



# Precarious Employment: A Neglected Issue Among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Workers

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## Abstract

**Introduction** Precarious employment disproportionately affects systemically marginalized populations. Despite ample literature identifying employment disparities among some marginalized groups, LGBTQ+ populations are often overlooked by research in this area.

**Methods** A scoping review of peer-reviewed literature was conducted to identify the prevalence of precarious employment characteristics (e.g., part-time work), how LGBTQ+ people arrive at precarious employment, and what precarious employment among this population looks like. In February 2022, the study team searched ten bibliographic databases for studies in OECD countries published from 2000.

**Results** The search yielded 2738 unique articles, of which 30 met inclusion criteria. The ability to fully characterize the prevalence or nature of precarious employment among LGBTQ+ people was limited. However, it was clear that precariously employed LGBTQ+ workers have limited power to address the hostility and discrimination they experience when pursuing employment and in the workplace.

**Conclusions** Increased workplace protections for LGBTQ+ people are needed in addition to addressing their devaluation within and exclusion from stable employment through effective social policy.

**Policy Implications** Existing social policies are insufficient to address the unique conditions that structure LGBTQ+ people's experiences in the labor market. This analysis brings together disparate literature that might better inform and strengthen social policies targeted toward equity and inclusion of LGBTQ+ populations.

**Keywords** LGBTQ · Sexual and gender minorities · Low-wage employment · Precarious employment · Scoping review · Labor market discrimination

## Introduction

Contemporary labor markets have undergone significant restructuring as a consequence of technological advances, globalization, and a redistribution of power away from labor and toward capital. Governments have responded to the growing political power of capital by meeting their demands for greater flexibility in the labor market. Subsequent reforms aimed at deregulating the labor market and loosening restrictions on hiring and firing have in turn contributed to the gradual erosion of the standard employment relationship—full-time, permanent employment (Benach et al., 2016; Bosch, 2004; Kalleberg, 2012; Quinlan, 2012). Precarious employment, defined by powerlessness and insecurity in the labor market, is now impacting millions of workers worldwide (International Labour Organization,

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2016). Precarious employment is often characterized by a multidimensional construct including a combination of inadequate income (e.g., lower wages), contractual insecurity, and limited rights and protections for workers (Kreshpaj et al., 2020). This includes short-term contract, flexible, intermittent, and inadequately compensated work, as well as casual employment without benefits (e.g., health insurance and sick pay; MacEachen et al., 2021). Examples include gig workers and temporary agency workers. Though many high-paying jobs in the contemporary labor market may be flexible and involve intermittent contracts (e.g., some physicians and business consultants), this article focusses on precarious work based on the above definition.

### **Precarious Employment and Public Health**

Precarious employment leads to social and economic deprivation and has been declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a threat to public health (Benach & Muntaner, 2007; International Labour Organization, 2016; Julià et al., 2017). Those with less control over their employment encounter several negative outcomes, including overall poorer quality of life, lower levels of social cohesion and community engagement, and increased isolation and stress (Lewchuk, 2018). Further, adverse health outcomes associated with precarious employment span physical and mental health and include mental illness, psychological stress, occupational injury, and increased rates of chronic disease (Benach & Muntaner, 2007; Benach et al., 2014; Blustein et al., 2023; Kalleberg & Vallas, 2018; Lewchuk et al., 2008; Muntaner et al., 2010; Sverke et al., 2002; Vosko, 2006). Despite stated commitments by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to create better jobs through social and economic policy (OECD, 2018), precarious employment continues to proliferate across OECD countries.

### **Precarious Employment, LGBTQ+ People, and Intersections of Gender and Race**

Marxist political economy and intersectionality frameworks guide the research team's conceptions of precarious employment among systemically marginalized groups, such that labor markets and policies produce and sustain social inequities, particularly along axes of difference (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991; Harvey, 2021; McCall, 2005). Social, political, and economic factors that shape and perpetuate inequities based on differences in class, race, and gender exacerbate vulnerability to precarious employment among certain populations. Precarious employment produces precarity through three dimensions: uncertainty of job security, unpredictability of workplace experiences of harassment/discrimination, and insecurity from insufficient income

(Allan et al., 2020). This second dimension is particularly useful to understanding the experiences of those who are likely to experience increased rates of workplace harassment and discrimination, resulting in increased precarity among marginalized workers (Blustein et al., 2023). Women, people with disabilities, young people, immigrants, those in lower economic strata, and racialized people all experience disproportionate rates of precarious employment (Young, 2010; Hira-Friesen, 2018; Vancea & Utzet, 2017; Ornek et al., 2022). However, it is not enough to treat social categories of race, gender, age, and others as depoliticized risk factors for precarious employment (Misra, 2021; Vosko, 2011). Rather, there is need to explore and expose the structural forces of inequities, such as classism, racism, and misogyny, to name a few (Branch & Hanley, 2017).

Despite ample literature identifying employment disparities among some marginalized groups, certain populations affected by oppressive power relations and inequitable social policy remain less visible in the scholarship. One group requiring attention in this arena is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (trans), and queer (LGBTQ+) populations (MacKay & Ross, 2018). The majority of population-based employment and labor research do not disaggregate findings by sexual orientation or gender identity (i.e., LGBTQ+ people are rarely identifiable or considered in analysis) or, in the few cases where disaggregated data are presented, LGBTQ+ people are often treated as a monolithic group, without attention to potentially important distinctions between subgroups (e.g., gay vs. bisexual and sexual minority men vs. sexual minority women). However, there is substantial heterogeneity among these diverse populations' experiences, both as a function of diversity in sexual orientation and gender identity and also as a result of variability in race, socio-economic status, and other intersectional factors (Badgett et al., 2021; Ozeren, 2014). In particular, very little is known about trans and bisexual people's experiences of employment, relative to lesbians and gay men (Fric, 2017; Waite et al., 2019).

