bad... Sometimes I travel by bus and it's very difficult to put in all that travel time for only four hours of work.

- Loveleen

During my employment with the second agency that I worked through, I was sent home early on the first day of my assignment. While I was told the shift would be from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m., I, along with other agency workers, was sent home at 2 p.m. Two of the women that came with me from the same agency were very upset by this and called the agency to complain because they had expected to work the entire day and this meant that they could not make as much income for that day.

Though women knew that work assignments were likely temporary, five of the women hoped to be hired directly by the client company if they worked well and remained there long enough. Of the twelve women interviewed, however, only one was ever hired directly by the client company while nine of the women continue to work through multiple agencies with no guarantee of moving ahead.

Lack of Control over Working Conditions

Findings also indicated that agency workers have little control over their working conditions. They do not get to decide where they will be sent to work, how long they will work there, what tasks they will do and at what pace they will work. Particularly, workers were often pushed to work extremely fast or given more work than they felt like they could handle.

Alarming, they were threatened to be sent home early if they did not comply.

The one I went, I think worked there like two days. The supervisor was really bad over there, he gave like three people's work to one person, three machines with like no uh you can't take breaks for long. It was twelve hour shift and you have to handle three machines at the same time which is like not possible. If you ask him you can't do that, he would like yell like okay you can go home, you can do that.

- Jasleen

Jasleen stated that she could not handle the amount of work that was being given to her and left during the middle of her shift. However, when she told the agency, she was never called again for work and had to then switch to another agency. Kajol, who worked as a secretary for an agency, pointed out that refusing to do work or complaining easily resulted in the agency refusing to call the worker back. She also noted that immigrants were much less likely to ever refuse any type of work.

A lot of, I would say, Caucasians would sometimes refuse to do things (laughed). Immigrants will never refuse to do work, no matter what... They still send Caucasians but as soon as you get one complaint, that's it. Like they're never going to call you again.
- Kajol

Additionally, workers were well aware that they could be sent home if they did not work fast enough. They were both told this explicitly and the women expressed that it was also implicitly made aware through what they heard and witnessed. Not only did agency workers have to work fast even when they were tired, but they also neglected their own safety in order to meet demands from supervisors. Harjot said, "They would tell you [about safety] but they wanted to get as much work as they could out of the agency workers so you didn't really have time to think about how to pick up a box safely." Anisha cited a similar example where she felt like the work that she was being asked to do was too demanding. She recalled:

It was really hard there. If you didn't know how to do something, they would tell you to go faster. They wouldn't let you work slow. Like they put us to work on the machine the first day that we went. You had to pick up five heavy boxes and put it on the machine and it moved so fast. You had to place them very quickly. We found it very hard there. For the most part, we had the hardest time at the ----- place.

Along with the pace being pushed, Jasmine reported being given unrealistic or extremely difficult production goals each day at one of the client companies where she worked:

There they would say your production has to be 1500 something each day. It's very hard work...you just couldn't reach the production goal. Then every day the supervisor would count this is how much your production was and they would get rid of whoever was slow...I used to kill myself there because I would think I couldn't reach the production goal. I was very slow at first (laughing). She would see that I didn't reach the production goal and then I would be sent home.

- Jasmine

At the first workplace that I was sent to while being employed through an agency, I observed the supervisor threatening to send a woman home at lunch because she was not working as fast as they wanted. After lunch, the supervisor put the workers, including myself, into two groups and stated that she wanted to see who would make more boxes by the end of the day. The workers, out of fear, tried really hard to push themselves even though they were tired and kept looking anxiously over at the other group's pile in order to see who was in the lead. They were worried that whoever lost would not be called back to work.

Many respondents also expressed that agency workers were given harder assignments than permanent workers. It was often stated that permanent workers would take the easy jobs and be able to work confidently and less strenuously because they did not have to compete to stay. In addition to the difficult assignments, respondents also complained about being treated poorly, specifically, being spoken to rudely by supervisors and permanent workers, and not being entitled to similar breaks in these kinds of settings.

The ones who were hired and have been there for a long time, they do what they want to do. They don't go to the supervisor and ask what to do and if they want to take a break; they just leave. But they don't treat agency workers like that. It was different. You can't go without telling them, you can't get a drink without telling them, you can't use the washroom without telling them.

Jasleen

For many of the women, this was especially upsetting because they felt like they had to work harder than permanent workers but were paid significantly less, given no benefits, and had fewer

rights. This created a noticeable division among the permanent workers and agency workers, and this was evident at the workplaces that I attended as well. While permanent workers had their own established groups, temporary workers either sat alone initially or made friends with other agency workers. Further, permanent workers could be helpful to agency workers that they liked, but many were also indifferent or rude to them. Whether or not permanent workers accepted or helped new workers seemed largely dependent on the agency workers' ability to work fast and competently. When agency workers were slow or did the job incorrectly, permanent workers often became frustrated and voiced this to the worker and those around them.

Therefore, workers commonly reported having little control over working conditions. For recent immigrants in particular, these conditions are exacerbated by the fact that many have little or no savings when they first arrive to Canada and need whatever employment they can find. As is developed below, findings were consistent with other research that indicates racialized immigrants face many challenges in obtaining employment. As such, jeopardizing assignments received through the agency by complaining or refusing to do the work was not an option because they knew they would be sent home as a result. As Anisha stated, "They said if you can't do the work then you can go home." It should be noted that respondents also expressed that some client companies treated them very well and that supervisors and permanent workers were kind to them. It was difficult to discern a pattern, however, for which types of companies were more likely to treat workers poorly, as it occurred in both small and large companies, and in both short-term and long-term assignments.

Low Wages and Income

Most women reported being paid minimum wage or less than minimum wage. The only woman who was paid slightly more than minimum wage was paid more for working the

afternoon shift. According to Statistics Canada (2013), The Low Income Cut-Off (LICO) for a single person in Canada in 2011 living in a community with over 500,000 people was \$23,298 before-taxes. All of the women interviewed lived in cities with populations over 500,000 people. With a minimum wage of \$11.00, or \$11.25, based on the time of the interview, a person who worked full-year, full-time at 35 hours a week did not make more than the LICO at \$20,020 or \$20,475. For 40 hours, the yearly income before-tax at a minimum wage of \$11.25 is \$23,400. As these findings state, full-time hours were rare; as such, it can be reasonably assumed that all of the women made less than the poverty line in a given year.

Even more concerning, however, is that three women reported being paid less than the minimum wage. These women were paid in cash ranging from \$9.50/hr to \$10/hr without taxes being deducted. No written record of payment was provided either. At the first agency that I worked through, the first payment that I received was approximately \$9.30/hr in cash. I was informed that this was because I had not provided them with my Social Insurance Number before starting my first assignment. When I requested a cheque in order to see how much money was deducted in taxes, I was informed that the amount would remain the same regardless of whether my payment was in cash or cheque form. I insisted on receiving a cheque for “tax purposes” and I was told to return the cash and pick up a cheque in two weeks. When I received the cheque, however, the details of tax and other deductions indicated the pay actually worked out to be \$10.30/hr after taxes. Two of the women who I interviewed that worked through the same agency told me the same story where they were told that they had to be paid in cash because they had not provided their SIN in time. They reported being paid only \$400 in cash each for 8-9 days of working 8 hours each. However, they were made to believe that it was their fault that their pay was deducted and they were unaware that this practice had been illegal. At the final company I

worked at, I spoke to women who were not being paid more for working overtime. The agency was paying them minimum wage for each of the hours. The women, however, were afraid to speak up and ask to be compensated fairly. While many women accepted cash payments that left them underpaid either unknowingly or out of fear for speaking up, it is hypothesized that some women may choose to work through TEAs for cash because they are undocumented or limited by their type of visa in terms of how many hours they are able to work.

At the second agency I was employed with, I was paid \$10/hr in cash. When I asked for a written record so that I could see how much of my wages was deducted in taxes, I was told that the agency would be unable to provide it because the payment had already occurred. They offered to provide it the next time I was paid. When respondents were asked if they minded being paid in cash, many believed that it was in their benefit because they did not have to pay taxes, however, at \$10/hr or less, they were actually being paid less than they would have been at the minimum wage even after deducting taxes.

As such, low pay is a dimension of precarity for temporary agency employment but this is exacerbated for women because women are typically given lower paying jobs available through agencies. Kajol and Sonia both reported that client companies may request males or females in particular for certain jobs, but that women were typically requested for lower paying positions.

Interviewer: Okay so do client firms ever ask for any specific types of people, like women, men or...

Kajol: Well if it's for like shipping and receiving, they definitely want someone who can lift a lot of weight (laughed) so they prefer male. Um then there's other jobs that are easier and pay a little bit less so they would prefer women. Admin work I find there's a lot more women. Um but only, only like definitely when there's more lifting and heavy, or forklift, they ask for men.

Interviewer: So you're saying the, the women jobs that they were typically sent to paid less usually?

Kajol: Sometimes yeah. Because they can't, they don't do forklift, they don't do shipping and receiving, they don't do any heavy stuff. So they just get like, they get literally the minimum wage, line work.

Of the four places that I went to work at, this definitely appeared to be the pattern as well.

Forklifts were typically driven by men, and men also did the tasks that required heavy lifting.

Additionally, they would also be in charge of operating the machines. Only at one factory did I observe women being tasked to operate machines. This is significant because women reported that operating machines requires greater skill and experience and so workers who were able to operate machines were considered more likely to be hired directly by the company. At the same location where women also operated machines, I saw one woman driving a forklift. This was the only instance where I observed a woman doing that. It was not clear as to whether the lack of women observed operating forklifts was because companies specifically requested males from agencies for this particular job, or whether women were just less likely to obtain a forklift license. At two of the companies that I worked at, women did all of the light but fast-paced or assembly line work and men did not. At the other two companies, men and women worked together to do that type of work, though it was still primarily women. In addition, when asked what job their husbands had, Harjot replied that her husband was able to get hired directly at a company while she was working through an agency because his workplace only hired men as the job required heavy lifting. As such, the same employment opportunity was not available to her as a woman.

