EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF

PRECARIOUS EMPLOYMENT ON SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING

AMONGST WOMEN AGED 24-44 LIVING IN NORTHERN BC

by

Theresa Campbell

BSW, University of Northern British Columbia, 2009

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Abstract

This thesis explores the experiences and perceptions of precarious employment on subjective wellbeing amongst women between the ages 24-44, living in northern British Columbia. The idea of this research evolved out of a larger SSHRC grant funded project of the Women North Network/Northern FIRE: Centre for Women's Health Research at UNBC (Women North Network, n.d.). The SSHRC grant funded research examined the experiences of older women (aged 45 years and older) with respect to the impact of precarious employment on their health and wellness. Through the use of exploratory qualitative research, the current research sample consisted of six younger participants, who self-identified as being involved in precarious employment, who provided data through semi-structured interviews. Additionally, a six stage thematic analysis process was used to analyze the data.

Four themes emerged from the data: (1) job insecurity; (2) lots of stressors; (3) health and safety and; (4) coping with social supports. The findings showcased the participants' experiences and perceptions regarding precarious employment and identified the impact on their subjective wellbeing.

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Dedication

To my mother, Margaret (Roane) Black.

Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis outlines relevant information regarding the research process and findings of an exploration of women's perceptions regarding experiences and impact of precarious employment on subjective wellbeing. This research explored perceptions and experiences of precarious employment amongst women between the ages of 24-44, which according to Vosko (2006) is the age demographic for the "prime earning years" (p. 26). It was my hope that this research would allow women's voices to be heard regarding their involvement with precarious employment and to identify impacts on subjective well-being due to this involvement. It is important to note that this study was an extension of an earlier SSHRC grant funded project of the Women North Network/Northern FIRE: Centre for Women's Health Research at UNBC (Women North Network, n.d.). The SSHRC grant funded research examined the experiences of older women (aged 45 years and older) with respect to the impact of precarious employment on their health and wellness.

This first chapter introduces the topic and details the purpose, research question, key concept definitions, the research approach used and significance of the study. The second chapter provides highlights from a review of the current literature relevant to the study. Chapter Three details the chosen methodology for this research and the fourth chapter reports the research findings. Chapter Five discusses the findings in relation to the literature, explores the implications for social work practice, and makes recommendations for future research.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research was to explore women's experiences and perceptions of precarious employment and its impact on their subjective wellbeing. Precarious employment can be viewed as sub-standard work, including precarious, limited, underpaid employment situations, or unemployment (Vosko, 2006, p. 14). The research was conducted in the northern community of Fort St. John, BC with female participants aged 24-44 who self-identified as being involved in precarious employment.

Research Question

The research question was: What are the experiences and perceptions of precarious employment, and impact on subjective wellbeing, of women aged 24-44 living in northern British Columbia (BC)?

Definitions of Key Concepts

For the purposes of this research, three key concepts that were identified as being central to the study are precarious employment, north and subjective wellbeing.

Precarious Employment. Precarious employment has many definitions. This research utilizes a definition offered by Vosko (2011):

Precarious employment encompasses forms of work involving limited social benefits and statutory entitlements, job insecurity, low wages, and high risks of ill-health. It is shaped by employment status (i.e., temporary or permanent, part-time or full-time), and dimensions of labour market insecurity as well as social context (such as occupation, industry, and geography), and social location (the

interaction between social relations, such as gender and race, and political and

economic conditions) (p. 3).

North. The concept of north can be challenging to define as it encompasses geography

of place as well as individuals' connection to the geography. North is often associated with

"limitations and includes characteristics like remoteness, isolation, lack of service and

personal hardship as compared to an urban environment" (Graham, 1990, p. 235). For the

purpose of this research, the North is defined geographically as the area served by the

Northern Health (NH) health delivery region of British Columbia which stretches as far south

as Quesnel, as far east as Valemont, as far west as Haida Gwaii and north to the borders of the

Yukon and Northwest Territories (Northern Health Quick Facts, 2012). The location of the

study took place within the northeast section of NH's region.

Subjective Wellbeing. For the purposes of the research, Albuquerque's (n.d.) definition

of subjective wellbeing was utilized:

Subjective wellbeing is a person's cognitive and affective evaluations of his or her

life. The cognitive element refers to what one thinks about his or her life satisfaction

in global terms (life as a whole) and in domain terms (in specific areas of life such as

work, relationships, etc.) The affective element refers to emotions, moods and

feelings. Affect is considered positive when the emotions, moods and feelings

experienced are pleasant (e.g. joy, elation, affection etc.) Affect is deemed negative,

though, when the emotions, moods and feelings experienced are unpleasant (e.g.

guilt, anger, shame etc.) (para. 1).

Research Paradigm

The study employed a qualitative research approach utilizing a theoretical framework rooted within structural social work and an anti-oppressive lens. Qualitative research is a common approach used in social work. It seeks an understanding of a phenomenon in its context in greater depth and to elucidate the nature of social practices, relationships, and beliefs along with the meaning of human experiences from the participants' point of view (Creswell, 2013, p. 45). Through the use of inductive reasoning, this study was able to promote understanding, or make meaning of, the participants' experiences and perceptions of precarious employment and then generalize the relationship among the particulars (Marlow, 2005, p. 335).

Significance of the Research

The topic of precarious employment is significant for several reasons. Precarious employment continues to be a gendered phenomenon in Canada (Vosko, MacDonald & Campbell, 2009, p. 27). Despite expectations that both men and women are to be engaged in the labour force during their prime working ages (i.e., 24-44), women not only continue to represent the majority of workers who are involved in precarious forms of employment, they also face the "socially prescribed norms" regarding female caregiving and unpaid labour, which create additional barriers within social relationships as well as employment opportunities (Vosko, et al., 2009, p. 27). In addition, the importance of allowing women's voices be heard is vital within research. According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy, (2007), "while many thousands of men's lives have been recognized and recorded for centuries and across cultures, women's life stories have been documented far less often, even forgotten" (p. 55).

Conducting the study in the environs of Fort St. John, in the northeast region of British Columbia, is also important. Fort St. John, a northern rural community, has historically seen economic growth which carries with it high increases in population. The strong labour market in Fort St. John, which is subject to boom or bust cycles common in resource industry based communities had one of the highest levels of disposable incomes in the country, although, at the time of the study in 2016 the labour market in Fort St. John was facing an economic decline. According to BC Statistics Canada, (2013), Fort St. John's population in 2011 was 20,408 residents, with 9,065 being female, and 3,120 females falling within the 25-44 year age range. Fort St. John also holds a strong labour market which is often reflected in low unemployment rates. Kaweesi, Wagner and Hara (2007) identified unemployment rates in Fort St. John as 4.3% for people between the ages of 19-64, with females accounting for 51.7% of this statistic (p. 5). More recent research data was not found specific to the area. With a strong economy, typical rural values and a large population of females between the ages of 25-44 years of age who represent a larger portion of the unemployment rate, Fort St. John presents as an optimal location to conduct research exploring perceptions of precarious employment among women.

At the time of this research, Fort St. John, as many other resource driven towns, was facing an economic decline as a result of the slowdown of the oil and gas economy. According to Wakefield (2016), the economic decline was due to the "drop in the oil and gas prices that began in late 2014, brought on by a global supply glut and an economic slowdown in Asia" (para. 4). This resulted in a decrease in production demand therefore having an impact on the job sector demand that has been considered strong in the past. According to Case Manager Todd Stringer from Employment Connections:

The official unemployment rate is 9.4%, which I think went down due to the

mass exodus of non-resident workers in the area. As far as a forecast, all I have

heard are rumors. I have noticed that many of our local oil and gas workers

are looking at retraining for positions outside of the oil and gas sector or at

least positions / training that will benefit them in and out of the local oil and

gas sector (T. Stringer, personal communication, July 4, 2016).

While the forecast for the oil and gas industry seems unknown, there are some

indications that the oil and gas economy may start to bounce back soon as forecasted in

Alberta's economy. According to Hames (2016), "With oil prices higher in recent weeks,

we might be getting closer to some stability in the petroleum sector, which may stem the

job losses in coming months" (para. 1). In addition, there seems to be focus on the

Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) pipeline as well as the Site C Dam (BC Hydro, n.d.;

Wakefield, 2016.). While these projects are currently undergoing review it is giving some

economic hope to the region.

Researcher Position

It is important to situate myself in relation to the research to further understand any

possible assumptions or biases that I may bring to this research (Absolon & Willett, 2005).

I was employed by North Peace Community Resources (NPCRS) in 2009 and had the

opportunity to work in a variety of women's programs, such as the Baby's Best Chance

Program, Children Who Witness Violence Program, Women's Outreach Program, and the

Family Advancement program from 2009 to 2013. While employed in the women's

programs, I gained insight into many of the social issues prevalent within the community,

issues such as violence, marginalization, oppression and addictions. In addition to gaining

increased knowledge regarding social issues, I also became aware of the barriers women faced in regards to re-entering the workforce and the impact that the women faced due to precarious employment. I realized at that time the struggles of leaving violent relationships and taking steps towards independence was the first hurdle that some of the women would have to face, only to face the additional barrier of precarious employment. I witnessed women appearing frustrated and disempowered when unable to obtain sustainable employment, instead being caught up in the cycle of precarious employment. I found myself becoming frustrated with the barriers that many of the women faced and the limited knowledge regarding precarious employment and impact on women. At this time, I focused on educating myself in regards to the role of gender within precarious employment.

In 2012, I had the opportunity to participate in a SSHRC grant funded project of the Women North Network/Northern FIRE: Centre for Women's Health Research at UNBC examining the experiences of women, age 45 and over, with respect to the impact of precarious employment on their health and wellness (Women Network North, n.d.). I was a research assistant at the Fort St. John location, under the supervision of Dawn Hemingway, Lead Researcher and Associate Professor with UNBC's School of Social Work. This opportunity led to an increased knowledge regarding precarious employment and the impacts on health due to this issue. As a result of my experience with NPCRS and the primary research, my desire to explore the perceptions and experiences of precarious employment among a younger demographic emerged.

I am a privileged, married Caucasian female parent of middle class economic status. Having interest in women's issues is a direct result of my upbringing within a single-female-led household where my family encountered issues with poverty, mental health and

marginalization. Throughout my childhood and adolescence, I was aware of the marginalization and oppression that my mother, my siblings and I endured due to the impact of precarious employment. I believe that this experience has given me a greater understanding of the plight of women and the potential impact precarious employment likely has within our society. I recognize that my upbringing and past work experience could contribute to potential assumptions and bias with regard to this research. To ensure the study reflects the perceptions and experiences of the women involved, continual reflexivity will be incorporated throughout the study. According to Creswell (2013, p. 47), reflexivity is the identification of the researcher's position within the study, the process of examining both oneself as researcher and the research relationship.