LGBTQ+ populations are quickly growing (Jones, 2022) and continue to face significant labor market inequities despite increasing social protections in OECD countries over the past two decades. LGBTQ+ people in the workforce continue to be discriminated against and face disadvantage in hiring practices, workplace settings, and wages (Badgett, 2020; Fielden & Jepson, 2018; Waite & Denier, 2015). For example, a recent Canadian study found that blue-collar workers with LGBTQ+ identifying content on their resumes were significantly less likely to be invited for an interview (Dilmaghani & Robinson, 2022), a trend also identified in the USA in an influential audit study conducted in 2010 (Tilcsik, 2011). One related systematic review on LGBTQ+ employment and income found unique barriers to and, sometimes, exclusion from the labor market (Waite

et al., 2019). In addition to labor market discrimination, LGBTQ+ people are more likely to experience poverty, homelessness, incarceration, poor mental health, and barriers to education, among other intersecting factors that limit access to secure employment (Hollibaugh & Weiss, 2015). Despite the documentation of such labor market discrimination and adverse experiences, the characteristics of LGBTQ+ people's employment are largely unknown.

## Research Questions

Given the dearth of literature on precarious employment among LGBTQ+ people, the research team's aim was to map what peer-reviewed empirical studies have identified about precarious employment among LGBTQ+ people in OECD countries. Three specific research questions that guided the analysis were as follows: (1) "Are LGBTQ+ people disproportionately represented among precarious workers?" (2) "How do LGBTQ+ people become precariously employed?" and (3) "What are prominent characteristics of precarious employment among LGBTQ+ people?"

## Methods

The research team conducted a scoping review following the "Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses—Extension for Scoping Reviews" (Tricco et al., 2018). A scoping review methodology was appropriate given the aim to map key concepts and gaps in the area of study, the broad research question that draws on various study designs, and the desire to learn from any peer-reviewed studies in this area (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). Detailed methods and theoretical framing for this review can be found in the registered protocol in the Open Science Framework and in Kinitz et al. (2022). In sum, the study team searched for peer-reviewed published articles that addressed precarious employment among LGBTQ+ people in OECD countries following three main steps: identify a research question, search and screen existing literature, and extract and analyze data.

## Searching the Literature

A search strategy (see Kinitz et al., 2022) was developed in consultation with the research team and a librarian based on the concepts of LGBTQ+ identities (primary concept), precarity (primary concept), and work (supplementary concept). Examples of LGBTQ+ identity search terms were as follows: sexual divers\*, gender minorit\*, and plurisexual\*. Examples of precarity were as follows: informal, insecure, and casual. Examples of work were as follows: job, employ\*, and occupation. Searches were

completed in English in February 2022 in ten bibliographic databases: EconLit, Sociological Abstracts, Scopus, PsycInfo, Social Work Abstracts, ABI/INFORM, Business Source Premier, LGBTQ+ Source, Gender Studies Database, and Web of Science.

Article inclusion criteria were as follows: reported disaggregated data and analysis among LGBTQ+ populations aged 18+, published after 1999, focused on OECD countries, and published in English. Studies related to precarious employment may not explicitly state that the study includes precarious workers or precarious employment; therefore, the study team included articles based on the multidimensional characteristics of precarious employment provided in the introduction of this article. Further, articles that refer to precarity of LGBTQ+ workers due to discrimination in seemingly secure employment were not included as identity-based discrimination was not part of our definition of precarious employment (e.g., see Pang, 2021). This review focuses only on precarious employment as defined above. Countries not belonging to the OECD were excluded due to potentially important differences in labor market and human rights contexts. Labor market conditions and human rights protections for LGBTQ+ people vary greatly globally. In an effort to parameterize this review, the study team restricted studies to OECD countries given the explicit commitments shared by being part of the OECD: improving social and economic policies and creating better jobs for their citizens (OECD, 2018). Country-specific economic, social, and political systems shape employment among LGBTQ+ workers, leading labor market conditions for LGBTQ+ people to vary greatly—even across OECD countries. However, given the limited research on the topic, we extended our search to OECD countries due to their shared aims.

Included sources were restricted to peer-reviewed, empirical studies. Title and abstract screening and full-text review were conducted by a minimum of two team members. Where conflicts occurred, a third team member was consulted and a final decision was made by the first author.

## Data Extraction and Analysis

Data was extracted from studies following full-text review using a standardized template in Covidence developed by the first and last authors based on the study characteristics, research questions, theoretical underpinnings, and inductive themes identified during the full-text review. The first author completed data extraction and led an analysis of extracted data to identify themes in collaboration with the team. This process began with a thorough review of the data that was guided by the research questions. This was followed by qualitatively coding the data using codes based

on the research questions, pertinent topics in precarious employment and LGBTQ+ literature, intersectional forms of oppression (e.g., racism), and based on inductive readings. Examples of codes include employment characteristics; discrimination; employment skills; intersections of race, age, gender, and sexual orientation; and arriving at precarity. Research questions structure the themes. Memos were written based on the codes that guided data extraction.

## Results

The search yielded 2738 unique articles. Following title and abstract screening, 116 entries were forwarded for full-text screening, of which 30 met eligibility criteria and were included. The majority (25) of included studies were published in the decade immediately preceding the search (2012–2022). Just over half (18) of the studies were based in the USA, followed by Canada (4) and Australia (2) and one each from Germany, Korea, and France. Three studies had participants from multiple countries. Two studies employed mixed methods, 17 were qualitative, and 11 were quantitative in nature. Diverse LGBTQ+ identities were represented among the included studies. Studies among trans and nonbinary people were most prevalent (11), followed by inclusion of multiple LGBTQ+ groups (7); gay and bisexual men (5); lesbian women (2); lesbian women, gay men, and bisexual people together (2); lesbian women and gay men together (2); and bisexual people (1). For further detail, refer to Table 1. While there was intersectional variability in the findings, there were common experiences in the studies across LGBTQ+ groups. Where feasible, we highlight how racism, sexism, and other structural factors uniquely shape the experiences of specific LGBTQ+ groups.

