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Insecure Work and Well-being: The Experience of Learning Support Officers in the Education Sector

Christian Bombig *

Abstract. Despite the growing body of research into insecure work, debate still rages about its impacts upon the well-being of workers. This research goes beyond existing quantitative research to explore the human experience of Learning Support Officers (LSO) / Teaching Assistants in the Australian education sector. LSOs, the majority of whom are women, continue to be employed in part-time, fixed-term positions at a rate up to five times higher than that of the general population. This research applies a phenomenological methodology to explore insecure employment and its impact on well-being. For LSOs, the precariousness of their employment exposes them to financial risk, limits their access to training and impacts broadly upon their well-being. Regardless of how unavoidable risk is in a modern economy, this research distils the essence of the human experience of insecure work and calls for changes to employment policies and practices to minimise its negative impacts.

Keywords: *Insecure work, education, well-being*

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* Senior Adviser to the Minister for Suburban Development in the State Government of Victoria, Australia. Email: christianbombig@gmail.com

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1. Introduction

Work is critical to human existence in a capitalist society. It occupies over half the waking hours of most adults in Australia, gives our lives meaning and provides the vast majority of us with the income required to subsist. Work in Australia, and its regulatory framework, evolved concurrently with social welfare policy to become what Francis Castles[1] described as the 'wage earners welfare state'. Since the 1980s however, the social contract between citizen and this welfare state has been refashioned by the rise of individualization[2] and the emergence of a 'risk society'[3].

These risks vary from the unexpected, such as illness, to the planned, such as taking out a mortgage. In Australia, the State has traditionally provided protection against the most unpredictable and severe risks such as unemployment by providing welfare. In addition to this, further employment security was provided through the standard employment relationship (SER). Historically the Australian SER was as much a social contract as an actual contract, reinforcing the role of the 'male breadwinner' as full-time worker and sole provider for his family[4]. This social contract was a product of the 'Federation Settlement'[5] and characterised by the employee submitting to the employer's authority in return for job security and a wage substantial enough for the needs of the employee and his dependents. In addition to this 'job for life', the contract evolved to include other 'risk minimising' conditions of employment such as personal leave to protect against illness or penalty rates to compensate for working unsociable hours.

In the 1980s Australia began to deregulate its economy and dismantle the cultural, political and social mechanisms that had till then protected its citizenry and promoted the SER. Since then, we have labelled employees outside of the SER, like casuals[6] and fixed-term[7] employees, as 'insecure'.

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[1] F. Castles, *The Wage Earners Welfare State Revisited*, *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 29/2, 1994.

[2] U. Beck, *Risk Society : Towards a New Modernity*, Theory Culture & Society; London: Sage, 1992, 260 p.

[3] U. Beck, *Risk Society Revisited: Theory, Politics and Research Programmes*, *The risk society and beyond: Critical issues for social theory*, 2000b, 211-29.

[4] B. Howe, *Weighing up Australian Values : Balancing Transitions and Risks to Work and Family in Modern Australia*; Sydney: UNSW Press, 2007, 207 p.

[5] Australian Centre for Industrial Relations Research Training *Australia at Work: Just Managing?* , Sydney, 1999

[6] Commonly, a casual employee is someone who works irregular hours and days and receives a loading of between 20% - 25% of the hourly wage as compensation for

It is appropriate to note that not all changes to the SER need be considered negative. For instance, greater flexibility in working hours has created employment opportunities for women to be able to enter the workforce and balance career and family in circumstances[8] where respectful and reciprocal relationships exist between employer and employee[9].

The proliferation of insecure employment in Australia has not been uniform. Recent studies such as the *'Staff in Australia's Schools Report'* 2007[10] and 2013[11] record an increase in the use of fixed-term contracts in the education sector, with contract and casual employment increasing from 10% to 15% for secondary teachers and 17% to 22% for primary teachers. Yet these reports provide little insight into how insecure employment affects a teacher's well-being, nor do they shed light on how fixed-term employment is utilised in other occupational categories such a Learning Support Officer (LSO)[12]. As fixed-term employment rises, a limited understanding of its impacts is concerning, particularly when major investments are being made to improve the quality of education. Currently, no published research exists into impacts of insecure employment on LSOs, who are predominantly women and who contribute significantly to equitable access to education in Australia.

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entitlements such as personal leave H. Buddelmeyer, D. Mcvicar, and M. Wooden, *Non-Standard "Contingent" Employment and Job Satisfaction: A Panel Data Analysis*, *Industrial Relations: A Journal of Economy and Society,* 54/2, 2015, 256-75..