Theoretical Framework

My perspective is rooted in structural social work and anti-oppressive practice. Structural Social Work identifies problems engrained within society, problems that are "inherent, built-in part of our present social order" and rely on discrimination from social institutions against individuals (Mullaly, 1997, p. 104). Additionally, Structural Social Work is a generalist model that identifies oppression as a total system of oppression. When viewing personal struggles, we identify the connection between personal and political, how our personal struggles are a result of the political environment (Mullaly, p. 104).

When addressing oppression, Freire (2007) states that the "interest of the oppressors lie in changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not in the situation that oppresses them" (p. 74). Carniol (2000) suggests that we consider various oppressions "that are not only based on gender and class but also on colonialism, racism, ableism, heterosexism, and ageism, it is the experience of unequal social relations" (p. 11).

Summary

Chapter one briefly provided an introduction and background relevant to the research. The key concepts were defined and the theoretical framework outlined. I have also situated myself as a researcher. The following chapter, chapter two, provides a literature review highlighting important information relevant to the study which will further justify exploration of the research question.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This literature review presents an introduction to the concept and history of precarious employment, issues associated with precarious employment, and the health impact of precarious employment on women, with emphasis on identifying factors relevant to the Fort St. John area. The review supports the need to further understand the impact of precarious employment on subjective well-being amongst women between the ages of 24-44, which was the focus of this research study.

Precarious Employment

Precarious employment is a term used to describe "non-standard employment, that is poorly paid, insecure, unprotected, and cannot effectively support a household" (Vosko, 2011, p. 2). Additionally, Vosko further details precarious employment as work that includes:

Work for remuneration characterized by uncertainty, low income and limited social benefits and statutory entitlements. Precarious employment is shaped by the relationship between employment status (i.e., self or paid employment), the form of employment, such as temporary or permanent, part-time or full-time, and dimensions of labour market insecurity as well as social context (e.g., occupation, industry, and geography). Social locations, or the interaction between social relations such as gender, and legal and political categories and citizenship are also factors contributing to the social issue (p. 2).

According to Vosko (2006), a shift in employment relationships has seen a dramatic increase in precarious employment due to factors such as globalization, a trend away from the manufacturing sector to the service sector, and the proliferation of information technology (p.

17). These changes created a new economy, one that demands flexibility of the workplace and, as a result contributed to a decline in the standard employment relationship and an increase in precarious employment (Vosko, p. 11). Vidal and Tigges (2009) state that "since the 1970's, temporary employment has become a component of employers search for flexible labour supply, accounting for the decrease from 68% of full time employment in 1989 to 64% in 2007" (p. 67).   Additionally, the percentage of workers who are temporary part-time, temporary full-time or solo employed has increased by 50% during this same period and now accounts for over one in five Canadian workers in such employment circumstances (Vosko, MacDonald & Campbell, 2009, p. 30). Data from the Canadian Labour Force Survey (Morissette & Johnson, 2005) shows that temporary work has become more prevalent amongst new hires in the private sector and that the numbers of workers with less than two years seniority in temporary jobs nearly doubled between 1989 and 2004.

Vosko (2006) indicates precarious employment is not a new issue, rather one that has been well documented throughout Canadian history (p.6).   Historically, precarious employment was linked to a series of "gendered practices related to the organization of social reproduction – the daily and intergenerational reproduction of the working population – contributing to gender contract assigning men a primary role in breadwinning and women the responsibility for care-giving" (p. 27). Forward to 2014 and little has changed. The trend of precarious employment continues to rise with temporary employment leading the chart. Grant (2014) identifies the rise of temporary and contract jobs, commenting:

> The greatest portion of involuntary part-timers are those between the ages of 25
>
> and 54, men and women in their prime working years, according to data compiled
>
> by Statistics Canada. Temp work, defined as jobs with a fixed end date, has grown

to 13.4 per cent of the work force from 11.3 per cent in 1997, those figures show.

And within the temp category, contract positions have increased the most, up 83

per cent to 1.1 million people since 1997. Statscan has noted that temp workers

tend to see lower pay, fewer benefits and less on-the-job training than permanent

staff (para. 2).

Recent statistics in British Columbia indicate that nearly 263,000 British Columbia

residents had temporary forms of employment in 2013 (Longhurst, 2013). Longhurst referred

to temporary forms of employment as including; contract, seasonal, casual and temporary

work and identified that temporary employment in BC, is on the rise, representing 13.9

percent of provincial employment. Longhurst further identified 40 percent of job creation in

the wake of the 2008-2009 recession as being temporary employment. These trends point to

an increasingly insecure labour market for workers in British Columbia and are consistent

with national statistics as outlined above. More recent statistics related to northern BC or

northeastern BC were not located.

The statistics outline the growing issue of precarious employment in Canada and

identify the issue of precarious employment as being a gendered phenomenon. In the next

section the feminization of precarious employment is examined in more detail.

Feminization of Precarious Employment

There is a large body of literature that identifies the feminization of precarious

employment. Vosko, Zukewich and Cranford (2003) identify the history of precarious

employment and the common themes that persist, "throughout all these changes, the common

themes remain the same; women and marginalized groups are excluded from the labour

market on many different levels" (p. 37).

Vosko (2006) suggests Canadian employment is expanding in the very sectors where precarious forms of employment are common and predominately these positions are occupied by females. Furthermore, Vosko, MacDonald, and Campbell (2009) state, "Precarious Employment is a significant phenomenon in the Canadian labour market that is deeply gendered" (p. 26). Scholars have long argued that gender is integral to the organization of paid and unpaid work and the reproduction of inequality. Ferrarini (2006) demonstrated that the labour markets are gendered institutions operating at the intersection of the productive and reproductive economies. Feminist scholarship has also examined the ways in which neoliberal policies and restructuring processes disproportionately affect women and visible minorities (Aronson & Neysmith, 1997). Brodie and Baaker (2008) argue that in Canada and elsewhere, research has demonstrated that privatization and the erosion of social programs force health and child care back onto the family and the unpaid work of women (p. 54). Other research also argues that both women and visible minorities are disproportionately represented amongst unemployed workers, a growing number of workers in low-income sector jobs, and in precarious employment (George, Thomson, Chaze & Guruge, 2015).

The issue of precarious employment amongst female dominated professions appears to be on the rise. Stephenson and Emery (2003) identify that clerical and financial services increasingly hire on a part-time basis, retail stores are increasing their demands for split shifts, and call centre jobs necessitate evening and weekend work. Temporary jobs are also increasing faster for women than for men resulting in a higher number of female temporary part-time workers. Part-time work is also seeing declining wages. Statistics

Canada (2006) states that more women than men hold multiple jobs and work weekends and evenings.

In keeping with the trends of growing part time and temporary work, Labour Force Survey, a monthly data-gathering endeavour by Statistics Canada used to track employment trends nationwide, identified that

71,000 full-time jobs were lost since June 2016 — the largest month-over-month drop in years". In addition, part-time employment was on the rise, with 40,000 new jobs created. Over that same period, employment for those aged 15–24 dropped 28,000. All of those job losses were part-time positions. Women face a more precarious outlook than men. Across an even broader age range of 25–54, women lost 39,000 full-time positions while part-time jobs rose 38,000 (Adams, 2016, para. 7-8)

Walby (1997) argues that women are impacted from several layers of labour market discrimination, such as training opportunities, labour market occupation, work arrangements and working conditions. Stephenson and Emory (2003) also identify single mothers as being more than twice as likely as married women with children to report that they worked part-time because they could not find full-time employment. In terms of feminization of precarious employment, Vosko, Zukewich and Cranford (2003) further identify "the erosion of the standard employment relationship as a norm and the spread of non-standard forms of employment that exhibit qualities of precarious employment associated with women and other marginalized groups" (p.48). Additionally Morissette, Picot and Lu (2013), state that over the past two decades women's earnings have become more unstable especially amongst low wage workers.

Manendez, Benach, Muntaner, Amable, and O'Campo (2006) identify the male power structure that is in place when looking at the issues of precarious employment. According to Manendez et al. (2006), the data supports the research claims that women are at a higher risk of unemployment and non-standard forms of employment than men. Additionally, Menendez et al. (2006) claim that "the gender division of labor, the 'breadwinner' ideology and patriarchy still channel women into unemployment and non-standard forms of employment at a higher rate than men" (p. 778). Despite the fact that the numbers of women involved in the workforce has increased in the past 30 years, this involvement has been predominately in the part-time and temporary fields compared to male counterparts (Vosko, et al. 2009). Low minimum wages frequently found within these positions also contribute to hardships faced by women.

In northeastern BC, Fort St. John is a hub for oil and gas exploration. Kaweesi, Wagner and O'Hara (2007) identify the nature of gendered employment, stating "In Fort St. John women are not benefiting equally from the strong economy that is fuelled primarily from the exploration and extraction of natural resources, in fact, they are being seriously hurt by it" (p. 21). Kaweesi, et al., identify the impact on women in Fort St. John including financial impact, identifying that women in Fort St. John are earning less than half of their male counterparts. Women apparently rely on low paying jobs in the service and helping sectors because of barriers faced in the oil and gas industry (2007, p. 21).

Implications of Precarious Employment on Women

The following literature examines the impact of precarious employment as a social issue within the social determinants of health framework. According to Mikkonen and

Raphael (2010), the primary factors that shape the health of Canadians are not medical

treatments or lifestyle choices but rather the living conditions they experience (p. 14).

The fourteen social determinants of health, as identified by Mikkonen and Raphael

(2010), are: aboriginal status, gender, disability, housing, early life income and income

distribution, education, race, employment and working conditions, social exclusion, food

insecurity, social safety net, health services, unemployment and job security (p.3). Each

of these social determinants of health has been shown to have strong effects upon the

wellbeing of Canadians. Their effects are actually much stronger than the ones associated

with behaviours such as diet, physical activity, and even tobacco and excessive alcohol

use. Health Canada (2002) identifies gender as a determinant of health and recognizes

"gendered norms influence the health system's practices and priorities" and that "many

health issues are a function of gender-based social status or roles" (p.8). Marmot and

Wilkinson (2006) summarised the World Health Organization's Commission on the Social

Determinates of Health and reported:

> Work is the origin of many important determinants of health. Work can
>
> provide financial security, social status, personal development, social
>
> relations, and self-esteem and protection from physical and psychosocial
>
> hazards. Employment conditions and the nature of work are both important
>
> to health. A flexible workforce is seen as good economic competitiveness
>
> but brings with it effects on health. Mortality seems to be significantly
>
> higher in temporary workers than in permanent workers. Poor mental health
>
> outcomes are associated with precarious employment (p. 43).