Lack of Rights and Protection

Finally, findings revealed that temporary agency employment involved a lack of rights and protections. Agency workers are not entitled to many of the rights and protections available to workers who are hired directly, but it is also difficult to prove when violations of rights occur. Women told many stories of exploitation and being treated unfairly, but they have limited

options to pursue justice when violations occur. Being a recent immigrant exacerbated this dimension of precarity as the women had a limited knowledge of their rights and the processes surrounding the exercising of these rights. They also felt limited by the fact that they needed the employment as they had little to no alternatives for work. As such, doing anything that could potentially jeopardize their employment was not an option.

To begin with, women expressed being bullied at many workplaces and feeling like there was nothing they could do. Women were sometimes harassed by supervisors in terms of the tasks they were given and the way they were spoken to. As well, if permanent workers did not like agency workers, or if there was a conflict, supervisors always took the side of the permanent workers and the agency worker was never called back. As Jasmine states:

Over there, the hired workers don't do much. They make the agency workers do the work...They made us work fast and pick up heavy items. If we didn't then they yelled at us. One time what happened was an agency worker was packing a box and she didn't close it properly, then they started fighting with each other. It was the permanent worker's fault but the supervisor took her anger out on the agency worker. She called [the agency]...but they didn't say anything. They made her sign something and didn't ask what happened. Then after a few days the supervisor stopped calling the girl he got in a fight with. That's when we found out that no one cares about the agency workers. I don't know why but the supervisors never said anything to the hired workers. They made the agency workers do all the work.

- Jasmine

The women reported often feeling ostracized and being treated unfairly. For example, Harjot recalled a workplace where workers even stood separately.

...when they would tell you in the morning what to do, the permanent workers would stand on one side and the agency workers would stand on the other side. It felt like they would make us stand separately. But they should make us feel the same. It made us feel bad. We would think gosh if only we could get hired here.

- Harjot

Because agency workers knew that they could be sent home and never called back again for any number of reasons, many expressed feeling like they could not speak up if they had any

concerns or issues. Some of the women reported that they would talk to the supervisor if they ever felt like they had a problem, but many others reported not knowing who they could complain to. Others felt that taking action would be unproductive or that it would jeopardize their jobs. Harjot said, "...we didn't know that we can complain to someone. They said if you didn't do the work or you complained then they would send you home."

When Laura, a representative from a Toronto area workers' advocacy group, was asked about the particular issues that are brought forth to them by racialized immigrant women working through temporary agencies, she also mentioned workplace bullying as being a significant issue and women feeling unable to do anything about it.

Um I think that's a big one, um I think having a voice at work, um again women have talked to me about sort of feeling like, um they can't really say anything because they don't know if they're going to jeopardize the assignment. Having to feel like you have to work harder than everybody else, um again just cause you don't know how long the assignment is going to be. And then obviously there is a lot of workplace bullying in terms of disrespect, and treatment from supervisors, and again folks feeling like they can't say anything because they'll lose that assignment.

- Laura

Because there is no transparent system in place for deciding where workers are sent and for how long, it is impossible to tell whether or not a person is selected for, or terminated from, an assignment fairly or if there is discrimination in the decision-making process. As such, being terminated on the basis of an unjust criteria such as appearance, race, sex, etc. can occur very easily but it is extremely difficult to prove. Laura explains:

...women have talked about, there being um feeling like they show up to work but because they don't look the type of what the agency wants them to look like...And the client company doesn't like the look of them, then you know their assignment lasts a day right, and then they don't get called back. But they don't know if it was just a day's assignment or, if it was actually a week's assignment, or a longer assignment...because they don't know what's going on right, and the temp agency doesn't say anything because of course they want to keep the business of the client company right. So if there is racism or sexism at the client company or

at the agency, for workers it is very difficult to challenge that right because the agency is looking out for its own interest, the client company doesn't have to be accountable and all they need to say is, "Oh it was just you know, I don't like the way she worked or you know I don't need other people right now."

- Laura, Toronto Area Workers Advocacy Group

One scenario that was reported by two of the women was where women are called in from the agency but are terminated from the assignment after reaching the designated amount of hours for being eligible for layoff pay. The two women reported that the agency would rotate workers after they had worked 900 hours in order to ensure that they did not have to hire the worker. The worker would be laid off but both women reported that the process of receiving employment insurance (EI) was very difficult. One of the women did not bother trying as a result of the stories she had heard.

Over there they continuously sent us for three or four months straight and when they felt that we had enough hours, they laid us off work so they wouldn't have to hire us. For the company they wanted to pay the agency workers less. So they would send them in a routine and then laid them off work and sent in a new worker. Then they would get layoff papers and another person would come in... I didn't take it but some people did. I heard that when people applied for it, they encountered a lot of problems. They didn't send it. They would say they sent it online. You had to go through a lot to get it apparently. Then you had to apply again after you accumulated enough hours.

- Harjot

The other person, Jasmine, reported that the agency did not allow her to receive EI. She stated that she had almost completed her 900 hours but she called to say she could not come in one day because her son had a nosebleed and she had to take care of him. As a result, the agency wrote that she 'quit' the job and that made her ineligible to receive EI.

...they shouldn't write "quit" the way they do. They should understand if there's a problem and allow you to go another day, you can't quit work like that. You just write quit suddenly and the person doesn't even know. I worked for a *a year and a half*, year and a half. How many hours did I have? I must have had over two thousand. And how much layoff can I get? And then suddenly they wrote I "quit."

- Jasmine

When Jasmine tried to complain to the agency, it was to no avail and she never received any money as a result even though she was taken out of work.

Immigrant status, or being a recent immigrant, also potentially plays a role in creating levels of insecurity in terms of pay. Respondents frequently reported instances of wage theft, including not being paid wages or overtime, or being paid less than the minimum wage.¹⁶ They reported not knowing how to deal with it or feeling powerless. In the instance where Baljot and Amrit were severely underpaid because the agency told them that they had not submitted their SIN card on time, they believed it truly was their fault for having not provided their information on time. In another instance where Anisha and Mandy were paid for fewer hours than they actually worked, they felt like they could do nothing about it because they were told they would have to go talk to the company directly to ask about it and they were never called back there again. Additionally, respondents being paid \$10/hr did not realize that they were making less than minimum wage even after-taxes. Finally, many respondents were unaware of what the minimum wage was at the time that they were being paid for work. While the Ministry of Labour (2015) has mandated that all workplaces covered by the Employment Standards Act (ESA) must have a copy of the Employment Standards Poster somewhere easily visible in the workplace, only one woman reported seeing such a poster. Additionally, employers are supposed to provide employees with a copy of this poster, which covers information regarding hours of work, rest periods, overtime pay, minimum wage, payment of wages, vacation time and pay, public holidays, leaves of absence from work, termination notice and pay, and reprisals. However, none

¹⁶ The Workers' Action Centre (2011) has published reports on wage theft. After conducting a survey with 520 workers, they found that a significant proportion of low-wage workers in precarious jobs experienced many forms of wage theft. This included earning less than minimum wage, failing to receive overtime pay, being fired or laid off without termination pay or notice, and difficulty obtaining wages that were owed to them as well as vacation pay. The Workers' Action Centre found that many workers did not report wage theft out of fear of retaliation or employer reprisals, and a lack of knowledge of regarding employment rights.

of the women reported being given such a poster or being made aware of any of these rights. I also was not given this poster at any of the agencies I worked for.

Additionally, Laura reported that immigrant status was sometimes used as a justification for paying people less, but there was little anyone could do because it is difficult to prove:

Again a lot of the stuff like the problem with the temp agency structure is that you cannot, it's very hard to hold it accountable, um to any laws. So for instance you can have a group of workers go to an agency on the same day and um, apply for a job...We don't know what rates of pay each one is getting, we have no idea. These are all sort of, you know, um anecdotal, right? Where woman have said to us "oh we know that, you know because we don't have status, we're getting a different rate, because we are new comers we are getting a different rate." But you can't prove it...people are generally told you can't say anything about your wages, its confidential, and then if you're sent into different locations, but you're doing the same work, or you're in the same location doing the same work, again we have no idea what the pay rates are because no one is told...Based on merit? Or is it based on race? Is it based on language? Based on gender? You have no idea because people are not given the information that they need to get.

- Laura, Toronto Area Workers Advocacy Group

Agencies do not have to tell people how much they are paying others and they also do not need to tell them how much they charge the client company for each worker. As such, workers do not know how much of their wages are taken by the agency. This was also upsetting for many agency workers. When asked what she thought the benefits of working with an agency were, Jasleen replied, "I don't think there are any benefits, cause if you go direct, company pays you more but agencies don't pay you more, they keep it."

It is important to note that along with low wages, agency workers are not entitled to the benefits that permanent workers receive. When asked about the disadvantages of working through an agency, most respondents reported having no benefits as one of the biggest disadvantages. Harjot stated, "I don't think there are any benefits [of agencies]. It's better if they don't exist. Then people can get hired directly, they can get benefits. In this work, it's like they pay you less, you have to do more work, and they don't even give you benefits." Along with no

benefits, Navpreet noted that a disadvantage also was that no matter how long a person works with the agency or client company, they will never receive an increase in their wages like permanent employees would.