In the summary of findings below, the study team begins by describing the prevalence of precarious employment (research question 1), followed by explaining how LGBTQ+ people become precariously employed (research question 2) and descriptions of the phenomenon of precarious employment itself, including characteristics of this type of employment (research question 3).

### The Scope of Precarious Employment

Given the absence of literature addressing precarious employment directly, in this section, we review literature on distinct but related concepts, specifically underemployment, employment, and labor force participation, in order to provide context for the phenomenon of precarious employment. Noteworthy findings from the USA highlight that despite high education rates, LGBTQ+ people appear to be more likely involuntarily part-time employed, underemployed, unemployed, or not in the labor market (Allan et al., 2020;

Leppel, 2016). Further, trans and bisexual people reported the highest rates of being underemployed or unemployed, though sexual minority and gender minority populations were not explicitly compared (Leppel, 2021; Schuler et al., 2021).

### Trans Workers and Labor Market Participation

Trans workers had particularly poor employment outcomes. Despite high education rates, trans women had poorer employment outcomes and less education than trans men. For example, the 2008 and 2015 National Transgender Discrimination Survey (NTDS) conducted in the USA was analyzed in two studies by the same author who identified poorer outcomes in 2015 than 2008. Reporting 2008 followed by 2015, the author found that among trans men, 15% and 19% were not in the labor force, 10% and 12.6% were unemployed, and 75% and 68.5% were employed, whereas among trans women, 22% and 22% were not in the labor force, 11% and 12.2% were unemployed, and 67% and 66% were employed (Leppel, 2016, 2021). Two important variables identified as impacting employment among several studies were being perceived as trans due to one's physical appearance (Leppel, 2016; Sausa et al., 2007) and state political ideology (Cannonier & Galloway Burke, 2020). In one study, trans men appeared to be more impacted by being visibly trans than trans women (Leppel, 2016). Further, trans people racialized as Hispanic or Black had worse outcomes, and specifically, Hispanic trans men and Black trans women were most likely to be unemployed or not in the labor market (Cannonier & Galloway Burke, 2020; Leppel, 2016).

### Sexual Diversity and Labor Market Participation

Despite higher rates of education, one study found that LGBTQ+ people had worse employment outcomes, such as higher rates of involuntary part-time work and unemployment, than the general population, though no breakdown by sexual orientation or gender identity groups is provided (Allan et al., 2020). When considering studies that analyzed among specific groups, bisexual men and women had the poorest outcomes among any sexual orientation group. For example, one large study analyzed the 2015–2018 US National Survey on Drug Use and Health to explore disparities in socio-economic factors by sexual orientation and gender. The authors quantified unemployment in the past 12 months. Across most age groups, lesbian women and gay men had higher rates of unemployment compared to straight women and men; both bisexual men and women had similar rates that were higher than straight, lesbian, and gay counterparts (Schuler et al., 2021). Another study in France using the Employment Survey looked at labor market participation among

**Table 1** Characteristics of included studies in a scoping review of precarious employment among LGBTQ+ people in OECD countries

Author(s)	Place	Time	Source/sample	N	Phenomenon studied	Employment-related variable(s) of interest	Methods
Allan et al. (2020)	USA, national	2014 and 2015	Strada-Gallup Alumni Survey College graduates; disaggregated analysis by LGBT status, race, gender	58, 832	Moderators of involuntary part-time work and life satisfaction	Involuntary part-time work	QUANT
Brickner and Dalton (2019)	Canada (Halifax)	2014–2015	9 baristas, 6 union organizers, 2 NGO workers to support unionizing, 1 café manager Variety of sexual orientations and gender identities/expressions; included, but not exclusive to, transgender, nonbinary, queer, other non-heterosexual workers	20	Unionizing	Baristas' employment; low wage	QUAL
Cannonier and Galloway Burke (2020)	USA	2008 and 2015	2008 National Transgender Discrimination Survey (2008–2009) and 2015 US Transgender Survey Trans people, 18–64, living in the USA	6456 (NTDS) 26,563 (USTS)	Party affiliation and state political ideology on trans employment outcomes	Employed people	QUANT
Chlala (2020)	USA, LA	2014–2018	Queer women and trans Black, Latin, Native, Asian Pacific Islander people Lesbian, bisexual, trans men and women, nonbinary, and queer identified; 19 front-line workers; 26 owner-operators; 15 organizers/advocates; ½ the sample was LGBTQ	70+	Cannabis markets as “diverse economies” or engaging in labor, exchange, and org. practices that create a diverse economy	Working in cannabis industry	QUAL

Table 1 (continued)

Author(s)	Place	Time	Source/sample	N	Phenomenon studied	Employment-related variable(s) of interest	Methods
Cho (2020)	S. Korea (2nd most precarious/insecure employment market in OECD countries)—Seoul	2007–2009	Gay men with working and middle-class backgrounds (data generation included gay men, lesbian women, and bisexual and transgender people, though specific article focussed on gay men)	100 + interviews and participant observation	Using the Internet to navigate emotional intimacy, sexual morality, and financial insecurity amidst heteronormative familism and extensive neoliberal restructuring	Financial (in)security	QUAL
Corinne (2001)	Great Britain, Belgium, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, USA	Not reported	Lesbian artists	100 +	How artists support their art	Employment (broadly)	QUAL
Duguay (2019)	Australia	2013–2016	Lesbian and queer women using Instagram or Vine	10 interviews and 3-year observation	Microcelebrity labor and queer women's digital self-representation with entrepreneurial endeavors	Employment (broadly)	QUAL
Gailits et al. (2021)	Canada	2017	Latin American trans women	9 Focus groups, hand mapping	Impact of migration on health and well-being	Settlement	QUAL
Gamarel et al. (2021)	USA, SF	2017	Trans young adults, including nonbinary, trans men, and trans women, with large majority people of color	61	Intranational migration	Settlement	QUAL
Hankins (2015)	USA	Not reported	Queer drag performers	Not reported (3 central participants)	The tip exchange in drag, genderfuck, and modified burlesque	Tipping practices; drag performers' employment	QUAL
Hergenrather et al. (2013)	USA	Not reported	Unemployed African American gay men living with HIV/AIDS	7 Weekly 3 h sessions	Pilot intervention to explore employment and mental health	Employment (general)	MIXED
Laurent and Mihoubi (2017)	France	1996–2009 (stacked)	Employment survey (French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies) Same-sex people living in the same household; men only	409 individuals labelled as "gay"; 106,342 straight	Employment probability gap between gay and straight men; participation and unemployment gaps based on sexual orientation	Employability	QUANT