Vosko (2009) identifies that women are "disproportionately affected by precarious employment. In fact, women are faced with the 'triple burden', including their roles as mothers, as workers, and as community advocates" (p.86). Not only do women suffer the consequences of precarious work – so do their families and communities. As governments around the world decrease social spending, services such as health care, child care and care for older-aged adults become less available or affordable, increasing the burden for women. Similarly, trade policies do not commonly include a gender analysis that would expose potential negative impacts on women, families and communities. Globalization, and the various policies and structures that support it, have contributed to the feminization of poverty. Economic globalization has resulted in an increased work burden, a decrease in compensation for their labour and growing health risks associated with poor working conditions and stress, which have all had a negative impact on women globally (Vosko, 2006, p. 145).

Menendez (2007) argues that increased job insecurity worsens both physical and mental health, commenting that those "exposed to chronic job insecurity are more likely to report minor psychiatric morbidity as compared to those with secure jobs" (p. 387). Vosko (2006) notes that despite the relatively few studies we do know that mental health issues including "job-related stress and depression have further health related impacts such as increased risk of exhaustion, depression, lower job satisfaction, and, ultimately to stress-related illness, including cardiovascular disease, cancer and stroke" (p. 141) .

The concept of employment strain focuses on the uncertainty associated with precarious employment and how this affects mental and physical health (Lewchuk, Clarke, & de Wolff, 2011). Three inter-related aspects of precarious employment are considered:

1. Uncertainty, which includes duration of employment, terms of conditions of employment, work schedule and uncertainty over future employment;

2. Effort which includes both finding employment and conditions of worksites, and;

3. Supports in place which include support from unions, coworkers, friends and family (p. 138).

The importance of Lewchuck et al.'s (2011) work is that it identifies the individuals' perception of their status in precarious work and their ability to meet needs. It considers three groups: those who are able to meet their needs and find the employment relationship acceptable; those who cannot meet their needs but see the current working conditions as a necessary step to more stable employment and finally, those unable to meet their needs and who are also discouraged from finding better employment conditions. According to Lewchuck et al., (2011), self-rated health was worst amongst the third group, those who were discouraged and unable to meet their needs (p. 71).

When examining health and social status, Health Canada (n.d.), identifies that women with high incomes are more likely to engage in health-promoting practices and less likely to engage in risky health practices than those with lower incomes. Further, wealthier women are almost twice as likely as those with lower incomes to report excellent/very good health (p. 2). Consistent with the literature, highly educated women are more likely than women with less education to engage in health promoting practices, and are less likely to take part in risky practices. In addition, highly educated women are almost twice as likely as less educated women to report excellent/very good health (p. 3). Donner (2008) identifies that "health and social status are intimately related such that individuals in higher social classes are healthier and live longer than those in lower classes" (2008, p.

84). This is true regardless of whether income, education or another socioeconomic indicator is used and regardless of the health outcome used. Health improves with each increment in social class. So it is not only the most disadvantaged members of a society that experience poor health, but rather health status decreases with each step down the socioeconomic ladder, thus affecting the health of the entire population   The following examines the impact of poverty on the social determinants of health.

Lewchuk et al. (2013) also identify the impact of precarious employment on the ability to afford immediate needs such as food or housing. According to Lewchuck, et al. (2013), the participants involved in precarious employment face increased uncertainty regarding consistent employment – as well as the financial means to maintain basic necessities such as providing food and allocating funds for housing. The United Nations Development Programme (n.d) asserts "absolute deprivation leading to poor nutrition may lead to susceptibility to infection and chronic disease and crowded housing may increase disease transmission" (para. 3). In regards to Fort St. John, Eckford and Wagg (2014) report increased housing prices in Fort St. John:

> The average rent for a single family dwelling is $949 compared to national average of $785. In 2011, the average house price was $310,686, which was the second highest price in all of Northern BC, behind Fort Nelson with average housing prices at $325,290. 66.2% of Fort St. John respondents in a housing survey indicated that they spend more than 30% of their income on housing. Of those who responded in the housing survey, renters and lone parents were hardest hit – over 30% of people in these groups spend over 30% of their income on housing each month (p. 6).

Furthermore, in regards to the impact of precarious employment on wellbeing, Lewchuk et al., (2013) identify that precarious employment makes it more difficult to raise children. According to their study, low income households are the most likely to report problems buying school supplies, paying for school trips, and financing children's activities outside of school. Insecure employment significantly increases the problem of paying for these expenses within low- and middle-income households. The study also found that people in low-income households are least likely to report that they attend school-related meetings or volunteer at children's activities outside of school. Additionally, child care was more difficult for low-and middle-income households in insecure employment (p. 13). This is congruent with research by Eckford and Wagg (2014) that presents the top five needs identified by service providers regarding women who are living in poverty in Fort St. John as affordable housing, transitional housing for women fleeing domestic violence, financial support, childcare and counselling.

Kaweesi et al. (2007) identify the reliance on low paying jobs in the service and helping sectors as a contributing factor of continued marginalization and oppression of women. Specifically, they identify the risk involved for women struggling with poverty, commenting "for some women, the burden is so great that they continue to live with, or attach themselves to, partners who are violent. Others may open their homes to strangers who are looking for cheaper housing, which could further expose them and their children to violence" (p. 21).

Summary

The literature review presented research outlining the overall impact of precarious employment, the feminization of precarious employment, as well as, the impacts precarious employment has on various aspects of subjective wellbeing. There, however, appears to be a gap in literature regarding the impact of precarious employment specifically amongst women between the ages of 24-44 living in Northern British Columbia that therefore supports this research project. The potential benefit of this research is to help further educate our community and the social work profession regarding the impact of precarious employment on women living in Northern BC.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter details the methodology that was chosen for the research. It includes

pertinent information such as an overview of qualitative research method, ethical

considerations, research procedures, data analysis and evaluation of research. Data was

collected through individual semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis of the data was

undertaken.

Qualitative Research

The purpose of this study was to acquire an in-depth understanding of the experiences

and perceptions of precarious employment on the participants' subjective wellbeing. I,

therefore, undertook a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research "produces data that

is collected through text and observations in natural setting using processes that describe the

event, incident or case and is in contrast to quantitative research which involves numerically

expressed data analyzed statistically" (Patton, 2002, p. 34). Creswell (2013) argues that a

qualitative research approach allows for a better understanding of a complex issue and

enables a level of collaboration between participants. According to Marshall and Rossman

(2007), qualitative researchers are "intrigued by the complexity of social interactions

expressed in daily life and by the meanings that the participants themselves attribute to these

interactions" (p. 2). My intent was to listen to the participants' experiences and perceptions of

precarious employment and its impact on their subjective wellbeing. The findings may then

be used to begin to address any challenges encountered by women who are precariously

employed.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards, fundamental quality criteria, are used to judge the rigor and merit of any social science study (Lincoln, 1995). The importance of ethical adherence was critical throughout all stages of the research. This project began with an application to the Research Ethics Board (REB) at UNBC for review and approval (see Appendix D). During recruitment and throughout contact with participants, the voluntary nature of participation was stressed.

Confidentiality and anonymity. Participants' anonymity and confidentiality were upheld throughout the process as required by the REB as well as my professional Code of Ethics (BC College of Social Work, 2009), which states in principle 5.1, "Social workers comply with any applicable privacy and other legislation. Social workers obtain consent to the collection, use of disclosure of the client information including personal information, unless otherwise permitted or required by law" (p. 23). In efforts to address issues of anonymity, the interview took place at a confidential location, this student's professional office. This office is utilized to meet with people for various reasons; therefore, the participant was not necessarily identified as attending a research-related appointment. Additionally, confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process. Participants' names and information were stored separately and documents were kept in a secure locked filing cabinet at the researcher's home office or at the office of the Fort St. John campus of the University of Northern British Columbia. All documents kept on the computer were password protected. Furthermore, the final report does not include any identifying features, aside from geographic location, that could identify individual participants.

Consent. Participants were asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix B). This form also obtained consent for the interviews to be audio recorded. While there were no known

risks for participants in the study, the participants were informed about free counselling services if they had any negative or uncomfortable feelings that arose for them during the interview.

Location of research. The research was conducted in the northern community of Fort St. John. Fort St. John is a community located in the Peace River region in northeastern British Columbia (BC), the largest city north of Prince George, and a hub of northeastern BC for the retail, service and industrial centers. The province's oil and gas industry, including the provincial Oil and Gas Commission, is centred in the city. Forestry has also become more important to the city since the opening of a strand board plant in 2005. Additionally, agriculture has been the mainstay of the economy servicing and providing a market for the upland prairies (City of Fort St. John, 2014).

Research Procedures

Participant recruitment. Participant recruitment strategies included displaying research information posters (see Appendix C) at local agencies gathering places and were distributed through local service providers. Contact information (i.e., phone number or email) was provided on the distributed information. The criteria for participation in the study included being female, between the ages of 24-44 and self-identifying as being involved in precarious employment. While there were ten phone calls enquiring about the research and ten interviews scheduled, six interviews came to fruition. It is unknown why the other four interviews did not occur as the women were unable to be contacted.

As a part of the recruitment process, I met with interested potential participants on an individual basis to review the study information. If agreeable, written consent forms were then read and signed. The participants were also asked at this time if they wish to have a final

copy of the research project report. If the participants identified that they did, agreements for the delivery of the final copy were then agreed upon (i.e., whether the participant prefers the report to be emailed, mailed or left at an agency for pick up).

The participants were provided with a $20.00 honorarium (cash) to help with any expenses that arose as a result of participating in this project and for their time. The honorarium was initially intended to be presented at the end of the interview, however, after the first interview I felt that dispensing the honorarium at the end of the interview was a form of mandating the client to stay until the end of the interview, therefore changed the timing of dispensing honorariums from the end of the interview to after the informed consent was signed for participants B-F. It is my belief that the participants should not have to endure any expense as a result of attending the interview meeting.