Finally, the women reported receiving little to no safety training. Three of the women reported being shown a video that discussed safety when they signed up with an agency, but six women reported that no video was shown. While some companies reviewed a bit of safety at the worksite, many did not. This is concerning because none of the women had ever worked in a factory before coming to Canada. Furthermore, the women were often expected to work as fast as possible and without the necessary knowledge about how to do it safely. Additionally, when I went to sign up with two of the agencies (I was never asked to fill out any forms for two of them), answers for the test were provided. At one agency, there was a booklet with the answers in front of me. At the other agency, I told the receptionist I did not know the answers and I was given a sheet with the answers. Three of the women interviewed reported not having to fill out any forms or receiving any safety instructions at all. Also, I was not informed about safety at any of the worksites and learned through observation or direction from fellow workers as situations occurred.

Summary

The above stories provide an overview of the women's experiences of precarious employment. The various dimensions that were found to make employment through agencies precarious were: a lack of control over work schedules and the duration of work assignments; lack of control over working conditions; low wages and income; and a lack of rights and protections. Additionally, ways in which social factors such as gender, race and immigrant status informed these experiences were also explored. The next chapter examines the way in which

women described household dynamics and their relationship to working through agencies, adding another dimension to these workers' experiences of precariousness.

Chapter Five

Findings: Household Dynamics

This chapter focuses on the findings that pertained to the question of how precarious employment affects the household. With this question, I hoped to unpack the more gendered aspects of precarious employment, particularly whether household dynamics shape the decision or need to work through agencies. I also wanted to explore how temporary agency employment affects household dynamics in return, such as childcare and eldercare decisions. Before presenting my findings, I begin with a brief review of research and statistics related to labour participation rates of married immigrant women, and also discuss division of domestic labour, and family life, for recent immigrant families in Canada.

According to Statistics Canada (2016), the labour force participation of immigrant wives between the years of 2006 and 2014 was considerably lower when compared to Canadian-born wives. While 88% of Canadian-born wives between the ages of 25 and 54, whose husbands were paid workers, participated in the labour market, only 76% of immigrant wives did the same. This is despite the fact that immigrant women tend to be higher-educated than their Canadian-born counterparts. Reasons for this discrepancy are thought to be both cultural and structural. Immigrant wives who migrated from countries who have lower rates of female participation, relative to males, than Canada were less likely to be engaged in paid work. It was found that larger family size was negatively correlated with participation rates for both immigrant and Canadian-born wives. However, despite the fact that immigrant women had higher levels of education, their hourly wages were significantly lower than those of Canadian-born wives. Between the period of 2006 and 2014, immigrant wives' wages were 20% lower. It is suggested that the lower wages received by immigrant wives may be a partial explanation as to why they

are less active in the labour market, but how much this is a contributing factor was deemed difficult to measure (7).

Along with immigrant women making significantly lower wages than their Canadian-born counterparts, Tatsoglou and Preston (2005) found that they are also much more likely to be unemployed and to be segmented into manual occupations. One particular difference between immigrant men and immigrant women is that immigrant women are more likely to be family class immigrants and refugees while economic immigrants, who are highly educated and/or skilled individuals, are more likely to be men. This results in important differences in labour force experiences (47). The authors found that links between home and paid work are also necessary to examine when considering the economic and labour market integration of immigrant women, as “migration often disrupts gender roles and power relations within immigrant households, but the changes are not necessarily emancipatory” (Giles, 2002 as cited in Tastoglou & Preston, 2005). The economic hardships experienced by immigrant families often force women into low-paying, precarious jobs. Additionally, authors suggested that traditional gender roles and unpaid domestic work also constrain women in terms of their employability, employment, earnings, and ability to access programs such as language training (52).

Research on South Asian and Chinese immigrant women caregivers in Canada found that cultural norms and expectations of organizing care work and the division of labour significantly impacted South Asian women’s opportunities for employment (Spitzer et al., 2003). Caregiving was found to be an important part of women’s identities in these particular cultures where women were deemed to be the best suited to provide care for children and elders. Men were not recognized as capable of providing care in the same way, limiting their role and excusing them from care responsibilities. However, while women had a variety of resources to rely on in their

home countries, including kin and access to extra household labourers, they lacked these supports in Canada and many also had to participate in the labour force to contribute to household income (268). This meant that women had to take on more work with less help and less time. The authors noted that few women claimed their responsibilities were burdensome although they reported “exhaustion, ill health and anxiety due to the overwhelming duties they had to complete” (278). As a result, employment was significantly impacted as it had to be organized around family caregiving and domestic responsibilities, and many of the women were concentrated in low-paying jobs. Liu and Kerr (2003) note that one particular way in which recent immigrant families with children were able to fare better in terms of economic well-being, was by living in extended families, and this was found to be much more common among immigrants (16%) than Canadian-borns (6%).

Findings from qualitative interviews with the women in this study indicated that household dynamics played a significant role in married women’s involvement in precarious employment as they based their employment decisions around their children. This in turn limited their options for employment and education. Additionally, these women had to cope with working both through the agency and doing the majority of work within the home. For other women, it was found that the strenuous work associated with working through agencies often conflicted with their ability to do housework. This, strain, however was mitigated in households where multiple women resided and were able to share the work.

Employment Decisions Based On Children

Of the twelve women interviewed, three were mothers with young children, all of whom arrived to Canada by being sponsored by their husbands. As such, they came to Canada at an age where they were recently married but had not yet had children. For these women, it was found that their decisions regarding employment revolved largely around starting a family, and

subsequently having their children. For Preeti, when she arrived to Canada, her first priority was starting a family. However, she also needed to work in order to first achieve the economic security needed to sustain a family, and to account for the amount of time that she would not be able to work after having her child. Therefore, childcare decisions had to be balanced with financial needs. Preeti stated, “I was worried about having children first as I was getting a lot older...so my first step was to get pregnant...So my focus was on that and that is why I went through the agency.” Despite the fact that Preeti had been a lab technician in India, she could not obtain a job in that field when she first moved to Canada. She would have been required to take more courses which she could not afford at the time. She stated, “the fees were \$10,000 and the job you get after doesn’t pay much either. I needed time and money. But I wanted to complete my family.” Preeti’s priority was to have children, but money was also an important factor so she felt as if she had to take whatever job she could find initially. She was referred to agencies by both a community organization and a neighbour. As money was a prevalent issue, Preeti described working at factories through agencies until she was eight months pregnant and then continuing to work at home doing sewing work until two days before the birth of her first child. This begins to demonstrate the difficulties faced in terms of ensuring economic security along with having and raising children for households, but also for women in particular.

Another way in which Preeti’s employment was affected by the decision to have children was that the first company that she worked through did not allow her to continue working there when they found out she was pregnant. She stated feeling lucky that she was able to work at another company that allowed her to work there while she was pregnant, and also provided her with a stool to sit on while working. She did not tell the second company she was pregnant initially out of fear of losing the job and stated, “I didn’t [tell them] at first because I was worried

I might not get all my hours. But then I told the supervisor that I need work. I just came from India and I'm fine. I don't have any problems. Then the supervisor helped me and gave me work I could do sitting on a stool." The combination of needing money while also wanting to start a family was therefore found to shape decisions regarding working through an agency.

Like Preeti, Jasmine and Harjot also had children within the first few years of moving to Canada and they also reported challenges with securing employment despite many efforts of applying for jobs. Like Preeti, Jasmine and Harjot stated that they were unable to attend school or take classes at this time due to financial barriers, and eventually turned to agencies as they desperately needed the work. Yet their decisions regarding employment also revolved around starting families and having children. For example, all three women left their workplaces multiple times in order to have children. As a result, this meant that they never worked at one place for more than one year. As women reported hearing or witnessing that client companies would occasionally hire agency workers after an extended period of time, a potential challenge for obtaining permanent employment for these women could have been that they were unable to remain at a workplace long enough to be considered for a permanent position. Thus, having to leave work in order to have children may have hindered possibilities of better employment opportunities. In the case of Harjot and Jasmine, they became trapped in a cycle of working through agencies before, between, and after having children as childcare responsibilities prevented them from either getting hired directly or from upgrading their skills in order to find other types of jobs.

Primary Responsibility for Childcare

After having children, the three women reported being responsible for most of the housework and childcare duties between them and their partners. This meant that the women had to cope with the challenges of both working through agencies and then also doing most of the

work at home as well. When Jasmine was asked how the work is split between her and her husband, she replied, “He doesn’t do anything. Even now (laughing).” Preeti and Harjot both reported doing most of the housework and caring for children as well. However, from the nonchalant way that the women spoke about the division of labour within the home, it was clear that the status quo was a normalized phenomenon for the women. As Preeti put it when asked about having to work both outside the home, and do most of the work inside the home, she replied neutrally “it’s okay...because it’s our habit as Indians to adjust accordingly. We’re not Canadian.” This quote particularly demonstrated how normalized the gendered division of labour within the home was for Preeti and she attributed it to the Indian culture. It showed that she did not expect any other arrangement and did not expand upon her answer any further, neither expressing negative or positive feelings about the situation. For her, it was simply the norm for Indian women and any challenges associated with it were just something that one had to “adjust” to. Balancing both home and work life, however, was reported to be challenging for Jasmine and Harjot.

For example, the women talked about their experiences of coming home after work and how it affected them and their children. Harjot explained:

Yes and I had to take care of [my child] too. I would come home around 12-12:30 [a.m.]. My child would be sleeping with my mother and I would bring her to my bed. By then she would wake up. Then there is so much stress, you have to feed her milk. She would wake up in the morning around 9 [a.m.] Then I would go to work again in the afternoon. I would get really tired so I only did it for about three months and then I left the job.

Similarly, Jasmine described coming home from work exhausted and not being able to play with her children because of how tired she was.