Table 1 (continued)

Author(s)	Place	Time	Source/sample	N	Phenomenon studied	Employment-related variable(s) of interest	Methods
Leppel (2009)	USA	2000	US 2000 Decennial Census Men and women in same-sex couples; same-sex (unmarried, as marriage was not an option), married opposite-sex, unmarried opposite-sex	20,154 individuals in female same-sex couples; 18,778 individuals in male same-sex couples; 100,000 of each other group	Labor force status by sexual orientation	Labor force status (employed, unemployed, not in the labor market)	QUANT
Leppel (2016)	USA	2008–2009	National Transgender Discrimination Survey Trans men and women	3271 total; 1948 women and 1323 men	Labor force status by trans status	Labor force status (employed, unemployed, not in the labor market)	QUANT
Leppel (2021)	USA	2015	US Transgender Survey	16,918 total; 9047 women and 7871 men	Labor force status by trans status	Labor force status (employed, unemployed, not in the labor market)	QUANT
Loist (2011)	Germany	2010	Not reported	Comparison of two (2) festivals	Precarious cultural work and the organization of queer film festivals	Precarious work	QUAL
Martino et al. (2021)	USA	2020	Internet-based survey among LGBTQ+ -identified people across the USA	990; 100 unemployed prior to COVID-19	Employment loss due to COVID-19	Employment loss	QUANT
Mills and Owens (2021)	Canada	2018–2019	Lesbian, gay, bisexual; transgender (men); transgender (women); transgender (non-binary); nonbinary; queer	50 (30 were focus of this study)	Customer abuse and aggression toward LGBTQ+ low-wage service workers	Employment experience; low-wage service work	QUAL
Mizock and Hopwood (2018)	USA	2013	Gender diverse people: transgender man, transgender woman, transgender nonbinary person	3 case studies within a larger study of 40	Economic challenges associated with transphobia	Economic challenges	QUAL
Munoz (2016)	USA, LA	2004–2007	Queer/ "not straight," Latin American women	3 primary participants within a large ethnographic study	Street vending landscapes as constitutive of dominant cultural ideologies about sexuality, gender, and immigration	Employment (broadly)	QUAL

Table 1 (continued)

Author(s)	Place	Time	Source/sample	N	Phenomenon studied	Employment-related variable(s) of interest	Methods
Munoz-Laboy and Severson, (2014)	USA, NY	2009–2011	Bisexual Latino men	148	Work environment, type of occupation, and sexual risk taking	Occupation	MIXED
Ruberg (2019)	North America, Western Europe	2017	Lesbian, gay, bisexual	Not reported; 5 participants discussed	Precarious labor of queer indie game-making	Employment (broadly)	QUAL
Rueda et al. (2012)	USA	1996–2006	HIV + MSM	1415	Labor force participation and health-related quality of life	Labor force participation	QUANT
Sausa et al. (2007)	USA, SF	1999–2000	Trans women of color involved in sex work	48	Risks and benefits of sex work	Employment (broadly)	QUAL
Schuler et al. (2021)	USA	2015–2018	National Survey on Drug Use and Health	153,939 (total); 11,133 (LGB)	Social and economic determinants of health	Economic variables	QUANT
Sullivan and Day (2019)	Australia	Not reported	Lesbian, gay, bisexual Indigenous transmasculine sex workers Transgender man Intersex nonbinary	2 (part of a larger study among Aboriginal sex workers)	Negotiation and construction of identities while navigating financial and social needs	Financial needs	QUAL
Turner et al. (2021)	USA	2016–2019	Trans National Cohort Study Trans women in the sex trade	429 (total); 90 (sex work); 338 (not in sex work)	HIV-risk and socioeconomic outcomes	Economic variables	QUANT
Uy et al. (2004)	USA, NY	Not reported	Gay and bisexual male escorts	46	Reasons for and effects of sex work	Employment (broadly)	QUAL
Vartabedian (2019)	Portugal and UK	2015	Trans women	145 profiles	Negotiation and construction of identity on trans women sex workers' websites	Advertising work	QUAL
Waite and Denier (2015)	Canada	200, 1 2006, and 2011	Census of Canada (2001 and 2006) Canadian National Household Survey (2011) Same-sex couple women and men, different sex couple women and men	4,330,595 (total); 2,227,745 (different sex couple men); 18,950 (same-sex couple men); 2,066,650 (different sex couple women); 17,250 (same-sex couple women)	Self-employment by couple status	Self-employment	QUANT



gay (defined as same-sex partnered) and straight (defined as opposite-sex couples) men and revealed significantly lower labor market participation and employment probabilities for gay men; they were more likely to work part-time or be inactive or unemployed (Laurent & Mihoubi, 2017). Gay men (same-sex partnered) were also found to take longer to find a good job, and younger gay men experienced higher exposure to unemployment risk and turnover compared to their straight counterparts (Laurent & Mihoubi, 2017).