Participant sample. Participant criteria included: females between 24-44 years of age, self-identified as being involved in precarious employment and living within the community of Fort St. John, BC. A combination of purposive and snowball sampling were used in this research. Purposive sampling is a form of selecting participants who have a greater likelihood of having experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2013, p. 154). Snowball sampling was utilized with the first participant asked if they would consider seeking out additional individuals who were possibly interested in participating in the research.

Data Collection

Data collection comprised of individual semi-structured interviews and field notes. Individual interviews are a common data collection strategy in qualitative research. Semi-structured interviews provide the benefit of flexibility within the interview and allow the

researcher more freedom to "pursue hunches and improvise with the questions" (Marlow, 2005, p. 167). Interviews took place at this researcher's office located in Fort St. John.

Semi-structured interviews. Each person was interviewed once and the interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 2 hours in length. The interview began with general demographic questions and then semi-structured questions (see Appendix C). The interview questions were developed with consideration given to the interview questions used in the SSHRC grant funded research project (Women North Network, n.d.).

Field notes. Field notes were written immediately after each interview to record the observations that were made during the interview. The use of field notes were instrumental in recording non-verbal communication that transpired during the interview, such as participant's body language, facial expressions, tone of voice, as well as any of my own personal reflections of the interview. Through the use of field notes, I was able to reflect on my thoughts and observations through anti-oppressive social work views regarding systemic oppression (Munhall, 2001).

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, "data analysis overlaps with data collection, meaning that the researcher engages in active listening, reflection, clarification and intuiting" (Chambers, 1998, p. 431). Verbatim transcriptions of the audio recordings began as soon as possible following an interview and were "conducted concurrently" as new data is collected (Chambers, p. 434). Transcription checks were conducted by re-listening to the tape while reading the transcription to ensure accuracy of the transcription.

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of a thematic analysis process: familiarizing yourself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for

themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and producing the report (p. 11).

This approach was recursive in nature, moving back and forth between the entire data set,

the coded extracts of the data that were being analyzed, and the analysis of the data that

was produced. Using an inductive approach, I read and re-read the data, identified patterns

and then captured themes emerging from the data that were in relation to the research

question.

Trustworthiness of the Research

It is important to maintain credibility and trustworthiness while conducting research

(Patton, 2002). For the purposes of establishing trustworthiness throughout this research, I

conducted member checks and a coding check, kept a journal for reflexivity purposes,

maintained an audit trail, and provided a thick description detailing the study context. These

are common strategies often referred to in establishing trustworthiness.

Member checks. Member checks are used to confirm the interpretations and findings

of the data to ensure trustworthy and credibility in the findings (Marlow, 2005, p. 193). The

member checks took place once the interviews were transcribed; allowing the researcher to

obtain feedback, clarify any questions or concerns that the participants may have. Six member

checks were conducted which resulted in four participants reviewing their transcripts.

Messages were left at the agreed upon place with the other two participants although there

was no response. Of the four participants that reviewed their transcripts, all the participants

agreed with the transcripts and did not take out or add any information.

Coding check. The issue of coding consistency can arise in data analysis that involves

only one researcher (Richards, 2005). To identify any coding inconsistencies, an initial

coding check was conducted.   This researcher and the faculty supervisor independently coded an initial transcript and then discussed the similarities and differences (Braun & Clarke, 2006) between the coding in order to affirm and clarify coding categories. Throughout the coding process, I occasionally became lost in the data with the vast amount of coding possibilities. To maintain coding consistency, I would frequently refer back to the research question, review the transcripts and discuss any concerns that I had with my supervisor.

Journaling. A journal was used to log ideas, thoughts and activities in relation to the research for two specific purposes: reflexivity and to provide a part of the audit trail. The journal did not add to the data but tracked the changes in thoughts and ideas as I moved through the research. In regards to facilitating reflexivity, Ortlipp (2008) identifies the importance of keeping self-reflective journals during research, commenting, "keeping self-reflective journals is a strategy that can facilitate reflexivity, whereby researchers use their journal to examine "personal assumptions and goals [and clarify] individual belief systems and subjectivities" (p. 9). As a person who has a strong critical social work perspective, it was unrealistic for me to think I could separate the research from my personal beliefs and values; therefore, journaling allowed for me to maintain transparency. This researcher also maintained contact with her supervisor throughout the data collection and analysis phases for the purposes of feedback.

Audit trail. The concept of an audit trail, which is the provision of the necessary evidence documenting the research process, demonstrates credibility or trustworthiness of the research (Koch, 2006). Additionally, Schwandt (2001) identifies that an audit trail is a "systematically maintained documentation system" (p. 9) and "can be used to attest to the use

of dependable procedures and generation of confirmable findings on the part of the inquirer"
(p. 6). The journal, containing detailed notes of my research process and procedures
constituted such an audit trail alongside other documentation related to the research (e.g., the
transcripts, field notes, and data analysis notes).

Thick description. According to Guba (1981), thick description details the context of
the study and permits others to judge the transferability of findings. In this project, thick
description is provided through detailed description of the research setting, participants, and
process that was followed.

Knowledge Dissemination

Upon completion of the research and thesis defense, plans will be made to present the
project and its findings at a public meeting in Fort St. John. These plans include collaborating
with a local organization to hold an information night and present the project and its findings.
The participants will be notified and invited to attend the information night. Copies of the
final research product will be distributed to participants who identified that they wanted a
copy via agreed upon distribution methods prior to the information night. Distribution
methods include delivery of documents through regular mail or leaving for pick up at local
community agencies. A copy of the final thesis report will also be retained at UNBC for
review by faculty, students and other interested persons.

Summary

  This methodology chapter described the qualitative methods that were utilized. It

further detailed ethical concerns which included protection of confidentiality and anonymity

In addition, this chapter discussed research procedures including the recruitment of

participants, sample size, consent protocols, and interview methods. Moreover, I outlined the

data analysis methods and discussed the evaluation criteria in order to establish

trustworthiness. The following chapter reports the research findings.

Chapter Four: Research Findings

Participants in the research engaged in a semi-structured interview to explore their

perceptions of precarious employment and impact on subjective wellbeing. This chapter

reports the findings of the research. First, the participants' demographic information is

presented; along with the participant letter and pseudonym. Secondly, the findings of the

thematic analysis along with participant comments are reported. Participant quotes include an

identifier code to track the participant and the line number to identify where the quote appears

on the transcript.

Participant Demographics

The participants were community members recruited through various methods, as

described in Chapter 3. Demographic data was collected at the time of the interview after the

informed consent was signed. See table 1 for a summary of the demographic information. The

participants' real names remain confidential; therefore, pseudonyms were used in place of

real names. All the participants are female between 34 – 44 years of age. One participant was

single, two separated, three are common-law/married. All participants identified as being

mothers, three had full-time care responsibilities for their children, two had joint custody

although limited contact and one had no custody and had infrequent contact. Four of the six

participants were Caucasian, one was of Aboriginal ancestry and one was of Filipino

ancestry. Two participants also identified chronic health issues that they managed. Of the six

participants, three (Anne, Beth and Dianne) identified living in Fort St. John on and off

throughout their lives. The other participants (Cara, Elizabeth and Farrah) had lived in Fort

St. John for the past 13, 12 and 6 years respectively.

Table 1: Demographic Data

Participant	Age	Marital Status	Employment Status	Children
A Anne	44	Common-law	Employment Insurance Disability Benefits	2
B Beth	34	Common-law	Unemployed	2
C Cara	40	Married	Part-time and Contract work	2
D Dianne	36	Separated	Employment Insurance	2
E Elizabeth	39	Separated	Self-employed	2
F Farrah	38	Single	Employment Insurance Maternity leave from Customer Service	2

Themes

After analyzing the data as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006), four themes along with eleven subthemes (see Table 2) emerged from the data:

Table 2: Thematic Structure

Themes	Subthemes
1. Job Insecurity	1.1 Economic slowdown reducing job opportunities. 1.2 Supplementing income to make ends meet 1.3 Uncertainty about the future
2. Lots of stressors	2.1 I'm worried 2.2 It's hard on relationships 2.3 Coping
3. Health and Safety	3.1 Health and nutrition 3.2 Work safety issues
4. Coping with social supports	4.1 I've got friends 4.2 Living arrangements 4.3 Accessing services

At the time of this research, the community was in the midst of an economic decline in the oil and gas industry. The oil and gas industrial decline was brought about by the drop in the oil and gas prices which began in the late 2014, a global supply glut, and an economic slowdown in Asia (Wakefield, 2016), resulting in decrease in production demand which therefore had an impact on the once strong job sector. The economic decline was a common topic and concern for the participants, therefore, is interwoven throughout most of the themes. A discussion of each theme and related subthemes follows.

Theme #1: Job Insecurity

Job insecurity was a common issue for women who were dealing with precarious employment. This theme emerged as the majority of participants identified their subjective wellbeing being as directly impacted by the job insecurity they were currently facing. Three subthemes emerged from this theme.

1.1 Economic slowdown reducing job opportunities. Participants identified the economic slowdown as having a direct impact on themselves. Some participants stated that they were gainfully employed prior to the slowdown and are now facing a drastic reduction in hours. *"I haven't worked for about a month now. Two years ago I was working all the time, was making good money, was just starting to get ahead and then the slowdown happened, think I'm working a fraction of what I was, getting ahead isn't possible right now. It's hard"*. *D38-40.*

Some participants expressed frustrations and difficulties in finding work now because of the high number of applicants for available positions. In addition, participants identified fewer job opportunities as many of the companies are reducing employees. *"I don't think I have many options. I could try to get a job in one of the local agencies but I don't think any of them are hiring, if anything they are laying people off right now"(E98-100)*. Due to the nature of the economic slowdown and people reducing costs, some participants discussed their concern regarding contract work also being limited due to the lack of demand: *"Last year it was busier than it is this year. When the economy slowed down people cut cost where they needed to and unfortunately one of the costs that they will typically cut is a service like mine"(E54-55)*.

Some participants identified experiencing an increase in competition for under the table work. Participants discussed their beliefs that there are more people participating in alternative work due to the economic slowdown, thus creating competition for vulnerable groups that have been reliant on alternative work to meet their needs. Anne identified bottle picking as a means to supplement income and identified that there was more competition *"Sometimes you just go on a bottle pick around town, all by myself if I do that in a day I can generally make about 80 bucks. Now everyone is doing it all the sudden, so now you're competing with like forty other folks besides all the people who weren't here before, the slowdown of the economy up here, more people are all competing"* (288-292).