[7] Workers in fixed-term employment often have the same entitlements as ongoing workers but are only employed for a determined period of time.

[8] B. Howe, *Weighing up Australian Values : Balancing Transitions and Risks to Work and Family in Modern Australia*, B. Pocock, N. Skinner, and P. Williams, *Time Bomb: Work, Rest and Play in Australia Today*; Sydney: UNSW Press, 2012.

[9] B. Pocock, R. Prosser, and K. Bridge, *The Return of 'Labour-as-Commodity'? The Experience of Casual Work in Australia*, *Reworking*, 2005, 459.

[10] Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. *Staff in Australia's Schools 2007: Main Report on the Survey*, http://research.acer.edu.au/tll_misc/3/, 2008

[11] Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. *Staff in Australia's Schools 2013: Main Report on the Survey*, http://research.acer.edu.au/tll_misc/20/, 2014

[12] With the endorsement of most of the participants in this research, and for clarity, the term LSO refers to those working as classroom/teaching/learning aides or assistants in primary or secondary education. The role and duties of a LSO vary dramatically and often include: integrating children with special needs, managing student behaviour, reinforcing and explaining key concepts in the relevant subject areas and diagnosing and providing targeted support to improve educational outcomes.

Therefore, this research seeks to further explore the phenomenon of insecure employment and its impacts upon the well-being of LSOs.

By using the descriptive methodology of transcendental phenomenology[13] it is proposed that a deeper insight into the human biography of insecure employment will be achieved. The transcendental aspect of this form of phenomenology requires that the issue is re-examined anew, before examining it from various perspectives and ultimately distilling the experience to its very essence. This study expands existing knowledge in several ways. First, by application of theory, it explores the impacts of insecure employment on the eudaimonic, multidimensional well-being of LSOs. Second, it uses an innovative methodology by combining Clark Moustakas'[14] transcendental phenomenology with other qualitative research methods, such as focus groups. This approach will allow for an understanding of how LSO's experience insecure work and recognise the complexity of well-being, an objective not easily achieved through quantitative research.

For the purposes of this research, well-being is a state both subjective and holistic. Such an interpretation is suited to phenomenological analysis because it reflects the constructivist nature of research[15] and that the process of inquiry is inherently subjective. What follows gives an overview of the Australian education sector, before exploring existing and relevant literature on both the phenomenon of insecure employment and the concept of well-being. An explanation of the phenomenological methodology will then be provided, showing how it has been applied in combination with other qualitative research techniques. The results of the research will then be organised and summarised, allowing for in-depth discussion and interpretation. This research will conclude by distilling the phenomenon of insecure employment as it is experienced by LSOs, comment on what has been learned and identify employment policies and practices that may reduce any negative impacts of insecure employment upon the well-being of LSOs.

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[13] C. Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods*; Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 1994, 25-43.

[14] Ibid.

[15] A. Bryman, *Social Research Methods*; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

2. The Australian Context:
The Changing Nature of Employment in the Education Sector

This research seeks to shine a spotlight on the human experience of fixed-term employment. It also acknowledges the changing nature of education in Australia and the accompanying changes to employment. Over the last two decades, the definition of a 'professional' teacher has changed, and regulatory bodies like the Victorian Institute of Teaching have been established to monitor teaching standards so they will satisfy community expectations. Simultaneously, government reporting requirements designed to measure and compare student progress and school performance[16] have proliferated, exemplified by the National Assessment Program-Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) test[17]. Additionally, there has also been an increased recognition of specialist expertise and a rise in the number of people employed in these roles. This is particularly the case in support services, where the introduction of student well-being co-ordinators and Non English Speaking Background practitioners reflects a better understanding of the factors that improve educational outcomes[18].

In Victoria, 63% of students are enrolled in government schools, 23% in Catholic schools and 14 % in independent schools[19]. Approximately 68% [20] of employees are ongoing in the education sector; however this last figure is generic and, therefore, one can only infer possible employment trends from other occupations within the sector. As this research focuses on LSOs in Catholic and Victorian government schools (VGS) it is important to establish the frequency of fixed-term employment in these sectors. In the 2014 Victorian Department of Education and Early

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[16] Victorian Auditor-General *Improving Our Schools: Monitoring and Reporting*, Melbourne, 2007

[17] NAPLAN results are used to compare individual student progress and aggregated to provide international comparisons such as those made in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) (DEECD 2012).