Several important variables were discussed in the literature that impacted employment outcomes among LGBTQ+ populations. State antidiscrimination laws and living in metropolitan areas were important variables for improving labor force participation and the probability of being employed among same-gender partnered workers and LGBTQ+ college graduates (Allan et al., 2020; Leppel, 2009). Employment also differed by gender and sexual orientation based on occupation, such that for same-gender partnered women, blue-collar occupations increased probability of employment, which was contrary for other groups (same-gender partnered men and different-gender partnered men and women). Lastly, the COVID-19 pandemic was found to exacerbate poor employment outcomes for LGBTQ+ people. One US study found that among LGBTQ+ respondents who were employed prior to COVID-19, 16% were self-employed, 20% were unemployed in May/June 2020 when data collection took place, and half of those unemployed lost their job due to COVID. Another 22% of participants were laid off due to COVID, while 80% reported some type of employment. LGBTQ+ respondents who were living with HIV, younger, and Black experienced significantly higher rates of unemployment. Similar to Schuler et al. (2021), younger LGBTQ+ workers had worse outcomes with those under 30 experiencing approximately 7 times the odds of unemployment due to COVID-19 and those in their 30s had approximately 3 times the odds compared to respondents over 50 years old (Martino et al., 2021).

### How LGBTQ+ People Become Precariously Employed

Insights into how participants in the studies ended up in their precarious employment situations came mostly from qualitative studies. Social, structural, and economic barriers were the common reasons why LGBTQ+ people were in precarious employment. Many articles reported that the hostility that LGBTQ+ people experience in the mainstream labor market led participants into cultural labor, such as employment with LGBTQ+ film festivals or LGBTQ+ video game design, where they could increase LGBTQ+ representation and/or express themselves more safely. Other studies broadly

characterized the labor market as a place of hostility to be avoided.

### Social, Structural, and Economic Conditions

Across different studies, the unique life course trajectories of LGBTQ+ people were largely a result of the persistent influence of factors like heterosexism, monosexism, and cissexism in their lives, fraught with experiences of stigma and discrimination that rendered precarious employment a necessity. LGBTQ+ interview participants described entering into sectors that appeared safer, particularly where at least one other LGBTQ+ employee had been hired before (Brickner & Dalton, 2019; Chlala, 2020). In two qualitative studies, trans and gender queer people were reported to be moving to the bottom of the working class due to rampant discrimination, including being fired or not hired due to cissexism, causing them to enter low-paying, part-time work (Brickner & Dalton, 2019; Mizock & Hopwood, 2018). Laurent and Mihoubi (2017) suggest similar patterns based in quantitative population data among gay men, hypothesizing that they might leave stable employment as a strategic behavior to prevent management from determining they are gay. Though suggested in several studies, Brickner and Dalton (2019) clearly highlight that LGBTQ+ people, and trans people in particular, cannot just “get a better job” due to the barriers of finding and changing jobs, particularly for those who are visibly LGBTQ+ (Brickner & Dalton, 2019).

Two illustrative examples of these barriers are in Cho’s study among gay men in Korea and Muniz’s study on queer Latina immigrant street vendors. The erosion of stable employment in Korea combined with socio-cultural conditions led to a need for gay men to adhere to heteronormative cultural scripts (e.g., go to straight brothels and bars). Further, if one is single, as most gay men present to be in the Korean context, they were ostracized and passed for promotion (Cho, 2020). This led one participant to change careers into an emerging, precarious industry, such as freelance. Adding precarity to their lives, many gay men in Korea are rejected from their families, a primary source of financial security for workers in Korea, leading, particularly younger, gay men to either further prioritize their careers for independent financial security or to “give up” their gay lives for economic security (Cho, 2020). Another study of Mexican immigrant woman street vendors in Los Angeles shared one participant’s story where she had to drop out of school in Mexico at 14 to support her family, and then due to heterosexism, she left to work in the USA at age 21, leading the participant to work as a street vendor (Munoz, 2016). Munoz (2016) argues that the experiences of queer Latina immigrants to the USA are influenced by heterosexist, misogynist, heteronormative, classist, and racist systems of oppression

through being seen as criminal (undocumented), bad mothers for bringing children to work when they cannot afford childcare, and assumed straight. Given how these women are perceived, they hide their sexual orientation for fear of adding additional layers of discrimination (Munoz, 2016).

### Queer Arts and Representation

Two studies discussed entering cultural labor or promoting LGBTQ+ representation as reasons for LGBTQ+ workers entering precarious employment, such as being role models of alternative families, increasing LGBTQ+ visibility, and promoting LGBTQ+ arts and culture (Loist, 2011). One example of this was among video game makers in North America and Western Europe who described in interviews being politically drawn to their work, aiming to challenge dominant narratives through queer expression in video games (Ruberg, 2019). The limited funding and inadequate compensation for queer workers in the arts are also illustrated by two qualitative studies of LGBTQ+ painters and influencers. LGBTQ+ artists across many Western countries reported to often be inadequately funded or insufficiently popularized to have art as their primary source of income (Corinne, 2001; Duguay, 2019).

### Sex Work

Four qualitative studies spoke to why LGBTQ+ people enter sex work as an alternative to more secure, traditional forms of employment, ranging from limited employment opportunities due to structural discrimination to opportunity for financial gain and self-esteem. One US–New York City study among gay and bisexual man escorts identified four principal reasons for being escorts: non-taxed income, instant financial gain, increased self-esteem, and enjoying sex (Uy et al., 2004). Similarly, for two Australian trans Indigenous men, sex work was a side job to make additional money (Sullivan & Day, 2019), and for trans women in Portugal and the UK, sex work was also a way to empower themselves (Vartabedian, 2019). Further, Sausa et al. (2007) and Vartabedian (2019) found that trans women experienced barriers (e.g., sexism, cissexism, and racism) that limited their educational and employment opportunities. Due to social exclusion associated with gender, race, physical appearance, language, and legal status, trans women of color in San Francisco, USA, felt that many doors were closed to them and experienced isolation (Sausa et al., 2007). Sex work was reported as the primary way for these women to gain employment and was explained as a cultural norm (Sausa et al., 2007; Vartabedian, 2019). Physical appearance and the notion of “passing” (where transgender people are “read” as cisgender) were significant with respect to the discrimination trans participants in San Francisco encountered.