1.2 Supplementing income to make ends meet. Some participants discussed the reliance on working for unreported income in order to make ends meet. Participants described unreported work as short term work such as house cleaning, dog walking, painting or bottle picking. "*I do odd jobs to earn more money, helping people; I paint, walk dogs, go to the beer store for people*" (A256-60). Farrah, who was on maternity benefits at the time of the interview, discussed how she considered working under the table doing housecleaning. When discussing the risks involved with working under the table and not declaring additional income, the participant acknowledged the risks although she felt she had limited options. *"House cleaning, that's what my friends told me to do. Some of them work part time, but the cleaning the government knew it…but for me as a single mom, it would be helpful under the table".* (35-38)

1.3 Uncertainty about the future. Participants described feeling worried about their futures. Elizabeth described the economic slowdown as increasing her stress and worry level regarding her future, commenting, "*I have some money saved, I have equity in the home but I*

constantly worry about whether or not I will have an income 6 months, a year down the road.

If I keep getting slower then I'll have to rely on my savings, and I was counting on these

savings for retirement. I don't have a safety net; I don't have a retirement pension" (69-72).

Anne spoke of retirement as "doom and gloom", identifying that she has had limited financial

opportunity to prepare for retirement and foresees a low quality of life during retirement

years. *"Unless I work at some job right now that will put away money each month for me to*

*live on. It's just like a doom and gloom thing to look at the future that way" (*400-401)

Some participants expressed uncertainty regarding future employment opportunities

due to the mixed messages within the community and the media regarding the economic

climate. Dianne spoke about the mixed messages and feelings of being overwhelmed with all

the information that is available, commenting: *"There's so much information out there, one*

day it's turning around, the next day it's the end of the world. It can drive you crazy if you

follow the news from day to day" (103-104).

Theme #2: Lots of Stressors

   2.1 I'm worried. Many of the participants spoke about how precarious employment

was creating more stressors in their lives. Participants discussed their stress levels as being

magnified since the economic decline due to increased feelings of not being in control.

According to Dianne, *"Well, I have lots of stressors. I stress over money, I really have no*

*control over work, especially now, it can be stressful" (*D59-61). Another participant, who

disclosed higher earnings than the other participants, indicated that the current employment

instability has magnified her stress levels, resulting in feelings of having a lack of control and

hopelessness. Farrah spoke of the economic slowdown occurring at a time when she was

taking her maternity leave. This created additional strain not knowing if she had a fulltime job

to return to once her maternity leave benefits expired. *"They said the timing for maternity leave was good. It slowed down; they had lots of people that they laid off or people who just work 16 hours a week instead of 40. I'm wishful and hoping that when I go back it's good already; if not, before the time I go back to work I will have to look for another job. I need it, with my son and being single; no one will support me here but myself"* (98-103).

Participants spoke of managing mental health issues, such as depression and personality disorders, while attempting to maintain or obtain employment. According to Dianne, *"There are days where you just don't have that reason to get out of bed. So, there's times where it's manageable, and times where it's hard. When it's hard, it makes it tough to get up for work in the morning. Unfortunately, when you are relying on your job for survival, it makes it even harder"* (157-61). Some participants spoke of how their anxiety creates barriers for maintaining employment and living life. According to Beth, *"I have anxiety. I have severe anxiety. I have learned to control it over the years, but my bad months, generally January to April I don't want to be around people. I panic all the time, can't handle people talking around me, chattering, like that; I can't even go to the movies because of the chattering"* (308-310).

2.2 It's hard on relationships. Many of the participants spoke of the strain they have experienced in their relationships with their children and family members due to precarious employment. At the time of the interviews, three participants identified reduced physical contact with their children due to the lack of financial ability and/or lack of transportation. Beth, who resides approximately 200 kilometers from her children, discussed that her current financial situation has resulted in reduced ability to travel for important celebrations in her children's lives. *"The hardest thing is not being able to see them [children]. I've missed one*

birthday each; this will be his second birthday I've missed" (B24-25). Dianne discussed the lack of financial means as a barrier in ability to see her children as often as she would want. *"I probably go out there once a month; it's hard to go out there, not working much so don't have a lot of money for gas"*(60).

Some participants expressed concern regarding the limitations placed upon them through financial restrictions and how this has prevented them from attending important family functions. Elizabeth identified increased strain on her relationship with family members due to her need to limit travelling or vacations due to the slowdown of her business. *"It's hard on relationships in the sense that I'm worried about my future, therefore find it hard to participate in holidays or trips that cost money due to the fact that I'm scared of spending that money. I don't have another income to fall back on, I'm it"* (89-94). Farrah discussed how she was not able to travel back home when on maternity benefits and was unable to travel for her father's funeral and feelings of sadness regarding not being present. *"It can be hard to be away. My father died and I wasn't able to go back home and be with the family. Times like that can be tough"* (F252-253).

2.3 Coping. While the majority of the participants identified the challenges to their relationships as a result of precarious employment, some of the participants spoke of how resulted in both positive and negative outcomes. Some participants spoke of keeping their financial instability a secret from family in efforts not to worry them. This decision to not worry family members appears to have resulted in additional strain to the participants. Elizabeth discussed that she chose not to inform her family about her financial situation, instead only confiding in a few close friends. *"It's tough. I try to keep a lot of this from family, only speak to a few friends. I don't want to worry anyone, it's tough"* (E68-69).

Farrah shared that due to her responsibility of financially supporting her family back home, she chose to keep her concerns at this time private in attempts to not worry her family members. *"I feel bad for my family because I can't send a lot of money; they need money to eat, to live. I can't tell them the situation I'm facing right now cause I don't want them to think that I'm really struggling here, it's really hard for them, especially for my mom cause she's old"* (171-74).

Participants acknowledged that precarious employment affords them increased flexibility to participate in other activities that may not be an option if they were to work fulltime. Elizabeth identified that being self-employed allowed her the ability to balance her professional and domestic duties. *"Well, it's nice to be able to set your own schedule. I enjoy being at home when my son gets off school and I enjoy having the ability to plan activities around a flexible work schedule"* (47-50). Cara spoke of the benefits of being involved in contract work as enabling her more free time for self-care. *"I think right now it helps because I have time for self-care. I have the ability to focus on myself and my health and in turn have more energy to give to my children"* (14-17).

Some of the participants who disclosed mental health issues shared how they cope and manage. Some participants discussed that they are addressing their mental health issues through attending counselling or talking with family members or friends. Anne spoke of accessing supports: *"I go to mental health, but if your absolutely off your rocker or something then you just go to the hospital; say help me and they send you down to the psych ward for a couple of days, figure out all your meds, release you with meds, tell you where to go and how to obtain them"* (192-195). While some of the participants identified seeking professional service to help manage their mental health concerns, a participant identified her reluctance to

engage with professional services and instead to rely on family and friends, commenting: *"I've thought about it. I called and set up the initial meeting but didn't go in. I think I'm okay; I've got friends to talk with" (D93-94)*. When discussing coping mechanisms, participants identified healthy outlets in order to manage their mental health issues and stress. *"I get outside, go for walks, try to take a break and enjoy myself"* (F48). Dianne identified the use of intoxicants as means to manage stressors. *"I've definitely had more time to myself because of work, and it can get pretty boring. I'm not worried about my drinking, but I'll have a few drinks here and there. When I go back to work I won't drink as much. When you're stressing over money and not seeing your kids, why wouldn't you have a drink?"* (139-140).

Theme #3: Health and Safety Issues

  3.1. Health and nutrition. Some participants spoke of physical health issues impacting their ability to participate in activities and obtain work. Beth discussed her health issues and experiencing chronic pain. *"I have chronic pain in hips, hip dysplasia. It causes pain when I walk too far or if I lift too much; I keep pushing myself to do more so I don't get limited. I've kept myself, I push, just push myself harder each day; I notice I'm not as sore as I use to be" (337-338).* Another participant spoke about suffering from migraines. *"I've got migraines, mainly because of light sensitivity. And my back issues, I think that is what's causing my migraines because of the tension in my back. Sometimes I can't do anything but sleep"* (B401-02). Anne spoke to the issues she faces due to historic injuries and feeling her current health issues may be a result of not taking the time to attend physio-therapy at the time. *"I've injured myself a lot in life, so when the weather changes I feel it, my leg, all these pins and rods in my leg flare up, scared of heights, dislocated my shoulder, doing dishes and can only*

lift this high with this arm now; probably failed to go to physio therapy as much as I should have"(492-495).

Some participants identified that although they have BC medical coverage, they lack ability to have or maintain extended health coverage. Farrah spoke of her financial inability to afford the two hundred dollar cost each month for extended coverage and was considering discontinuing with benefits. *"It's very stressful, and my health is an issue to; my health uh, my group, insurance, benefits. I have to pay two hundred because I have a dependent already; it's too much I think because I'm on maternity. Sometimes I think that I have to let it go, but then most of the people say I have to have it. But it's too much for me"* (108-117). Dianne discussed having no dental coverage at this time, her concerns regarding the need for dental work and not being able to afford the cost. *"I don't have any benefits right now; I should have gone to the dentist when I was working but I didn't. I need to have work done, but I don't have the money to pay for it. I tried to ask for help in order to go to the dentist but I was told no"* (151-153).

Many of the participants spoke about nutrition and linked the need to have a healthy diet. *"I can't live if I can't eat"* (B351). Some participants spoke about the high cost of food and their limited access to a healthy diet. Dianne identified that the lack of financial means impacts her ability to eat nutritious meals. *"It's affecting my health; I don't have the money to eat properly. I remember when I was strict with my diet, trying to eat healthy, now I'm lucky if half the food I eat is healthy. When you're counting your change you're careful with what you spend money on. You don't go and buy the good stuff, you buy some mac and cheese; it sucks"* (75-78). Farrah discussed nutrition and her feelings of not wanting to spend money buying food. As noted in chapter two, women are commonly the primary caregivers in

society and frequently place their children's needs before their own, as attested by this participant in her decision to maintain a nutritious diet for herself as it was directly related to the nutrition her baby receives through her breast milk. *"Sometimes I don't want to eat anymore, but I can't, I'm a breastfeed mom, I have to feed my son. Sometimes I just have to don't buy this or that but it's your needs; I don't buy some stuff that is not needful right now. If I'm by myself it's fine, I think, but I have my son with me. I need to feed myself so I can feed him too"* (137-140).