When I work five days, then on Friday, then, [my child] would say get up and I actually couldn’t get up. I would shower and just sit on the floor. I would feel so tired that I would feel disoriented. I would feel so broken, like my shoulders

would hurt. I didn't want anyone to talk to me. I couldn't get up. I couldn't cook or do anything. We would order food (laughing). That was my situation when I first came. Really. I remember I would be so tired. I worked five days in a row. The boxes were really heavy that we had to pick up. It was really hard.

One of the challenges that Jasmine also faced was trying to make childcare arrangements when she was called in for work with short notice. While Preeti had arrangements with a neighbour and Harjot had her mother-in-law to help her, Jasmine did not have such a support system. She stated, "sometimes the babysitter would mind too, that 'you're telling me at this time. I already had plans. I already have kids here. I can't keep them.' So many problems."

Being primarily in charge of childcare affected the decisions that the women made regarding both employment and further education. For Jasmine, caring for her children posed a barrier to pursuing education that may have enabled her to find other employment. She expressed being unable to balance both school and taking care of her children. She stated, "I took some English classes. Then there was the problem of dropping off my kids... They said to join school and it was struggle. I couldn't do all that with children and we needed money so I started working." Additionally, while Jasmine had a part-time job over the summer during the time of the interview, she had to leave that job and begin working through an agency again once her children started school in September. This was because her work schedule had to align with her children's school hours so that she would not have to pay a babysitter. Harjot, on the other hand, stopped working after having her second child in order to care for her children. As such, her decision regarding employment was based solely around childcare as well. Of the three women with young children at the time of working through agencies, only Preeti was able to take a course after having children. That allowed her to obtain a higher-paying permanent job.

Being primarily responsible for childcare was also observed as significantly impacting employment decisions within the household. The women reported that unlike their husbands who

were working in more secure jobs, they could not due to their childcare responsibilities. For example, both Harjot's and Jasmine's husbands were able to find permanent employment as truck drivers but this was not an option that would be feasible for both partners while also caring for children. This is because driving a truck requires working long hours each day and/or being on the road for days at a time. Therefore, only one partner would be able to do such a job if there are children that need to be cared for. In these cases, the women held that responsibility as it was culturally expected for them to do so, thus limiting their choices for employment.

Multiple Women within the Household

For women that did not have young children, working through an agency still shaped household dynamics. For some of the women, engaging in housework was often difficult because of the physical strain of the work they were asked to do at the companies they were sent to. Anisha stated, "It's hard at work. Then you come home and do work. A person gets tired. It's not like a person doesn't get tired right?" Many women recalled specific assignments that stood out for them as being particularly difficult. Mandy spoke of one such assignment and said, "I would finish work around 3:30 and I would get home around 4:30 or 4:45. Then I would get home and sleep because I was so tired (laughed)...I couldn't get any housework done." For her, the fatigue that resulted from working strenuous assignments meant that she did not have the energy to do additional work when she came home. However, Mandy also had her mother at home to help with the housework.

Like Mandy, women that lived with their parents or in-laws stated that a lot of the burden of household tasks was offset by parents who were able to help. Jasleen stated, "My mom cleaned and cooked. I just helped out." Similarly, for women living with their adult children, they were able to share the housework with their children. When Manpreet was asked about

whether it was difficult to do work both through the agency and at home, she replied “What do I have to do at home? I make four rotis for everyone to eat. The rest of the work my daughter does.” It should be noted, though, that whenever a person was referred to as helping with the housework, the person was always another woman and never a man. As such, the pattern of a gendered division of labour remained even though it was offset by sharing the work between multiple women.

Eight women reported living with at least one other woman who was a family member. Six lived with either their mother or mother-in-law, and two lived with their adult daughter or daughter-in-law. In these settings, housework was reported as being less of a concern as there were multiple women to share it. Further, in at least five of the households with multiple women, one woman was employed and one was not. Four of the five women that were not employed and were living in households with two or more adult women were over 60 and were either the mother or mother-in-law of a working woman. One of the five women that were not employed but living in a household with multiple adult women, was the daughter of a working woman with two young children. Therefore in most situations, women either faced difficulties managing both paid work and work within the household, or they had a female family member that stayed home to take care of the housework. For the South Asian community, this signifies the importance of multiple generations living together. It helps to offset financial costs of social reproduction that fall upon the household, both daily and intergenerational. By having a female member of the household that is able to take care of tasks such as household chores and childcare, these services do not have to be paid for in the market, and it allows both partners, or multiple family members, to work simultaneously.

Summary

This chapter adds to the understanding of the precariousness of temporary agency work by illustrating its gendered dynamics both within and outside the workplace. The experiences recounted above by the women demonstrate the strong impact of household dynamics on decisions regarding employment, and how they influenced the decision and necessity for women to work through temporary employment agencies. Additionally, it was clear that working both through agencies and having primary responsibilities for housework and childcare was often a struggle for women. Finally, having multiple women living in the same household was described as one way in which the stresses of coping with both formal and informal work were negotiated. The next chapter explores women's experiences of trying to find work and what lead them to agencies, and their experiences of trying to achieve economic security while working through temporary employment agencies.

Chapter Six

Findings: Ability to Settle

This chapter focuses on the findings that pertained to the question of how temporary agency employment impacts settling and integration for recent South Asian immigrants. Before presenting these findings, I briefly review research and statistics relevant to income inequality and poverty among racialized persons in Canada. This is linked to the experiences of settling and integration for the women in this study as research demonstrates that racialized persons and immigrants, in particular, are likely to be paid significantly less than their non-racialized or non-immigrant counterparts. The emergence and growth of precarious work, such as temporary agency work exaggerates inequalities along the lines of race, gender and other social factors, as historically marginalized people are more likely to be found in this type of work (Block and Galabuzi, 2011).

Recent statistics demonstrate that rates of poverty have been increasing for racialized persons in Canada while they have been decreasing for non-racialized persons. The 1.1 million racialized persons who were living in poverty in Canada in 2006 made up 4% of the total population, 22% of all racialized persons, and 32% of all persons living in poverty. Over half lived in Ontario (52%), while 20% lived in British Columbia and 18% in Quebec. In these provinces, the majority of racialized people in poverty lived in the major cities of Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal. Women represented 52% of racialized people in poverty (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2013).

Dating as far back as 1975, three consecutive surveys conducted by the Canadian Civil Liberties Association found that most surveyed employment agencies in Toronto agreed to discriminate in their referral of employees (12). Phone calls with accents and “minority ethnic” names were discriminated against, and it was found that South Asians were discriminated against

the most. These findings seem to persist, as in a more recent study by Oreopoulos (2009), similar results were found when thousands of resumes were sent in response to online job postings in Ontario, and significant discrimination occurred on the basis of ethnic name and city of experience. Moreover, in 2011, Dechief and Oreopoulos found similar results by examining callback rates to online job postings in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. Results indicated that those with English-sounding names were 35% more likely to be called back even when resumes indicated that those with non-English sounding names were more than qualified and proficient in English. As a result of racist ideologies that have continued from slavery and colonial days, Das Gupta (1996) has found that Black workers and workers of colour are over-represented in the least desirable, least secure, poorest paid segments of the workforce. At the same time, the same groups of people have been “excluded from the better paid, secure, more desirable jobs through systemic practices in the labour market and in other related institutions, such as the educational system” (15).

Also important to note is that the majority of racialized persons living in poverty are recent first-generation immigrants (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2013). In 2006, the majority of racialized persons (66%) living in poverty were immigrants and 8% were non-permanent residents. 25% were born in Canada. For non-racialized persons, 12% of those living in poverty were immigrants. For racialized persons, almost three in four poor immigrants were born in Asia and the Middle East. For non-racialized groups, almost three in four poor immigrants were born in Europe, mostly from Eastern and Southern Europe. A review of literature on immigrants and income in Canada suggests that recent immigrants, particularly racialized ones, face considerable barriers to finding good jobs. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (2011) found that after controlling for age and education, racialized male

immigrants made 68.7 cents for every dollar that non-racialized male immigrants made. Racialized women immigrants made 81.9 cents for every dollar that non-racialized female immigrants made. Those who identified as South East Asians earned 77.5 cents for every dollar that a non-racialized worker earned, with an annual earnings gap of \$8,395. However, it is important to recognize that outcomes may differ because not all post-secondary institutions may be perceived as equal and there may be inherent biases. Support for this can be found in that 32% of racialized immigrants received their qualifications in Canada in 2006 versus 85% of non-racialized immigrants (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2013). Statistics Canada found in 2015 that the rate of unemployment for recent immigrants who had landed less than 5 years ago was almost twice that of the total population. As such, literature on immigrants and work in Canada demonstrates that racialized immigrants face two particular problems in the Canadian labour market which helps to explain their prevalence in precarious work arrangements. The first problem is the devaluation of their skills and the second is the requirement of “Canadian experience” (Bauder, 2003; Man, 2004; Ralston, 1991; Vosko, 2000).

As a result of the persisting discrepancies in income and employment between racialized and non-racialized workers, Block and Galabuzi (2011) find that Canada has a “colour-coded market.” Their study demonstrated that racialized workers have higher unemployment rates and inequalities in employment income. The authors also discovered that inequalities persisted even for second-generation immigrants as well as first-generation immigrants. The authors refer to this phenomenon as the racialization of poverty “where poverty becomes disproportionately concentrated and reproduced among racialized group members, in some cases inter-generationally” (15). The emergence and growth of precarious work is significant to this phenomenon as it accentuates historical forms of discrimination in the Canadian labour market

and this makes racialized communities more vulnerable to poverty. The 2006 Census showed that poverty rates for racialized families (19.8%) were three times higher than for non-racialized families (6.4%) (15).