In this study, African American trans women, in particular, experienced exclusion from mainstream work environments as a result of interlocking systems of racism and transmisogyny that rendered them visible as targets of discrimination (Sausa et al., 2007).

### Characteristics of LGBTQ+ Precarious Employment

LGBTQ+ precarious employment had many characteristics common to precarious employment more generally, including long hours, inconsistent schedules, power-laden relationships with management, temporary contracts, inadequate incomes, devaluing of skills, lack of workplace policies and protections, wage theft, holding multiple jobs at the same time, changing jobs, and violence/harassment from the job. However, as articulated most clearly by Ruberg (2019) who studied queer indie video game makers in North America and Western Europe, what makes this work particularly precarious for LGBTQ+ workers is that they often come to this work already facing economic insecurity and fewer social supports.

### Lack of Policies and Protections and the Role of Power

Exploitation and hierarchical power dynamics resulted in workers experiencing insecurity in their employment. Further, two studies highlighted that the work of LGBTQ+ workers was often found to be exploited to benefit mainstream—cis straight—society and workplaces through their efforts to create more diversity and better work environments (Brickner & Dalton, 2019; Ruberg, 2019). An illustrative example of this is with LGBTQ+ baristas in Eastern Canada who reported not being paid sufficiently to buy into the co-op café where they worked, leading to workers not having a voice in the company (Brickner & Dalton, 2019). The baristas further reported that there were poor communications from management, unfair tipping practices, poorly scheduled breaks, inadequate grievance policies, and issues with organizational structure (Brickner & Dalton, 2019). Noteworthy is that the workers advocating for improved workplace rights were those most impacted by inequity, such as the queer, working-class, low-wage, women, whereas cis, straight men embodied a more stereotypically masculine attitude in that they did not believe they required provisions such as breaks and were seemingly more tolerant of hostile work environments (Brickner & Dalton, 2019). Other professions that had few to no workplace protections were street vendors and cannabis sales and cultivation where workers' experiences were impacted by racism, classism, and sexism, with few ways to address structural discrimination (Chlala, 2020; Munoz, 2016).

Other areas replete with complex power dynamics were domains involving trans women's experiences with work.

For example, one Canadian study based in Toronto among low-wage Latina trans women found there to be stereotypes within mainstream communities that this population were often sex workers, which led one participant to report having to engage in sex for her apartment, despite not being a sex worker (Gailits et al., 2021). Another study among trans women of color found that their experiences of financial insecurity shaped their vulnerability in negotiation or lack of self-efficacy and were compounded by race, language, and legal status in the country. These workers struggled to negotiate condom use, particularly when there was financial reward or risk depending on their decision; participants reported a lack of self-efficacy when financially distressed (Sausa et al., 2007). Further, sex work carried multiple risks for these workers, such as exposure to violence and theft that were reported to be shaped by social oppression and stigma regarding their line of work, race, and trans status (Sausa et al., 2007).

### Low-Wage, Uncompensated, and Undervalued Labor Requiring Multiple Jobs

In addition to a lack of workplace protections, studies identified that workers' skills were often devalued. A mixed-methods study among bisexual Latino men in US–New York City found that part-time work and the informal economy are impacting all sectors, such as retail, hospitality, and manual labor. Across sectors, respondents identified job instability and involuntary underemployment, with 65% of the sample reporting having earned under \$20,000 a year (Munoz-Laboy et al., 2014). Relatedly, two qualitative studies discussed workers with extensive skillsets working long hours with insecure working conditions characterized by temporary, underpaid/volunteer positions (Loist, 2011; Ruberg, 2019). Videogame makers, for example, also considered their jobs to be high risk given their limited resources and the financial instability and emotional toll of managing harassment online. This work was considered deeply precarious and rarely fairly compensated, forcing video game makers to rely on donations from people who wish to support their work (Ruberg, 2019).

Given the precarity of the work described in the studies, many studies indicated that participants were required to work multiple jobs in addition to the job reported in the study (Corinne, 2001; Duguay, 2019; Loist, 2011; Ruberg, 2019; Turner et al., 2021). For example, as all video game makers in the study earned less than \$1000/month from game making, they were required to work a primary job in addition to game making (Ruberg, 2019). Queer woman artists not only worked additional jobs but they relied on incomes from social security and taking in house guests (Corinne, 2001). Further, trans women in sex work had more

sources of income than those not in sex work and included both criminalized and non-criminalized work; work and economic stability were compromised, in this case, by experiences of unstable housing and incarceration (Turner et al., 2021).

### Switching Jobs

Participants changing jobs were common among studies. A quantitative study found that French men in same-gender couples were less likely to be in blue-collar or private sector jobs and were likely to stay with the same employer for significantly less than their counterparts in differently gendered relationships, with 51% having the same employer after 5 years compared to 73% of the dominant group (Laurent & Mihoubi, 2017). This phenomenon is further explained in a US quantitative study that found that marginalized groups (e.g., LGBTQ+ and racialized) are more likely to struggle with attaining and retaining work due to harassment, bullying, discrimination, and general unfair treatment, regardless of level of education (Allan et al., 2020). Further, gay and bisexual men who were escorts explained struggling to separate work from home and that some negative consequences of their jobs (e.g., feeling lonely and depressed) led them to not want to continue as escorts, despite needing to continue for the financial compensation (Uy et al., 2004).