3.2 Work safety issues. Some participants discussed their experiences in the past with unsafe work environments and feelings of vulnerability regarding losing work if they were to speak up and identify the issue. *"If you say no then they'll fire you and get the next person"* (A473). Cara spoke of putting up with additional responsibilities and harassment in the workplace in order to maintain employment. "*I am sometimes asked to do more in my job over and above"* (C21). Additionally, Cara spoke of the possible consequences regarding voicing concerns, commenting, "*I'm afraid if I say no it will look poorly on me and my future employment"* (21-22). Dianne spoke to harassment in the workplace and feelings of having to put up with certain amounts of harassment. *"It can be scary sometimes; you're always going to be around workers that don't think of you as equal, they'll talk down to you, sometimes even harassing. You can't say much, if you do then you don't work. I know we have all these rules and regulations, but it happens"* (D30-36).

Participants also spoke to the safety issues regarding lack of reliable transportation within the community. For a couple of participants, working until late hours of the night has proven to be a safety issue due to unreliable and unattainable transportation options. Anne spoke of having to walk home, in the early morning, from work by herself and being exposed

to different safety issues, commenting: "*So I walked home from [business] in a hairnet and I got 3 sex propositions on the way home. November first, snowstorm, alone in a hairnet, cold and in the dark. And I'm grouchy, like friggin I hated everyone that wanted me to work. I hated you that was trying to solicit sex off of me in a hair net, ya just a very bad day that day so I never did go back the next day" (*60-63). Beth spoke of hitchhiking in order to get to work and how this has placed her safety at risk. *"One time I was hitchhiking, well the guy didn't feel like dropping me off at my spot. I thought that was it. I don't know what would have happened if he didn't stop at the gas station. He pulled in there, think he was getting some beer or something and I just ran from the car. I ran the opposite direction and didn't look back, that was the scariest time"* (389-392).

Theme #4: Coping with Social Supports

4.1 I've got friends. Participants identified reliance on friends and family in order to cope with precarious employment. For some of the participants, reliance on family members for assistance with food is vital for their survival. According to Beth, "*I have family in town too that will help me out if needed. My grandma has a cattle ranch, beef, so she'll go slaughter, so when she goes to slaughter I'll get some beef from her, as long as I have a deep freeze to keep it in"*. 368-71. A participant spoke of the support that she received from her friend and how this was the step that she needed in order to move from the streets to temporary housing and eventually into permanent housing. *"My friend, my good friend, she got sick of seeing me so friggin homeless and so busy she gave me a fifth wheel trailer to live in which I ended up buying for two grand; sold it for a grand to get into an apartment cause it was starting to get chilly then"* (A129-132).

4.2 Living arrangements. Some participants spoke of housing as being impacted by precarious employment. Of the six participants, two identified as being home owners, three identified as being renters and one identified as couch surfing at the time of the interview Relying on a roommate in order to afford rent was common amongst some of the participants. *"It's hard to survive in this town; if you don't have the sugar daddy or a rich boyfriend you're scrambling to get by. It definitely is not very friendly to people who aren't making the big paychecks. I would like to live on my own but I can't afford it, I have to have a roommate. I'm just thankful that I have a good roommate, someone that I can trust"* (D128-131*).* A participant spoke of managing with her mental health issue and a roommate, which speaks to the increased vulnerability that women with mental health issues may be presented with. *"I'm bi-polar myself, I can only put up with him for so long. He's living with me now but it's been on and off" (*A165-166). The rental costs that the participants were paying ranged from $900.00 – $1300.00 a month. For some of the participants, without having a roommate, their income would barely cover the cost of rent. Farrah described the financial impact of renting prior to obtaining a roommate: *"I pay rent and live with a friend. Before I paid 800 in a duplex, and when I'm paying 800 a month and I'm receiving 934 every two weeks, just half of my cheque is going to rent. How about my weekly payment for the car, the insurance, then I need to eat, I need to pay my bills for the phone, for my insurances, I don't know, it's so hard situation"* (159-162).

Some of the participants spoke of their experiences being homeless and the reliance on social supports, both formal and informal, for assistance. For some of the participants, their involvement in homelessness was fuelled by their substance use at the time. A participant spoke of living underneath an abandoned building, while another participant spoke of living

in the park. *"I slept outside all summer up until October last year; I stayed with my friends for a couple of months. Looking back at it was horrible, but at the time I didn't care, 'cause I was too fucked up to care about it, pardon my language. I didn't care at that point, my kids were taken care of and that's all I cared about at that time, and, the only thing I cared about was getting high at the time, getting drunk; I was at that point"* (B55-62). Another participant identified the strain regarding couch surfing and reliance on others, commenting: *"that is the worst thing in the world, not knowing if you're going to get kicked out in a day or if you're going to do something to make them mad, whether they don't want you to do certain things in their house that you were able to do before* (B237-239).

4.3 Accessing services. Despite the need for assistance, participants held differing views regarding accessing services within the community. Some of the participants identified the ability to reach out to services, while some expressed reluctance. In regards to food security, Beth identified accessing the local food bank when needed, commenting, *"If I'm stuck for food I'll go to the food bank, they're pretty good"* (B56). While others identified knowing of the service although were reluctant to access it. According to Dianne, *"I don't want to go there. I'm not that bad, I may have to eat some Kraft Dinner but I'm not ready to go and stand in line begging for some food"* (89-90). Some participants expressed concern regarding the locations of some of the services in town and how these locations impacted their access. Anne spoke of the new location of the Social Services office as well as Service Canada, commenting, *"They just moved up the unemployment and the social service, like welfare office, to the courthouse now and Service Canada to the College… now you either wait in line at the court house and have everyone see you or you have to travel across town, sometimes ending up walking, in order to access Service Canada; it's not easy"* (321-25).

Summary

This chapter detailed the findings of the research. It outlined the demographics of the participants and through discussion of the subthemes, highlighted the themes that emerged from the data: (1) job insecurity, (2) lots of stressors, (3) health and safety, and (4) coping with social supports. The next chapter will present discussion and conclusions regarding the findings of the research.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to explore experiences and perceptions held by women living in northern BC about precarious employment and its impact on subjective wellbeing. Women, between the ages of 24 – 44 years of age who self- identified as being involved in precarious employment were eligible to be interviewed for the research.

The research findings that emerged from the data support the existing literature, revealed new information regarding bust cycles and also point toward areas of future research. The study also has implications for social work practice. This chapter discusses the findings in relation to the literature, identifies limitations of the research, considers the implications for social work practice, and makes recommendations for future research.

Findings in relation to the Literature

In my initial review of the literature, it was evident that there was already a large body of knowledge regarding precarious employment and the feminization of precarious employment. Despite this large body of existing literature, there appeared to be a gap in exploring perceptions in a time of economic downturn. Most of the women who participated in this current study had experiences and perceptions that apparently reinforce findings in the current literature. The following are key areas where the literature was consistent, and inconsistent, with the participants' stories.

Job Insecurity

During the time of the interviews, Fort St. John was impacted by an economic slowdown in the gas and oil industries. As stated in the literature, Fort St. John is a northern community that is reliant and subject to boom or bust cycles (Schmidt, 2000). Fort St. John

has seen a strong labour market in recent years and had one of the highest levels of disposable

incomes in the country (BC Statistics Canada, 2013). However, at the time of the study in

2016 the labour market in Fort St. John was facing an economic decline (Wakefield, 2016).

The slowdown appeared to have an impact on all the participants, either personally or through

family and friends. Job insecurity, as a result of the economic slowdown, was common topic

that emerged from the data and was referred to throughout the different themes. A common

concern for some participants was the reduction in job opportunities due to the economic

slowdown, the need to supplement incomes to make ends meet, and uncertainty about the

future as all having impact on their subjective wellbeing.

A Statistics Canada study explored Canadian views regarding having control over

their lives and their future. The study found that 89 percent of the population reported a "high

sense" of ability to make changes to their future (Milan, 2006, p. 11). Younger adults,

between the ages of 25 to 34, were identified as having the largest sense of ability to take

control of their lives. Yet this sense of control significantly declined in subsequent years, as a

result of energy loss, health concerns, and social changes such as obtaining education,

fluctuations in the labour market, and a person's career progression (Milan, 2006). For many

of the participants, feelings of lack of control in their personal lives were connected to lack of

control relating to their economic status. In regards to socio-economic status, the higher the

status has findings of stronger sense of control. Not surprisingly, unemployed workers self-

report a lower quality of health and a less positive overall outlook on life (Milan, 2006).

When looking at precarious employment and social stratification of women, women tend to

be at a higher disadvantage at times of economic slowdown as compared to their male

counterparts due to their historic employment instability and or financial instability (Vosko, 2009).

Lots of Stressors

Most of the participants identified stress and strain as resulting from their involvement in precarious employment or being intensified by the precarious employment. Menendez (2007) identifies that increased job insecurity worsens both physical and mental health, commenting that "[people] exposed to chronic job insecurity are more likely to report minor psychiatric morbidity as compared to those with secure jobs" (p. 387). For some of the women, the "triple burden" (Vosko, 2009) of being a worker and a mother appeared to create greater strain. Vosko (2006) notes that despite the relatively few studies we do know that mental health issues including "job-related stress and depression have further health related impacts such as increased risk of exhaustion, depression, lower job satisfaction, and, ultimately to stress-related illness, including cardiovascular disease, cancer and stroke" (p.141).

Additionally, in regards to relationships, participants identified strains that were representative of not having consistent contact with children, distancing themselves from family and friends, and not engaging in family activities. Vosko (2009) identifies that women are "disproportionately affected by precarious employment due to their roles as mothers, as workers, and as community advocates" (p. 86). For some of the participants, the impact of precarious employment had a direct impact on their relationships with their children. Reid and LeDrew (2013) identify the concern regarding the additional strain on women when balancing their roles of being a caregiver as well as a worker, commenting, "women's limited opportunities for jobs intersected with their domestic responsibilities to often prevent them

from taking employment" (p. 10). Two of the participants who reported being self-employed and involved in contract work identified responsibility for the majority of domestic duties and how the precarious nature of their work afforded more time to spend with the children.

Health and Safety

Participants' perceptions regarding limited access to health care services; limited ability to meet health needs, including physical health and nutrition; and increased risk to physical safety were all topics identified as having impact on subjective wellbeing. While all the participants identified methods of self-care, it was clear that higher economic status enabled increased opportunities for accessing health care services and maintaining a greater level of self-care.