During the process of exploring the factors that led women towards working within a temporary employment agency, findings indicated difficulties with obtaining economic security while working within an agency. Other findings concluded that women faced significant challenges in finding employment. If they did find work, jobs were often precarious in nature with employers paying low wages and violating workers' rights set out in employment standards. As such, women turned to agencies due to a lack of other viable options, and a lack of knowledge in terms of navigating the labour market. Additionally, some women did not learn any skills through working within an agency that would have helped them to find a better job, nor could they find the time for improving their skills while working through an agency. Many of the women therefore became trapped in precarious forms of employment despite the fact that many were highly educated.

Immediate Need for Work

For most of the women in my study, it was found that obtaining employment was a priority upon arrival to Canada as they had little to no savings. For example, two of the women interviewed took loans from someone in order to cover the costs of their airfare to come to Canada as they were of such limited means. All of the women, except for two, were sponsored by either a family member or spouse. However, making an income was considered necessary for all. For those women that lived on their own or with their partner, the money was necessary to cover basic costs of living and to begin saving.

For the women that moved in with family members that were already residing in Canada, the money was still necessary to cover personal expenses or to help the family members that they lived with. They felt that having an income was important for them so as to not burden family members further. In the Indian culture, particularly, it is considered burdensome to live with a family member that is a woman and married. This is because when a woman is married, she is seen as leaving her existing family, with her main priority becoming her husband's family. Historically, Indian women have not been entitled to inheritances such as property and money which are passed from parents to children. As such, living with a family member who is a married woman is seen as burdening the husband's family as she has nothing to offer. For younger women living with family, it is also important for them to save to be able to live independently of their family one day.

Challenges Finding Employment

One of the main reasons why women turned towards temporary agency employment was because they faced significant challenges in finding other forms of employment, despite being highly educated. From the twelve women interviewed, six of the women had at least an undergraduate degree from India and two of them had a graduate level degree. Three of the women were in college at the time of working through agencies, two on a student visa and one as a Canadian citizen. Despite being highly qualified, many of the women reported being unable to find jobs in a field in which they were educated. They were told that they lacked Canadian qualifications and "Canadian experience," and were instructed to take particular courses through Canadian institutions. Jasmine noted that while some basic courses were provided for free through local community centres, the ones needed in order to work in her field of education were very costly.

It cost money to take those classes. The ones at the community centre were free. They give you transportation and everything. But the computer classes after that and the ones you have to take at a higher level, you have to pay for it. But it was the same things I've already learned for the computer. It was Java, etc., etc., whatever we did in India. But still they said you need *Canadian* qualifications... "You can't get a job in this field." So then I started applying to agencies and calling them every day.

Though they were told to obtain Canadian qualifications, this was a problem for the women as they could not afford the fees required to take the courses that they needed. For example, Preeti noted that to take the course that she needed to work the same job that she had held in India, she would have needed \$10,000 to pay for the course fees. However, the women had to first find employment and save money before considering going to school, let alone paying the high costs of it. Along with being unable to find jobs in their field of education, many women also reported not being able to find general labour jobs without the use of an agency. Both Harjot and Harpreet reported trying to apply for work directly by submitting resumes to multiple factories without success.

For some women, language was also reported as a barrier to finding jobs. Manpreet, who lived with her daughter, and only had a Grade 6 education from India, stated:

Well whoever has a son or daughter, it is not that hard because they can drive them and search jobs on the internet. For people like me, it is difficult. If somebody tells that there is a job here, we can only do it then. If someone can tell us what number bus to take and where to get it from. It is hard for us. I want to get a good job.

Anisha and Mandy reported not looking for employment outside of agencies because they could not speak English very well and did not think they would be able to find work elsewhere. They held degrees from India but wanted to save money before taking English classes, though they hoped the classes would improve their job opportunities.

Because of the demands placed on recent immigrants regarding Canadian education and experience, Laura found that recent immigrants are essentially funneled into working through agencies.

They really need to settle, pay the bills, and find a job, and so um the issue of Canadian experience right? “Oh you don’t have Canadian experience, well go get a job at a temp agency, and then you’ll get some experience.” But then they’ll go get a job at a temp agency and then because they’re not allowed to give, you know, because you know, then they just have temp agencies on their resume, but it’s difficult to get work right? And so um, I think that there is a whole bunch of things, first the Canadian experience that people are asked to get, push them into temp agency work.

Additionally, even when going to local community centres and organizations that help recent immigrants, Preeti said that she was referred to various agencies in order to find work. She stated, “Even when us newcomers come and do ESL classes, they give the names of so many agencies.” This demonstrates how it is commonplace for recent immigrants to be directed towards temporary employment agencies, even by non-profit organizations that are trying to help recent immigrants.

Another interesting finding based on my own observations working through the agencies was the prevalence of not just recent racialized immigrants in the workplaces that I went to, but also the prevalence of second-generation racialized students. This was interesting because while I saw no Caucasian agency workers (although there were permanent Caucasian workers and Caucasian people in supervisor and management positions), I saw many racialized young students that were born in Canada. Many of the fellow students that I met were currently about to start, or in university, at least one trying to be an engineer and another trying to get into medical school. It was interesting to talk to these students and try and understand why they were working through agencies and many reported being unable to find jobs elsewhere or indicated that a family member worked at the same company. For example, one of the students’ father worked at

the same company and was able to get her employment there. However, while the father had hired directly, the daughter was employed through an agency. When that agency's contract expired, she was told to switch agencies in order to be able to continue working there.

Whether the prevalence of racialized students was based on the demographics of the area, or based on other factors, is unknown. One hypothesis is that racialized second-generation immigrants lack networks to other types of jobs that non-racialized or non-immigrant people may have. As racialized immigrants face significant barriers to employment, these students' connections for jobs through family may be limited to general labour or other low-paying jobs. However, while many of the permanent racialized workers I met at the companies had been hired directly usually between ten and thirty years ago, new workers reported being directed to go through agencies in order to work for the company. Jasmine, for example, cited being told to go through an in-house agency at one of the factories that she worked at. She said the agency and the company were located in different units of the same building. Additionally, Harpreet, who was the only woman interviewed who had been living in Canada for over eight years, reported being able to get hired directly by factories when she initially came to Canada, but this no longer being the case at the time of the interview. Upon re-entering the labour market, she was no longer able to get hired directly by any company, even where her family or friends told her that there were openings. She stated:

Before, they used to just hire us permanently right?...It's only been about five or six years through agencies. Before they used to hire you directly. They used to pay you less but it was still good. But now I don't know why they do this. Like we do more of the work but we get paid less...People who need work, who pay taxes, who have houses, we need permanent jobs. But we're not getting them. That's why I say that there shouldn't be agencies. We do the hard work but the agencies profit. Its fourteen-fifteen dollars they get paid but we only get eleven dollars. They get three or four dollars just sitting there. It shouldn't be like this.

This quote demonstrates the normalization of temporary agency workers and the growing prevalence of the use of agencies by companies as opposed to hiring workers directly. This means that there are less permanent jobs available for people who need them, like the women in this study.

Experiences in Other Jobs

The women were asked about other work experiences that they had outside of the agencies. Of the women interviewed, seven of the women had experiences working in other jobs, while five of the women had only ever worked through agencies. Two of the five women had tried to seek employment elsewhere but were unsuccessful, and three of the women had not tried to find other work. Most of these stories that were told were about jobs that were also precarious, many of them even more precarious than agency work. It was not necessarily the nature of the work that made it precarious, such as piecework, but also the pay and the way that women were treated by employers. Many of the women reported several ES violations at the other jobs that they held.

Manpreet discussed her work experiences prior to joining the agency and some of her other experiences were actually difficult to hear about. At two of the restaurants where she was employed, she was paid fifty to sixty dollars for the day, but her shifts each day ranged from ten to twelve hours each day. This would result in wages being roughly \$5/hr- \$6/hr. She also reported being treated poorly by her employers, stating, “I used to work at the restaurant but the people there bothered me a lot. They didn’t even speak respectfully to me and the work was intense. So I don’t want to work there because after so many hours in the day they only gave me fifty dollars.” When asked if she knew that being paid fifty dollars a day for a ten hour shift (at the restaurant) was illegal, she replied, “They’re wrong. Yes. It is wrong. But I had no other choice. Whatever money I could take home.” At another job on a farm, she was paid seven

dollars an hour. Additionally, she held two jobs that consisted of piece work where she was only able to make 35 to 50 dollars a day.

Mandy and Anisha tried working at a factory between working through agencies where they were told that they would be hired permanently after a few days of training. However, after two days, they decided the job was too difficult and quit the job. They were never paid for the two days of eight hour shifts that they worked. They reported that the employer refused to pay them. Mandy said, “No they didn’t pay us. They said whatever you have to say come and say it here. You left work so you won’t get the money.” Their money was never recovered as they stated not knowing who to turn to in the situation and feeling powerless.

Jasmine, after working through agencies for years, decided to work out of her home. However, self-employment can also be precarious as the person retains all the risk of running a business and may even lose money. Jasmine was unable to sustain her income by only working out of her home and had to supplement it with part-time work.

After years of working through multiple agencies consisting of general labour, Preeti and Jasleen were able to get jobs that paid significantly more. While Preeti was able to get hired directly by a company, Jasleen was doing her new job through an agency. She was making \$17/hr now but the work was not guaranteed and it remained common for the agency to call her and cancel her shift the evening before she was scheduled to work. As such, most of the other work experiences that the women had were still in jobs that were either precarious in nature or that were made precarious because of frequent ES violations.