## Discussion

There is a growing emphasis on precarious employment and its deleterious impact on health and the relevance to systemically marginalized populations (Jetha et al., 2020; LaMontagne et al., 2016; Udah et al., 2019). Though some studies exist on particular work settings (e.g., baristas), industries (e.g., sex work and service), or employment contracts (e.g., part-time vs. full-time), no studies were identified that intentionally focussed on the phenomenon of precarious employment or employment quality among LGBTQ+ people more generally. It is clear from this review that LGBTQ+ people are not well represented in the precarious employment academic literature. Based on the quantitative studies identified, the study team can cautiously say that LGBTQ+ people are disproportionately represented in low-wage and precarious employment, particularly trans and bisexual people and those facing multiple systems of oppression (e.g., racism). Some LGBTQ+ people arrive at precarious employment due to pervasive structural conditions that limit employment opportunities, including entering employment with fewer economic and social resources. Others select into precarious positions to pursue creative aspirations and/or to support their communities through increasing LGBTQ+ representation, such as in film festivals or video game design. Upon

entering precarious employment, LGBTQ+ workers are often met with hostility and discrimination based not only on their sexual orientation or gender identity and expression but race and immigration status. This led to precarity of the work in terms of work contracts and precarity at work (Allan et al., 2020). Navigating contexts of poor workplace protections, workers were frequently unable to address discriminatory practices or experiences or were met with further hostility by those in power. The additional labor of managing ongoing discrimination within their precarious positions can lead LGBTQ+ workers to be fired from, not promoted, or leave their employment for alternate, sometimes even more precarious, forms of work.

Through this review, the study team identified several gaps in the literature, most glaring of which is that precarious employment among LGBTQ+ workers is severely underexplored in the academic literature given the public health impacts of low-quality employment and the health inequities LGBTQ+ people face. Most quantitative studies were limited to single variables (e.g., involuntary part-time employment) that do not fully characterize the phenomenon of precarious employment and limit the ability to address the first research question regarding disproportionate representation of LGBTQ+ people in precarious employment. However, non-empirical literature (e.g., Hollibaugh & Weiss, 2015) does suggest that given the social conditions that structure many LGBTQ+ people's lives (e.g., incarceration, social welfare systems, and poverty), this population is likely overrepresented in precarious employment. Further, since our search, one study has identified that lesbian, gay, and bisexual workers are three times more likely to report precarious employment (Kinitz et al., 2023). Only one quantitative study addressed types of employment sectors among LGBTQ+ workers, limiting the ability to understand the nature of precarity by sector. However, though the study team cannot identify what types of precarious employment are most common among LGBTQ+ workers, many included qualitative studies focused primarily on sex work, the arts, and service sectors.

Throughout almost all studies, a common thread among LGBTQ+ precariously employed workers was the discrimination faced in the labor market. This commonly led LGBTQ+ workers to precarious employment where they then continued to experience heterosexism, monosexism, cissexism, and other intersecting forms of systemic oppression. Systemic discrimination led to additional forms of labor (e.g., emotional), devaluing of skills, and economic insecurity.

Considering the three psychological states of precarity forwarded by Allan et al. (2020) can be particularly useful when considering precarious employment among LGBTQ+ and other systemically marginalized populations. Not only do LGBTQ+ workers face precarity due to the nature of their jobs (e.g., uncertainty of work continuity

and associated economic insecurity), discrimination and harassment related to sexual orientation, gender identity, race, and other characteristics added a layer of precarity that shape mental health and identity (Allan et al., 2020). At the systems level, drawing on intersectional and Marxist political economy frameworks highlights the role of cisheterosexism, racism, sexism, classism, and ableism in producing LGBTQ+ people as vulnerable to precarious employment. For instance, ableism and normative workplace practices create labor market precarity for LGBTQ+ people with disabilities given that those with poorer health or living with HIV had particularly poor employment outcomes (Martino et al., 2021; Rudea et al., 2012). Further, trans women's gender and visibility, and associated labor devaluation, led to entering sex work or other precarious industries with few protections (Brickner & Dalton, 2019; Mizock & Hopwood, 2018; Sausa et al., 2007; Vartabedian, 2019). These insights also provide important social context to the lower educational and employment outcomes identified specifically among trans women and racialized trans people due to non-normative visibility (Leppel, 2016, 2021). Relatedly, queer women were more likely to enter into blue-collar work than women or men in other couple types (man-man; woman-man; Leppel, 2009). This aligns with research on sexual orientation and blue-collar work that demonstrated discrimination in hiring practices among queer men with no disadvantage to queer women based on sexual orientation alone; however, both straight and queer women were similarly disadvantaged compared to straight men (Dilmaghani & Robinson, 2022). Though the included studies spoke little to the broader industries where LGBTQ+ people are more represented, it is clear that the devaluation of LGBTQ+ people's labor is impacted by more than sexual orientation and is also determined by gender, comportment, race, and disability, among others, and the extent to which these differences are visible to employers and co-workers. Several studies in this review point to the importance of an intersectional framework and merit their own intersectional analysis to further highlight the unique ways that some LGBTQ+ groups (e.g., Black trans women) might be particularly vulnerable to precarious employment and how their experiences might present more differences than commonalities with other LGBTQ+ groups.

The hostility of the labor market toward LGBTQ+ workers produces layers of additional labor to manage the emotional burden of working in cisheteronormative environments. Drawing on concepts of emotional labor (Wharton, 2009), LGBTQ+ workers must internally manage their emotions in addition to managing the outward display of their emotions when at work and encountering cisheteronormativity, racism, sexism, and ableism. This might be particularly true for workers who were visibly LGBTQ+ in the studies

discussed given that they likely experienced increased discrimination when seeking work and in their employment from management, colleagues, and customers (Brickner & Dalton, 2019; Mills & Owens, 2021).