Lewchuck et al. (2011, p. 71) identified three categories that represented managing health needs and views regarding the current economic situation. Those who are able to meet their needs and find the employment relationship acceptable; those who cannot meet their needs but see the current working conditions as a necessary step to more stable employment; and finally, those unable to meet their needs and who are also discouraged from finding better employment conditions. Within this research, there was an apparent divide between the participants who viewed their current employment relationship as being acceptable and those who were discouraged and unable to meet their needs.

All the participants recognized the need for proper nutrition and regular access to health services, including both physical and mental health. While the recognition was there, many of the participants also spoke to barriers that prevented proper health care and safety. Cronk (2015) identified barriers that prevent Canadians from obtaining health care; specifically,

limited financial resources, lack of comprehensive health care coverage, and lack of affordable transportation were identified as common barriers experienced by low-income Canadians. A common concern for the participants was their access to health services. When discussing access to health services, it is important to note that Fort St. John has various health related agencies within the community; the question is whether or not you have the resources to access the services that are not covered through basic medical coverage. For some of the participants, going without health services appeared linked with their economic status. Many of the participants acknowledged the need to maintain healthy eating habits, although found it difficult at the time due to lack of resources. For some of the participants, reliance on family members and social supports for healthy food was an option; for others, reliance on processed, packaged foods with little nutritional value was identified as the only options at the time.

Participants spoke of concerns regarding physical safety such as being placed in unsafe work environments. A lack of reliable transportation to travel to and from work was also problematic for some of the participants (e.g., no public or affordable transport to return home late at night). Mullaly (2007) identifies that "All oppressed groups suffer systemic violence simply because they are members of a subordinate group. Subordinate groups not only experience direct violence, but also live in constant fear that violence may occur" (p. 268). Some of the participants identified having to overlook physical health risk and sexual harassment that were common in their experience in order to maintain their jobs. When looking at transportation, it is necessary to understand the challenge that transportation poses for the women, particularly in the context of the geographical conditions that the women face living in the community of Fort St. John. Some of the participants identified having prior

employment in some of the outlining areas surrounding Fort St. John. The transit services in

Fort St. John operate from 6:30 am until 7:30 pm within the city center with bus routes that

service some of the more commonly travelled routes (BC Transit, 2016). Many of the women

identified relying on taxi, friends, or hitch hiking when working into the early hours of the

morning or if working outside of city limits. One participant spoke of walking home from

work in the early morning hours and having to deal with the cold weather as well as

solicitations for sex. Another participant spoke of hitchhiking in order to get to work which

resulted in a scary incident where her safety was in jeopardy. Hitchhiking has been a topic

discussed within northern British Columbia due to the safety risks involved and the missing

and murdered women along the Highway of Tears. In 2006, through collaboration between

government and communities, the Highway of Tears Symposium report (2006) emerged and

identified concerns regarding the practice of hitchhiking for young women. Poverty was the

"first and most significant contributing factor", and in addition, it stated that residents viewed

vehicles as "luxury items" and were putting themselves at risk by hitchhiking because they

simply had no other transportation options (p. 18). As a result of the Highway of Tears

Symposium Report (2006), the provincial government agreed and supported the report's

findings originally. Finally, in December 2015, the provincial government identified action as

a result of the symposium report and introduced the implementation of a $3-million

government action plan that includes funds to boost transit in the region. The action plan

consists of a "five-point plan which includes $1.6-million for transit expansion, $750,000 for

community transportation grant programs, $150,000 for a First Nations driver education

program, $500,000 for highway safety measures including shelters and webcams and

"collaboration to increase interconnectivity of services" (Stueck, 2015). While there has been

discussion and promises regarding implementation of the symposium recommendations, at the time of this study there has been no apparent further action taken by the provincial government.

Coping with Social Supports

Strong social supports and valuable ties to the community were identified as factors linked with the participants' better wellbeing. Many of the participants were actively involved in the social supports and agencies within the community and reported having positive relationships with the workers. For participants who were struggling with food insecurity, reliance on family, friends and social supports were how they managed. Beth described reliance on a relative for beef at certain times of the year; participants identified their ability to access the Women's Resource Center as well as the Salvation Army at times to obtain additional resources. It is noted that not all the participants held the same view regarding accessing social supports.

Accessing social supports. Some participants identified the ability to access social supports within the community as being a painless process, identifying feelings of validation and inclusion throughout the process. At the same time, some participants identified barriers in accessing services such as Income Assistance and Services Canada. Through downsizing and cost cutting measures, many of the social agencies within the community have moved to different locations in the city. The recent move of the Income Assistance office to the downstairs of the courthouse was viewed by some of the participants as infringing on confidentiality issues. The location of the Services Canada office within the Northern Lights College was perceived by some participants as being difficult to access due to geographical location.

High cost of living. Another interesting finding was the views of the participants in regards to living in a community that is faced with high living costs. For some of the participants, reliance on minimum wage in the past resulted in managing to meet the basic costs of living, but at times of decreased employment, the ability to manage these costs comes into question. According to Kaweesi, Wagner and O'Hara (2007), "In Fort St. John women are not benefiting equally from the strong economy that is fuelled primarily from the exploration and extraction of natural resources, in fact, they are being seriously hurt by it" (p. 21). Kaweesi, et al., identify the impact on women in Fort St. John including a financial impact of earning less than half of their male counterparts. Women apparently rely on low paying jobs in the service and helping sectors because of barriers faced in the oil and gas industry (2007, p. 21).

Affordable housing was a common concern for the some of the participants. Kaweesi, et al. (2007) identified the risk involved for women struggling with poverty, commenting "for some women, the burden is so great that they continue to live with, or attach themselves to, partners who are violent. Others may open their homes to strangers who are looking for cheaper housing, which could further expose them and their children to violence"(p.21). Many of the participants, who self-identified as being independent, were actually reliant on others to help cover the cost of their rent. Of the six participants, two identified as being home owners, three identified as being renters and one identified as couch surfing at the time of the interview. Due to the high housing cost in the community, the three renters spoke of needing roommates to share the cost of rent. For the one participant managing mental health issues, the need for a roommate placed her in a vulnerable position and potentially jeopardized her

mental health because of having to accommodate a roommate. In a report by Poole, Urquhart, and Talbot (2010)

> Often homeless girls and women are not visible in ways similar to homeless boys and men, as they are 'under-housed' versus living on the street. As such, their housing needs are often overlooked in harm reduction strategies. This is problematic, as unstable housing conditions are associated with poorer physical health, mental disabilities, fewer social supports, minimal education, traumatic histories, and little employment history, as well as vulnerability to HIV contraction, alcohol and drug use, and victimization. Homeless women are at high-risk for sexual assault. Gender-informed harm reduction strategies acknowledge that adequate housing for women and children is essential to mitigating harms and improving health (p. 5).

Limitations

This study had some limitations including the demographics of participants, homogenous sample, size of the sample, and transferability of findings.

Age. The age demographic for this study was 24-44 years of age. The

participants in this study were between 34-44 years of age and all identified as being

mothers. It is unknown why the study did not receive attention from the 24-34 age

bracket, which poses questions regarding the nature of precarious employment within

older age groups and if this limitation may have influenced the findings.

Motherhood. All participants in the study reported being mothers. Of the six

participants, three had full time care responsibilities for their children, two had joint custody

although limited contact and one had no custody and infrequent contact. It is unknown how

the study may have been impacted by the sample consisting of only mothers and if having

participants without children would have added alternative information to the study.

Homogenous sample. Four of the participants in this study identified as being

Caucasian, one identified as First Nations and one identified as being of Philippine decent.

Northern British Columbia has a higher than average First Nations population and an

increasing immigrant population (BC Stats, 2012). I feel having a larger number of First

Nations and immigrant participants involved in the study would have increased the breadth

and depth of the findings.

Size of the sample. While small sample sizes are a characteristic of qualitative

research, it does present some limitation. There are other women of similar age involved in

precarious employment who did not participate. The six participants who were interviewed

for this research permitted a more in-depth understanding of their particular experiences.

Transferability of research findings. The geographic location, community size, and

population of the research site may influence the transferability of research findings from one

location to another. This study was conducted in Fort St. John, a small community 1,200 km

northeast from Vancouver with a population of approximately 28,000. The community's economy is highly dependent on the resource sector (i.e., oil, gas, forestry, and mining) and, therefore, subject to boom-bust economic cycles. The population of the community is also not as diverse as larger urban communities in the province. The strength of conducting this research in a rural northern community is that it brings research to a rural area and allows communities members to fully participate in the process. Future research may investigate whether similar or different findings emerge from other small communities within northern British Columbia.

Implications for Social Work Practice

I have had opportunities to work with women involved in poverty in a community setting for the past ten years. During this time I have had the honour of learning from this diverse and resilient group about what is important in life as well as the barriers the women face. As a result, with my experience as a social worker and the knowledge obtained through the research, there is potential to have a deeper understanding regarding oppression within the community in forms of raising awareness regarding the health and social impacts of precarious employment, both on the micro and macro levels, identifying the need for increased access to affordable housing for women.

With respect to raising awareness regarding the health and social impacts of precarious employment, future education is needed for community members as well as the service providers. Through increased education and awareness regarding the health and social impacts of precarious employment, we can increase knowledge and understanding regarding the prevalence as well as the systemic oppression that reinforces the social issue. According to Bishop (2002), one of the first steps in addressing oppression is to understand oppression

as "power over and power with" (p. 44). Through understanding and awareness regarding the cycle of oppression that precarious employment contributes to, it is my hope that service providers can assess program policies and ensure that the policies in place create an atmosphere of hope and change for the women and not further the cycle of abuse.

Another potential impact on policy and practice is bringing an increased awareness and call for advocacy regarding safe, affordable housing and safe, reliable transportation. These are two issues that arose from this study that impact women.   Social workers who work with marginalized populations should ensure understanding regarding the intimate and complex connection between individual suffering and the social context from which it arises. Social workers know that lasting change occurs as a result of enlightened legislation that addresses key social issues; reasoned and principled social and agency policies and initiatives; and adequate funding by the government, therefore, long-term solutions must be addressed in the political and policy arenas. Housing and transportation challenges in Northern BC require such attention and related action.

Principle 2.14 of the British Columbia College of Social Workers (BCCSW) Code of Ethics states, "Social workers promote social justice and advocate for social change on behalf of their clients. Social workers are knowledgeable and sensitive to cultural and ethnic diversity and to forms of social injustice such as poverty, discrimination and imbalances of power that exist in the culture and that affect clients. Social workers strive to enhance the capacity of clients to address their own needs and problems in living. Social workers assist clients to access necessary information, services and resources wherever possible. Social workers promote and facilitate client participation in decision making" (2009, p. 13). As social workers, we need to engage in social and political action that seeks to ensure that all

people have equal access to the resources, employment, services, and opportunities they require to meet their basic human needs and to increase awareness regarding the impact of the political arena on practice and advocate for changes in policy and legislation to improve social conditions in order to meet basic human needs and promote social justice.