When asked about the benefits of working through an agency, seven of the women reported that working through an agency had benefits. However, the benefit that was stated was that the agency provided them with at least some work, though most of the women would have

preferred a permanent job. As Amrit stated, “You can get work until you can find a permanent job. It’s better than not having anything. They’ll send you sometimes so you get some work no matter what...Even if you try to find work on your own, you can’t find any sometimes. At least they’ll send you.” This, however, further demonstrates the existence of an environment where the women struggled to find work and had to feel grateful towards agencies for being given at least some form of employment. This, however, was not necessarily what the women expected upon arriving to Canada, especially given the level of education for many of them. Harjot, who was a teacher in India, said:

I thought I would get a job related to teaching work that I had done in India. I didn’t think I would have to work in a factory like this...when I first came, I found it very hard. Oh my god. I thought why did I come to Canada? (Laughing) That was the first time I had seen a factory in my entire life...What we made “bhaiya”¹⁷ do in India is what they make us do here.

When asked if the women thought that they were able to learn any new skills while working through the agency that they believed would help them in finding better jobs, the women reported learning no new skills. The only advantage they believed they received was having some type of work experience to add to their resumes. Whether that type of experience would help them to get better jobs is uncertain. Anisha reported wanting to take English classes in order to improve her chances of finding better employment but stated that the uncertain schedule of working through agencies made it very difficult to take any classes. She said:

We want to take classes but we stay too busy with work. The thing is they call us sometimes and then sometimes they don’t. It just stays like that. We wanted to take two days to do classes. But then they call us to work whenever they feel like it...we have to sleep too. We have to wake up around 3:45-4:15 [a.m.]”

Economic Security

¹⁷ “Bhaiya” are poor labourers from other provinces that travel to find labour jobs in Punjab. They are used as a cheap source of labour and made to do all the hard, dirty work.

One of the questions asked was whether the women felt that recent immigrants can attain economic security if they work through agencies. Based on their experiences, six women replied that it is not possible; four women replied that is possible but only to a certain extent or that it would take a long time; and two women replied that it is possible. Many of the women told stories about having difficulties meeting expenses while working through the agency and being unable to save any money. As mentioned in Chapter Four, all of the women made minimum wage while working through agencies but barely anyone reported being called to work every weekday for a consecutive year. This left all of the women making incomes below the LICO.

Jasmine reported barely making enough to cover basic living expenses and having difficulty saving any money. She noted “there was nothing to save. You had to pay the babysitter for the kids, gas for the car, nothing left over. I got a cheque of \$370 a week. How much can you save from that? Nothing.” Like Jasmine, Mandy reported needing at least \$250-\$300 a week simply to cover basic expenses such as groceries and bus fare, but was often unable to make that amount of money in her first few months of working through an agency. As Harjot also found, the difficulty of not having guaranteed work every day made saving very complicated. She stated:

You can become secure if you have secure, regular, work only. Not if you're only working some days. Then you can't meet all your expenses. How will you buy your own place if you are living in a place where you pay rent? And how will you buy groceries? There are so many expenses. With an agency you can't do it. If you have a permanent job, though, you make a budget for it all.

Harjot

As a result, it was found that having economic security while working through an agency is very difficult.

Summary

The stories relayed in this chapter demonstrate that the women faced significant challenges in finding employment, especially jobs in the field of their education. Thus, it showed how precariousness is also conditioned by immigrant status. Women felt their only choice was to work through an agency though almost all of them expressed desiring full-time, permanent employment. Women were also unable to learn skills through working for agencies that would help them to obtain better jobs. Most importantly, economic security was very difficult to achieve while working through an agency and women were unable to meet the LICO. In the next chapter, I analyze these findings, along with the findings from Chapters Four and Five, in order to describe what these findings mean for recent South Asian immigrant women.

Chapter Seven

Discussion

The feminist political economy perspective directs attention to studying the ways in which precarious work is shaped through multiple, intersecting social relations that are experienced both in and beyond the workplace. Using the lens of FPE, my study reveals the ways in which recent South Asian immigrant women experienced working through temporary employment agencies and how social factors such as race, gender and immigrant status impacted their experiences. The FPE perspective is important when examining precarious employment because, as the findings of this study depict, the experiences of precariousness are multi-dimensional and are felt beyond just the workplace as well. Gender, for example, contributes to reasons for engagement in precarious employment, shapes experiences of employment in the workplace, but also shapes how precarious employment affects women in their household before and after work.

My findings were consistent with other literature in that employment through agencies is particularly precarious. Dimensions of precariousness included: a lack of control over work schedules and the duration of work assignments; a lack of control over working conditions; low wages and income; and a lack of rights and protections. However, I also found that this group of women faced significant barriers to employment and had little to no alternatives except to work through agencies. Their opportunities for employment were limited by labour market discrimination where their qualifications were not recognized, and they lacked “Canadian experience” demanded by employers. In addition, their role as primary caregivers also limited their opportunities, as employment had to be based around their household and childcare responsibilities and they had fewer opportunities to seek training and education that would

increase their employability. As such, the women were essentially funneled into employment through agencies. Given their lack of alternate employment options, this informed their experiences as they could not do anything to jeopardize their work with the agencies, and both agencies and client companies were able to take advantage of that. The women were often exploited in terms of pay and were pressured to do a variety of things in order to keep their jobs. These pressures put them under a lot of mental and physical stress. This included being unable to turn down any work assignments and having to work extremely fast. It was also found that workers were often treated rudely by permanent workers and supervisors, and information about both safety and employment standards was often missing from orientations by both agencies and client companies.

Immediacy/ Limited Opportunity Effect

Given that many of the women arrived to Canada with little to no savings, they needed to find work immediately. However, despite the fact that many of these women were highly educated individuals, the lack of recognition of their education and experience from outside of Canada meant that they were unable to utilize whatever skills and knowledge they had gained in their home country. As such, they essentially had to “start from scratch” or invest a lot of time and money into meeting Canadian requirements for their field of work. Given that the women lacked time and money, they were not able to access resources that may be necessary in order to find better paying or more secure forms of employment. For example, time and resources could include taking courses or volunteering, building a resume, or taking the time to search for a wider array of employment opportunities. Therefore, structural barriers clearly exist for recent immigrants, particularly those who arrive from countries where the education and labour experience is not valued in Canada. By not recognizing their education and work experience,

barriers to employment for recent South Asian immigrants, particularly for skilled, secure and well-paying jobs, are created. This creates an environment where recent immigrants can be funneled into low-paying, precarious jobs such as working through temporary employment agencies.

Agencies provide a quick solution to finding work quickly, and appeal to recent immigrants who desperately need the work upon arrival and are anxious to start working immediately. Agencies require little effort in terms of signing up and in many cases, women reported not even having to go to an office to fill out application forms. They were simply able to call the owner through a mutual contact and were instructed where to go for assignments via phone call or text. Many of the women turned to agencies without making attempts to search for work elsewhere because they needed money quickly and lacked the time, along with the confidence and resources to search for work elsewhere. Lack of confidence in the ability to speak English held some of the women back from searching for other work. All of the agencies that I ended up working through were owned by South Asians, allowing for other workers and I to speak in Punjabi at all times. Being able to speak in their native language with employers provided some of the women with a sense of comfort and this is another reason why agency work was easier to access for the women. As such, another structural barrier for recent immigrants is language barriers and a lack of knowledge regarding how to navigate the labour market.

For others, they did not know how to find other work and were referred to agencies by family members, neighbours, or community organizations. The fact that women were directed to agencies by everyone, including non-profit community organizations, also demonstrates the normalization of this type of work for recent immigrants, and the recognition that there are

limited alternative options for them. Finally, for women that attempted to take courses, offered for free, in order to improve their skills and proficiency, such courses were not helpful in securing other work because the women were still told that they lacked the Canadian qualifications and experience deemed necessary by employers. This is despite the fact that many of the women were highly educated. Taking additional courses to get better jobs required time and money that the women simply did not have.

Thus, the immediacy effect, along with lack of other employment opportunities, are two major dynamics that shaped South Asian women's experiences of having to work through agencies. However, while agencies did provide a convenience factor in terms of offering work quickly, women's experiences of work were then highlighted by insecurity. Given that the women needed money, the lack of secure work, low wages and lack of benefits, and inability to learn other skills through the agencies was concerning. Thus, while agencies may seem helpful in providing the women with work, the work itself is highlighted by multiple dimensions of precariousness and leaves the women in vulnerable positions as they lack other options. As a result, many of the women interviewed stated that they wished that agencies did not exist so that they could get hired directly by companies. It is usually not the work itself that the women objected to or found difficult, but the sporadic and often insufficient hours of work, along with the unfair ways in which they were treated by both agencies and client companies who took advantage of the fact that the women needed the work but could be terminated from assignments, or not called back, at any point in time. This left the women exposed to exploitation, both physically through unfair production demands, and financially, through various wage violations.

Vulnerable to Exploitation

For a variety of reasons pertaining to their specific situation, the women were found to be vulnerable to exploitation by agencies and client companies alike. First, because the women needed jobs immediately and faced barriers to finding other jobs, they depended significantly on the work provided by the agencies. As such, they did not want to do anything to jeopardize their jobs and could be coerced into situations that violated their rights or placed them under undue stress. Women reported being threatened to be sent home if they did not meet certain production goals and expectations, sometimes forcing them to neglect their safety and physical needs in order to meet the demands of the company. Having no other options for employment meant that the women felt they could not refuse demands and companies took advantage of that. Workers were sometimes made to compete with one another, with the stress of potentially being sent home or not being called back omnipresent. As noted by the Institute of Work and Health (2014), any accidents involving agency workers do not appear on the client firm's accident record and the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board provides TEAs with lower workers' compensation premium rates than client firms, meaning accidents cost the agency less than the firm. As a result, agencies and companies alike have little incentive to worry about the safety of agency workers. This was confirmed by findings because women reported receiving little to no safety training. The lack of training, compounded by the pressure put by client companies who had the power to send anyone home at any time, and the fact that none of the women had ever engaged in general labour before coming to Canada, was of concern.