This study complements the findings of studies among other marginalized populations. One review of the conditions of migrant workers explains that macro-level policy, such as labor market regulation and migration policies, and meso-level organizations, such as unions and social service agencies, facilitate a precarious labor market for migrant workers (Zhang et al., 2022). So too do social policies and human rights protections, or lack thereof, impact LGBTQ+ people and their employment outcomes (Gould et al., 2024; Mendos, 2019). Precarious employment continues to expand, and people with disabilities, migrants, racialized people, women, people with lower incomes, and other marginalized groups are all disproportionately represented (LaMontagna et al., 2016; Oddo et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2022). With evidence pointing to poorer health outcomes for marginalized groups experiencing precarious employment (Gray et al., 2021), there is need to incorporate LGBTQ+ people into population-level analyses that currently neglect LGBTQ+ people in stratified analyses. Further, similar to studies among other marginalized groups, there is a need for more nuanced understanding of precarious employment beyond unskilled professions (e.g., service industry; Zhang et al., 2022). Most qualitative studies did not focus on the phenomenon of precarious employment and rather on a specific type of employment, often what are traditionally seen as unskilled labor (e.g., sex work, arts, and entertainment). More diversity is needed in what sparse literature exists to characterize precarious employment among LGBTQ+ people.

Throughout the findings, participants' lives, and particularly their labor market experiences, were impacted by their economic status, gender modality (e.g., cis and trans), race, language, sexuality, gender, and physical presentation, among other aspects (e.g., Gailits et al., 2021). Though sexuality and gender, beyond male and female, are missing from the precarious employment literatures, the findings of this review complement other intersectional analyses on precarious employment literature (Alberti et al., 2013; Liu, 2019). Just as racism, sexism, and classism intersect to shape the labor market experiences of immigrants, resulting in particular vulnerability to expanding precarity (Liu, 2019), so too does cisheterosexism intersect with other structural oppressions to produce a matrix of disadvantage for LGBTQ+ communities. Inequities related to employment quality are growing, and those with multiple intersecting marginalized identities are most at risk, contributing to growing health inequities (Andrea et al., 2021; Gray et al., 2021).

## Strengths and Limitations

To the study team's knowledge, this is the first study to map and summarize studies on precarious employment among LGBTQ+ people, an important step to understanding labor market inequities among LGBTQ+ populations. A primary strength of this review is the theoretical grounding in political economy and intersectional frameworks that permitted the illumination of social forces that (re)produce inequities in the labor market. To ensure rigor, the study team drew from search strategies of LGBTQ+ economics literature (e.g., Waite et al., 2019) and had the search strategy reviewed by a librarian at several stages and consulted experts focused on LGBTQ+ populations and precarious employment. Further, as LGBTQ+ and allied researchers, the study team was cautious to not further stigmatize LGBTQ+ communities and advance research that has meaningful impact for LGBTQ+ communities.

The conclusions the study team can draw about precarious employment among LGBTQ+ people are limited given the lack of disaggregated data on LGBTQ+ people in population datasets and the limited qualitative studies that specifically aim to explore precarious employment. The results and discussion are primarily drawn from studies in the USA and Canada ( $n=22$ ). The understanding of how precarious employment might differ for LGBTQ+ people across diverse social and political conditions remains underexplored. Further, excluding literature beyond OECD countries, studies not published in English, or monographs and non-empirical literature from this review limits important insights into the broader context of precarious employment, particularly regarding intersections of LGBTQ+-related stigma and discrimination and the labor market that have been well documented in literature outside the inclusion criteria of this study (David, 2015; Edelman, 2020). Future studies should consider the rich literature in non-English publications, monographs, and gray sources, as well as beyond OECD countries. Lastly, it appears that more attention has been paid to the topic of precarious employment and labor market discrimination in community organizations and think tanks than from the academic community (Grant et al., 2011; Medina et al., 2022; Movement Advancement Project, 2013; Sears & Mallory, 2011; Sears et al., 2021). It is important for the academic community to catch up with community and non-academic research and advocacy to address this public health issue collectively.

## Conclusion

### Policy Implications and Future Research

It is pressing to better understand precarious employment and its impacts on LGBTQ+ people given their already

concerning health, economic, and social outcomes. This scoping review has demonstrated that studies on low-wage and precarious employment among LGBTQ+ people are few, with limited insights into the prevalence and nature of this phenomenon. This article begins to highlight areas for policy intervention and draws attention to labor market inequities that remain unaddressed by current social policies and protections. However, more research is needed to better understand low-wage and precarious employment among LGBTQ+ people in order to strengthen social policy and practice aimed at alleviating employment and economic inequities among this group (Gould et al., 2024). Further, LGBTQ+ people are not uniformly impacted by precarious employment, making it necessary for future research to consider the unique groups within LGBTQ+ communities (e.g., bisexual people) and intersecting oppressions (e.g., racism and classism). Finally, other areas for future research should consider stories where LGBTQ+ people are doing well as well as employment conditions outside OECD countries that potentially have more hostile socio-political climates.

Given that studies included in this review highlighted discrimination as a key reason for and experience within precarious employment for LGBTQ+ people, ensuring labor market (macro) and workplace (meso) protections for sexual orientation and gender identity might begin to address some of the challenges that workers experience within a precarious labor market. However, larger structural issues, such as the devaluation of LGBTQ+ people and their exclusion from human rights protections, require policy advances beyond the employment sector to ultimately reduce barriers to accessing the labor market and stable employment. Example policy recommendations include making existing policies meaningful through funding and follow-through measures, employer training on implementing workplace policies and practices that promote LGBTQ+ inclusion, enhance LGBTQ+ training and employment programming, and increased support for LGBTQ+ youth who face adversity when preparing for and starting their working lives (Gould et al., 2024; Kinitz et al., 2024).

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## Declarations

**Competing Interest** The authors declare no competing interests.

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