Future Research

As a result of conducting this research, future research might also explore increased awareness regarding living wage and transportation and safety issues within northern BC.

According to First Call, BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition (n.d.), "one out of every three poor children in BC live in families with at least one adult working full-time, full-year. In other words, child poverty in BC is very much a low-wage story. For most of the past decade, BC's child-poverty rate, currently at 23.7%, has remained consistently higher than the Canadian average" (para. 2). Living wage is different from minimum wage, it reflects the true costs of living in a community and what parents require in order to support their families (Living Wage for Families, n.d.). Increased awareness as well as identifying an accurate living wage within the community of Fort St. John is needed in order to help ease the burden for families that are not benefitting equally from the oil and gas industry.

The Highway of Tears Symposium Recommendation Report has focused attention towards the Yellowhead Highway 16 between Prince Rupert and Prince George; there are high rates of missing and murdered Indigenous women within the northern communities. Fort St. John Sisters in Spirit (n.d.) is an organization that is raising awareness regarding the violence and disappearance of Indigenous women within northern communities. Any further

research in regards to this issue should be a collaborative community research based project with local organization involvement.

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the research findings in relation to the literature, the limitations of the research, implications for social work practice, and future research recommendations.

Utilizing a qualitative research approach with semi-structured interviews allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences and perceptions of precarious employment on their subjective wellbeing. The semi-structured interview was an organic experience, allowing for preparation of the interview process but also allowing the participants the freedom to express their stories in their own terms. The majority of participants expressed a lack of awareness regarding precarious employment prior to the interview and identified an increase in awareness as a result of the study. Some of the participants identified that their increased awareness was empowering as they realized that their situation was not solely based on their decisions, rather reinforced through societal structures.

I found the research to be rewarding and felt a deep, meaningful connection with the participants throughout the research process, from the interview to the coding. The valuable information and insight contributed by the participants creates a greater level of knowledge regarding the impact of precarious employment on subjective wellbeing and will benefit the body of knowledge. It was an honour to be allowed the opportunity to tell the stories of the women involved in the study.

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Appendix A

Ethics Application Approval

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD

MEMORANDUM

To:	Theresa Campbell
CC:	Nancy Jokinen
From:	Henry Harder, Chair
	Research Ethics Board
Date:	April 8, 2016
Re:	E2016.0311.024.00
	Exploring the Experiences and Perceptions of Precarious Employment on
	Subjective Wellbeing amongst Women 24-44 living in Northern B.C.

Thank you for submitting revisions to the Research Ethics Board (REB) regarding the above-noted proposal. Your revisions have been approved.

We are pleased to issue approval for the above named study for a period of 12 months from the date of this letter. Continuation beyond that date will require further review and renewal of REB approval. Any changes or amendments to the protocol or consent form must be approved by the REB.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Dr. Henry Harder
Chair, Research Ethics Board

Appendix B

Interview Information Sheet

Student Researcher's Name:	**Theresa Campbell, BSW, RSW, MSW Candidate**
Address:	**c/o University of Northern BC**
	9820 – 120th Ave
	Fort St. John, BC. V1J 6K1
Phone:	**(250) 794 8853 E-mail: campb01@unbc.ca**

Supervisor's Name:	**Nancy Jokinen, MSW, PhD**
	Associate Professor
	UNBC School of Social Work
Phone:	**(250) 960 5111 Email: Nancy.Jokinen@unbc.ca**

Title of Thesis: Exploring perceptions and impact of precarious employment on subjective wellbeing amongst women between the ages of 24-44 living in Northern BC.

Purpose of Research: The purpose of this research is to hear the voices of women, between the ages of 24-44, living in northern BC and the impact of precarious employment on their subjective wellbeing.

Participants will be:

      *female (between the ages of 24-44 years of age)
      *experiencing precarious, limited, underpaid employment or unemployment
      *living in Fort St. John

Role of Participants: Your role as a research participant is to complete one interview to explore the impact of precarious/limited/underpaid or unemployment work situations on subjective wellbeing. It is expected that interviews will take approximately one hour and thirty minutes to complete. The interview will take place at #205-9807 101 Ave, Fort St. John, BC. With consent of participant, the interview will be audio-taped.

Compensation: You will be compensated for your time, expertise, and input by receiving $20.00 cash.

**Your participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw your participation at any time. You will still be compensated. **

Potential risks and benefits: Apart from the commitment of time, there are no known inconveniences or risks associated with participation in this research. If during the research process participation brings up issues which the participants feel require debriefing they may access counseling support through Northern Health Mental Health and Addictions Services in Fort St. John (250-262-5269). The potential benefits of participation in this research include an opportunity to provide your thoughts regarding the impact of precarious employment on subjective wellbeing. Access to any reports that are the result of the research project will be made available to all participants who indicate they wish to receive this.

Who will have access to responses? Only Theresa Campbell (student researcher) and Nancy Jokinen (UNBC academic supervisor) will have access to the information gathered in the interviews.

Storage of Information: Information provided by you will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the office of the student researcher. The student researcher will be the only person who will have access to the locked cabinet. Any electronic documents will be password protected. Notes, transcripts and audio-tapes will be kept in a location separate from the consent forms. Transcripts of the interviews, audiotapes and written documentation will be kept for no longer than 5 years at which time they will be destroyed. Paper documents, including consent forms, will be shredded and electronic files will be deleted.

Anonymity and Confidentiality: No names or identifying information will be used in transcripts, analysis, interviews or written results. All identifiers will be stripped from the data and no one will be able to link participant names with what is said. Pseudonyms will be used to differentiate individuals' words. Identifying information on consent forms will be kept confidential and stored in a locked cabinet at UNBC. The researcher will make every effort to ensure that participant identity is not revealed directly or indirectly. Information provided by participants may be reflected in the final report, publications or presentations, however, names and identifying information will not be used.

Sharing of research Results: Upon completion of this project, results will be distributed through multiple mechanisms including: community-based publications and presentations as well as through peer-reviewed conference presentations and possible journal articles. Results will be made available to all study participants who indicate they wish to receive them.

For More Information: If you have any questions regarding this research study, please do not hesitate to contact Theresa Campbell at 250 794 8853 (researcher) or Nancy Jokinen at 250 960 5111 (supervisor), or the Vice President of Research, UNBC at 250 960 5820.

Please direct any complaints about this project to UNBC's Office of Research at 250 960 5820 or by email: reb@unbc.ca

What if I have any concerns or complaints?

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant in a research study or complaints about the conduct of the researcher, contact the UNBC Office of Research (250-960-6735 or reb@unbc.ca).

THIS RESEARCH IS PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OFREQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OFMASTER OF SOCIAL WORK FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA FOR THERESA CAMPBELL, STUDENT RESEARCHER

Appendix C

Consent Form

Participant #_____

Name:_____

Phone: (250) _____-_____

Email:_____

I _____understand that Theresa Campbell is a graduate student completing her Master of Social Work at the University of Northern British Columbia. She will be conducting a qualitative research project focusing on the impact of precarious employment amongst women living in Fort St. John, BC, between the ages of 24-44 as a partial fulfillment for her Master of Social Work degree. Her supervisor is Dr. Nancy Jokinen, Associate Professor at the UNBC School of Social Work and can be reached at 250 960 5111

The purpose of an informed consent is to ensure that you understand the purpose of the study and how you will be involved.

Do you understand that you have been asked to be in a research study and that you are asked to participate in a one-on-one interview?   Yes___ No___

Have you read and received a copy of the information sheet?

Yes ___   No ___

Do you understand that the interview discussion will be audio recorded?

Yes ___   No ___

Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in participating in this study?

Yes ___   No ___

Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?

Yes ___   No ___

Do you understand that your participation in this research is completely voluntary, and that you should only respond to questions you choose? You may refuse to participate or withdraw

from the study at any time. You do not have to give a reason and it will not affect any care or service you are receiving or plan to receive. Yes ___ No ___

Has the issue of confidentiality been explained to you? Yes ___ No ___

Do you understand who will have access to the information provided? Yes ___ No ___

Would you like a copy of the final report of this research? Yes ___ No ___

        Email: _____

        Reg. Mail at this address: _____

        To be picked up at this agency:_____

I agree to take part in this study:

_____   _____

Signature of Research Participant   Date

_____   _____

Theresa Campbell - Student Researcher   Date

Would you like a copy of this consent form?   Yes_____ No_____

Contact Information:

Student Researcher's Name: Theresa Campbell, BSW, RSW, MSW©

Phone: (250) 794 8853

E-mail: campb01@unbc.ca

Supervisor's Name: Nancy Jokinen, MSW, PhD

Phone: (250) 960 5111

Email: Nancy.Jokinen@unbc.ca

Appendix D

Interview Questions

1.   Demographic Information questions

a.   What is your age?

b.   What is your marital status? (married, separated, divorced, widowed)?

c.   Do you have dependent children? If yes, how many and what are the ages. Do you

want   to know how many and ages?

d.   Who takes primary caretaking roles within your household?

e.   Where do you live? What are your living arrangements (eg: rent, homeownership,

other)What do you mean by this?

g.   How long have you lived in Northern BC?

2.   How would you define your current employment situation?

Probe: how would you describe your previous work history?

3.   How satisfied are you with your current employment situation?

Probes: What are the benefits of your current job? What are the disadvantages of your

current job?

4.   How do you think your employment affects your wellbeing? on other aspects of your

life?

5.   What are the prospects for future employment?

Probe: What are your thoughts about looking for a different job?

6.   Do you have any other comments you would like me to know that are related to your

experience with precarious employment in northern BC?

Appendix E

Participant Recruitment Poster

Exploring Precarious Employment

Theresa Campbell, Master of Social Work Student from UNBC, invites you to participate in research exploring the Experiences and Perceptions of Precarious Employment on Subjective Wellbeing amongst Women 24-44 living in Northern BC.

Your role: Approximately 60-90 minutes of your time to participate in a one on one interview and earn $20.

Are you female, between the age of 24-44, involved in precarious employment and interested in doing an interview with Theresa? If so, please contact

Theresa at 250-794-8853 to discuss this opportunity.

Thank you for your interest and support!