Along with feeling as if they could not jeopardize their jobs, many of the women were also unclear about what their rights were, and what to do if their rights were violated. Some of the women were not even aware of what the minimum wage was when they were working. Others did not know how much of their wages were deducted for taxes. In fact, many accepted

cash payments that were \$10/hr because they believed they were saving money when they would have been paid more even after taxes were deducted if they were paid the minimum wage at the time. Having a limited knowledge of ES was exacerbated by the fact that most agencies also failed to provide this information, despite being mandated to do so. Only one of the women interviewed was ever given an ES poster or even witnessed seeing one at the agency. Moreover, there is no system in place for women to be able to file anonymous complaints. In terms of wage discrepancies, workers must try and enforce their ES rights with their employer (or former employer) before filing a complaint with the Ministry of Labour. This requires workers to have significant knowledge of their rights and the complaints process, but also places them in a vulnerable position when approaching employers. There is nothing to protect workers from any long-term effects such as differential treatment or from not being rehired if they are working on a temporary basis, or as a temporary agency worker (Gellantly et al., 2011; 92). As such, speaking up can easily result in the loss of work and there are many excuses that client companies are able to use in order to justify why someone may not have been called back. They could simply say that they no longer required any extra workers or that the worker did not work well. Therefore, it severely limits the women's ability to do anything when they are exploited, given that they have no other options for work. Along with being underpaid for regular wages, women also reported not being paid for overtime.

Finally, the women also faced undue stress when they felt like they could not refuse any assignments because they may not be called back for work. While working through an agency is supposed to offer flexibility for workers, it was found that flexibility primarily just exists for the agencies and client companies. While agencies could tell workers to stay home at any time, they expected workers to be available at all times. One agency even threatened to cut wages if

someone did not show up to work on a day that they said they would be available. Moreover, it was found that companies also requested only having workers that could work entire shifts or every day for an extended period of time. For the women who could only work part-time, such as women on student visas, they found that their opportunities were limited because some client companies only requested workers that could stay long-term and work full-time. As such, flexibility in terms of scheduling their work was not a luxury for any of the women.

The way in which temporary employment agencies have become legitimized in Canada, along with the lack of rights and protections afforded to workers who are employed through them, are evidence of a shift towards the commodification of labour. Not only are significant protections missing from employment standards legislation surrounding such work, but there is also a lack of resources put towards ensuring that the few standards that are in place are actually followed by businesses and agencies alike. The stories shared by the women in this study demonstrated that employment standards were violated by employers on regular basis and that workers were aware that there was little they could do to seek recourse. Given that marginalized persons, such as recent racialized immigrants, who are concentrated in such work and are particularly vulnerable given their economic status and lack of knowledge regarding their rights, temporary employment agencies are evidence of a racially segmented labour market.

Gendered Division of Labour both in Formal and Informal Work

The gendered division of labour both in formal and informal work created a unique experience for the women. As noted by FPE, it is important to examine social reproduction within capitalism and how this responsibility is delegated. FPE recognizes social reproduction as an economic category and notes that the consequences of not accounting for this work leaves women with greater burdens of work than men, and creates a level of economic vulnerability for

women (Riley, 2008). The women in this study reported being primarily in charge of tasks related to social reproduction and it was clear that this role was expected of them as women. Through conversation, they expressed that being primarily responsible for both housework and childcare was the cultural norm. As a result, the women made decisions about employment in accordance with their responsibilities related to childcare. Women entered and left the labour market in order to either have or take care of their children. As a result, this limited their ability to be hired permanently and impacted their income. As women held the belief that if they worked at one client company long enough, it would improve their chances of being hired, having to leave their assignments in order to have children can then be seen as limiting their chances of getting hired directly by the company. As such, being a woman who makes the decision to have children greatly impacted her employment opportunities and she was forced to switch assignments as a result. This demonstrates that women face consequences for having to leave the workforce in order to have children. Yet without women doing so, the reproduction of another generation of workers could not occur and this in itself is essential to capitalism. Women essentially bear the cost of having children though it is essential for the continuing of society. Along with facing economic consequences, women also continue to bear the majority of the burden for daily tasks related to social reproduction such as childcare and household chores.

Given that these women and their families could not depend on a male breadwinner model to achieve economic security, women still had to contribute to the household income. As a result, they had to handle both work outside of the home and inside of the home. This created unique experiences for them as they had to face the challenges of handling both forms of work with little help from their partners. As a result, employment opportunities were again limited for women because they had to base their schedules around the caring of their children, while male

partners were able to take jobs that required longer hours. Those jobs, however, also offered higher pay and more security. This confirmed Vosko's finding (2006) that women are less able to participate in full-time jobs because of their heavy workload within the household, coupled by a lack of social policies and programs that help to alleviate this workload to make working full-time easier. Because of this, women are more likely to be found within temporary or part-time jobs, which tend to be less secure, pay less, and less likely to have union coverage. Additionally, the women's primary focus on starting a family and children also limited their opportunities for education, which may have helped secure better jobs as well.

Along with a gendered division of labour in the household, the gendered division of labour at workplaces also impacted women's economic position. Women were often not given opportunities to work jobs that were exclusively offered to men such as jobs that required heavy lifting. These positions paid more and women also reported that their husbands were able to get hired directly by companies who were seeking men for heavy lifting jobs, but that these companies did not hire women. Consistent with other studies of temporary agency work, agencies were more inclined to place people within certain jobs based on their gender and race, even when women expressed an interest in particular jobs that were usually delegated to men, or even had experience working in them (see Longhurst 2014; Vosko 2000). This prevents women from obtaining higher-skilled and higher-paying jobs.

Summary

In this chapter, I analyzed the ways in which various aspects of the women's social location, including gender, race, and immigrant status, combined to create particular experiences of precarious work through temporary employment agencies. The women needed to find jobs immediately upon arrival but were limited to few options given the barriers they faced as recent

immigrants from India. These barriers were found to funnel the women into employment through temporary employment agencies. Given that they had no other options, and that work through the agency could be terminated at any point in time, the women were particularly vulnerable to exploitation and differential treatment by both agencies and client companies. Finally, a gendered division of labour both within the home and at work had negative implications on women in terms of their ability to find more secure and higher-paying jobs. Given the multi-dimensional nature of precariousness both within and beyond the workplace, an FPE approach to studying precarious work is important. It takes account of the ways in which social factors such as gender, race, and immigrant status shape experiences of work, along with how these social factors interact with political and economic forces to create particular experiences. It extends its scope of analysis to identify how precariousness is also experienced outside of the workplace and the implications that it has.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

Under the lens of feminist political economy, this study was conducted to support the research questions outlined in the first chapter, using qualitative interviews and participant-observation to capture the experiences of South Asian women who are recent immigrants working through temporary employment agencies in Ontario. It was found that social factors such as race, gender and immigrant status had a large impact on the women's experiences, both funneling the women into temporary agency employment and making them more vulnerable to exploitation. This leads to precarious livelihoods for the women where they are unable to meet the LICO, become trapped in a cycle of precarious employment, and must face the challenges of working both formally and within the home.

Strategies for assisting women in these positions need to address the lack of security related to work and pay associated with working through agencies and lack of enforcement of employment standards. Additionally, barriers to employment for recent immigrants need to be addressed so that immigrants can more easily and quickly work in the fields in which they are already qualified. Finally, there needs to be greater services and programs in place to assist women who are limited in terms of employment by their roles as primary caregivers.

Limitations

Given that women were primarily recruited through mutual contacts, snowball sampling, and directly from workplaces that I went to, this biased the sample, although all of the women that were interviewed collectively represented stories of at least twelve different agencies in the Greater Toronto Area. However, all women were subject to self-selection bias; i.e. each of the women interviewed chose to share their experiences for this research. Moreover, the total sample size was twelve, a relatively small sample. The findings from this study, therefore, cannot be

generalized to all recent South Asian immigrant women. However, detailed personal interviews allowed for a deeper understanding of experiences, which would not have been possible with a less personal approach, such as survey data, that could encompass more participants.

Additionally, all of the women interviewed lived and worked in the Greater Toronto Area, which has its own unique demographics, and this may mean that results may not be representative of all of Ontario.

Implications

The findings of this study may be used to inform the development of social and economic policies to reduce precariousness. This research project has demonstrated that temporary agency employment is characterized by many dimensions of precariousness, and that these are exacerbated by social location. Moreover, it was found that women and recent immigrants face particular challenges that prevent opportunities for more secure forms of employment. Initiatives should seek to make employment through agencies less precarious and to address barriers to employment. As such, I have developed a list of recommendations that are based on my own observations and suggestions made by research participants. It also encompasses recommendations made by the Workers' Action Centre that is currently engaging in a campaign called Fight for \$15 and Fairness. This campaign seeks to raise the minimum wage to \$15 for all workers in Ontario and also seeks to address other issues to create fairer working conditions. Many of those campaign goals have also been incorporated. Finally, the list includes recommendations that have been suggested in other literature regarding precarious employment and temporary employment agencies (Baker and McKenzie, 2013; International Labour Organization, 2011; Longhurst, 2014; PEPSO, 2013; Arsdale and Mandarin, 2010; Vosko 2010):

1. *Equal treatment.* Temporary agency workers should be treated the same as permanent workers in regards to equal pay, access to benefits, equal rights, and working conditions.

2. *Fair scheduling.* Workers should be given adequate notice in advance for work, along with a specified and guaranteed length of assignment.
3. *Protection for workers and easier access to justice.* Workers should be able to stand up for their rights without fear of reprisal. This would incorporate an anonymous complaints system. Additionally, it should be ensured that workers are made aware of their rights and that there is easier accessibility for workers that need to file a complaint.
4. *Increase enforcement of Employment Standards.* Greater resources need to be put into ensuring that employers are following Employment Standards and greater penalties need to be administered for employers who violate laws.
5. *Increase minimum wage.* The minimum wage should be increased to a living wage for all workers. The Workers' Action Centre recommends that the wage be increased to \$15 an hour in Ontario.
6. *Prearity pay.* Agency workers should be paid a premium on their wages to compensate for the fact that they do not receive regular hours of work but must be available at all times. Other forms of protection are also recommended including eligibility for pension entitlements and seniority.
7. *Encourage transition from temporary workers to permanent workers.* There should be no barriers to getting hired permanently by client companies. For example, agencies can currently charge a fee if a client company attempts to hire a worker before a specified period of time. That stipulation should be removed. Additionally, client companies should have to hire temporary workers after six months.
8. *Restrict the use of temporary agency workers by companies.* Companies should be limited in terms of what percent of their workforce can be constituted by agency workers versus workers that are directly hired by the company. For example, no more than 30 percent of the total workforce can be hired through agencies in the Guangdong Province in China (Baker and McKenzie, 2013).
9. *Proper safety training.* Agencies should have to ensure that workers are provided with mandatory free and comprehensive safety training, in many different languages, pertaining to general labour.
10. *Collective representation.* Given that agency workers work unpredictable hours and at multiple sites, it is difficult for them to organize. Finding new ways for these types of

workers to come together and exercise collective agency is crucial. Additionally, the International Labour Organization (2011) states that it is important to “ensure the right of freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, as guaranteed by Conventions Nos 87 and 98.”

11. *Easier transition for qualified immigrants.* For recent immigrants that are qualified, faster and easier ways should be found for them to meet Canadian requirements to work in their field.
12. *Increase access to affordable childcare.* Current costs for childcare create a barrier to employment for women who have to decide whether paying for childcare is worth taking a job. As such, greater access to subsidized childcare needs to be made available.

Final Thoughts

The political and economic context in which recent South Asian immigrant women live and work is such that their employment opportunities are significantly limited. For recent immigrants, particularly racialized ones, their education and work experience is often not recognized in Canada, and many do not possess the time and money to invest in education and training when they first arrive. For women, their employment opportunities are further limited by their roles as primary caregivers within the household. Both division of labour within the household and within the workplace limits women to lower-paying, precarious jobs. As such, the social factors of race, gender, and immigrant status intersect to create unique experiences for recent South Asian immigrant women, where they are essentially funneled into work such as employment through agencies. Further, the lack of protections surrounding agency work, combined with the lack of enforcement of existing ES places these women in a particularly vulnerable position where they constantly face employment insecurity, income insecurity and must handle the stresses of work in the formal labour market and within the household.

While the Employment Standards Amendment Act was adopted in 2009 in order to better working conditions for temporary agency workers, this research highlighted that the legislation in place is poorly enforced, as agencies were found to consistently violate employment standards. Moreover, the legislation does little to protect people from precarious livelihoods. As mentioned in the Introduction, the Ministry of Labour recently conducted a blitz of temporary employment agencies in Ontario and found that 34 of the 50 agencies inspected were violating ES. This pattern speaks to the shifting nature of work and the erosion of both legal and normative standards of employment. While agencies are justified as allowing labour flexibility for companies, many companies are using agency workers simply as a means of cutting costs by avoiding paying higher wages and benefits, having the ability to fire people at any time and avoiding liability when it comes to safety. It was both witnessed, and recounted in stories from the women interviewed in this study, that companies routinely employed large numbers of workers hired through agencies. Many of these workers were never hired directly by the company and worked at the same company for years, or workers were switched every six months to avoid having to be hired. This demonstrates that companies are routinely using agency workers on a long-term, permanent basis simply to maximize their own profits. While this benefits companies, it lowers standards for all workers and creates working conditions where labour is simply viewed as a commodity. For women who are racialized and recent immigrants, this experience of precarious employment is exacerbated by their social location. Workers and their families in Ontario deserve better.

As such, this unrestricted use of agency workers needs to be regulated. Businesses should not be able to employ more than a certain percentage of their workforce through agencies and they should have to hire workers after a certain period of time. There should also be no barriers

to getting hired. The purpose of agencies should truly be to lead workers to permanent employment and the fate of workers should not be left solely at the mercy of business owners. The findings of this research demonstrate that many companies are likely to avoid hiring workers if they can, and that is neither fair nor justifiable. Further, the approach that businesses are able to self-regulate themselves, and that most will choose to willingly comply with employment standards needs to be discarded. Employment standards are there to create a minimum standard for workers and these standards should allow for fair and decent working conditions. Right now, employment standards for agency workers fall short of ensuring decent working conditions. More sadly, however, these low standards are very poorly enforced so agency workers have very little protection from being exploited. Stronger legislation needs to be in place to protect agency workers and greater resources need to be put towards enforcing employment standards. Without these substantial changes, people, particularly those who have already been historically marginalized, are left in precarious positions.

Borrowing a suggestion from Longhurst (2014), future research should focus on gathering more statistical data regarding temporary agency employment in Ontario. There is currently a lack of such data. Survey research would allow for a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon. Given the way that permanent workers were found to react to temporary agency workers in this research, it may also be beneficial to gather insight into how the hiring of temporary agency workers impacts permanent workers in terms of their perceptions and attitudes of work. This suggestion has also been made by Cuyper et al. (2008) who noted that a potential hidden cost of using temporary agency workers may be negative psychological impacts on permanent workers.

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Appendix A: Interview Schedule

Experiences of Precarious Employment

1. When did you start working with a temporary employment agency?
Subquestion: Have you been working with the agency the entire time since?
2. What was the process of joining the agency?
Probe: How did you hear about the agency?
Probe: How you get in contact with the agency in order to begin working for them? (e.g. went directly to the office, phone call, etc.)
Probe: What information were you given about the agency and the type of work you would be doing?
Probe: Were you informed of any safety procedures and/or your legal rights as a worker?
Subquestion: Did you have to fill out any forms?
Probe: Did you see any Employment Standards posters at the office? Were you given one?
3. Can you tell me about your experiences working with the temporary employment agency?
Probe: How long was it before you received your first assignment?
Probe: How often do you usually receive assignments?
Subquestion: How often do the assignments last?
Probe: How much are you paid?
Subquestion: In what format are you paid?
Subquestion: Do you know how much is deducted in taxes?
4. How are you treated by the agency?
Probe: How much time in advance are you given notice of work?
Probe: Have you ever refused work? If you did, did you find that anything changed in regards to how often you were called?
Probe: Have you ever had to complain to the agency about a particular worksite? If yes, how was this dealt with?
5. Have you worked with more than one agency? If yes, what was the reason for switching to/ joining another agency?
6. How does it feel to constantly have to learn new jobs?
7. Can you tell me about some of the work assignments that you have received?
Probe: What kinds of work have you had to do?
Probe: How big was the company where you worked?
Probe: How far have you had to travel for work assignments?
Probe: What form of transportation do you use?
Probe: How are you treated by supervisors?
Probe: How are you treated by permanent workers at the worksite?
Subquestion: How does it affect your ability to do your job?

Probe: Have you ever felt like the work you had to do was unsafe or unfair?

Subquestion: Do you feel like you can refuse work without any repercussions?

Probe: Are you provided with equipment?

Probe: Do you know who you would complain to if you felt like you being treated unfairly?

8. What do you think are the benefits of working for a temporary employment agency?
9. What do you think are the downfalls of working for a temporary employment agency?
Subquestion: What changes would you like to see made?
10. Do you feel that you are treated differently at work because you are a woman?
Probe: Are you given the same types of work assignments as men?

Precarious Employment and Home Life

1. How does working for a temporary employment agency affect your home life?
Probe: Who do you live with?
Probe: If husband, what job does he do?
Subquestion: If not with agency, how did he get job without agency?
Probe: How does it affect decisions regarding dependants such as children and parents?
Probe: Does it affect the amount of informal work you do within the home?
2. Does an uncertain work schedule affect your home life? If yes, how so?
Subquestion: How do you cope with the uncertain schedule?
3. Does an uncertain income affect your home life? If yes, how so?
Subquestion: How do you cope with uncertain future income?
4. During times when you have not had work assignments, how has the experience been?
5. If you are married, how does your working for an agency affect how you and your husband share work in the home?

Precarious Employment and Immigration

1. Can you tell me a little bit about how you came to immigrate to Canada? When?
Subquestion: Under what immigration class did you come to Canada?
Probe: What was your educational and employment experience from your place of emigration?
2. What led you to seek employment with a temporary agency?
Subquestion: Did you try to seek other jobs before or after turning to the agency? If so, what were your experiences trying to find other types of employment?
Subquestion: If you had a choice, would you choose this work?
3. What do you think are some of the barriers you face as an immigrant in finding 'good jobs'?
Subquestion: Do you feel like you have gained any skills or experiences working through the agency that will be able to help you progress to a better skilled or better paying job?

4. Do you feel you are able to be financially secure working through the temporary employment agency?
Subquestion: If you are an international student, what is your tuition at school? How important is employment for paying for tuition and expenses?
5. How does working for the agency affect your ability to get settled?
Probe: How does it affect your ability to get settled financially?
Probe: How does it affect your ability to integrate into the community?
6. Have you ever experienced any racism working through the agency?
Subquestion: Do you feel you are treated differently than other workers who are not immigrants? If so, how?
Probe: Are you given the same types of work assignments?
7. If you no longer work for an agency, how did you end up finding alternative work? How do you compare your work now to agency?
8. Is there anything else you wanted to say/ any questions that I should've asked that I didn't?
9. Can I follow up after if I have any more questions?