[18] Victorian Auditor-General *Improving Our Schools: Monitoring and Reporting*,

[19] Independent Schools Victoria, *School and Student Numbers*, <http://www.is.vic.edu.au/independent/facts/numbers.htm>, 13/09, 2015

[20] This figure was derived by combing the number of employees in the education sector who do not receive entitlements (casuals) 17.7%, reported by the Australian Bureau of Satistics, *Employee Earnings, Benefits and Trade Union Membership, Australia, August 2013*, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/6310.0/>, 11/06/15, 2014a, with the percentage of employees in the education sector on fixed-term contacts 14.6%, reported in Australian Bureau of Statistics *Forms of Employment* 2014b

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Childhood Development Annual Report [21] summary data suggests that approximately 39% of LSOs employed in VGSs are employed on a fixed-term basis, compared to 32% [22] in Victorian Catholic schools. The frequency of fixed-term employment amongst LSOs is four to five times higher than the general Australian population which was 7.25%[23] in 2014.

In addition to the changes to employment in the education sector, one should bear in mind the process by which children with special needs have been integrated into main stream education and what factors may have influenced the initial use of contracts. Consistent with the disability normalisation principle of the 1970s the Australian government introduced funding to assist with the integration children in 1974-75[24]. Throughout the 1990s this 'mainstreaming' increased, changing the nature of support provided in schools[25]. It appears that LSOs were initially employed on contracts because funding was linked to student numbers and issued annually, and that the transition from unpaid parent helper to paid employee engendered two attitudinal norms that enabled the use of contracts. First, any support for these children would be better than none, even if it was precarious; and second, the work was previously unpaid so any method of paid employment would be better than none.

There are two elements of the funding arrangements for students with disabilities that promote the use of fixed-term employment. The first element is the identified funding deficiency in the quantum of funding provided to support children with special needs[26] which makes investment in well-paid secure employment a financial risk for schools. The second is the mechanism used to allocate this funding. Currently, funding is linked directly to the child which means that the funding will move to a different school if the child does, potentially resulting in an excess number of LSOs.

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[21] The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. *The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Annual Report*, Melbourne, 2014

[22] This is an approximated amount based on unpublished IEU Victoria Tasmania membership data.

[23] Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research., 'Hilda Survey Annual Report', (Melbourne: The University of Melbourne, 2014), Online resource (volumes).

[24] C. Forlin, *Inclusive Education in Australia Ten Years after Salamanca*, *European Journal of Psychology of Education,* 21/3, 2006/09/01 2006, 265-77.

[25] Ibid.

[26] D. M. Gonski, *Review of Funding for Schooling: Final Report*; Australia: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2011.

So, why research the impacts of insecure employment on the well-being of LSOs? Australia values quality education, spending over $81 billion[27] on it nationally in 2013-14. However, in working towards an inclusive system that reduces the risks associated with disability by providing support to children, we have at the same time conferred new risks on those providing the support. This paradox is rarely discussed and, while there is some research into the impacts of the new risks on teachers and principals[28] (S. Beltman et al. 2011; P. Riley 2014) insufficient research[29] exists in relation to LSOs.

3. Literature Review

It is central to this research to understand both insecure employment and the concept of well-being. The absence of literature pertaining to LSOs and insecure work means that one must go to the more general body of research into: 1) the sociological approach to understanding insecure employment as a 'risk', and the contemporary international discourse around risk and work; 2) insecure employment as it understood in the Australian context; and 3) what constitutes well-being. Finally, we will also comment on existing research including a quantitative well-being index, two studies of fixed-term employment and job satisfaction, and one study into the well-being of school principals.

3.1 Risk and Contemporary International Discourse about Work

It was Anthony Giddens[30] who first proposed that risk is an essential part of progress and that modern political economies need to re-allocate risk in order to generate wealth. The re-allocation of these 'new risks' associated

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[27] Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Government Expenditure on Education in Australia*, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/5518.0.55.001>, 2/08/15, 2015

[28] S. Beltman, C. Mansfield, and A. Price, *Thriving Not Just Surviving: A Review of Research on Teacher Resilience*, *Educational Research Review*, 6/3, 2011, 185-207, *Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety & Wellbeing Survey. 2011 - 2014 Data*, Melbourne, 2014

[29] The only references that can be found regarding LSOs and insecure employment are contained in two submissions to the Independent Inquiry into Insecure Work in Australia made by the Australian Education Union (AEU) Australian Education Union Tasmanian Branch *Aeu South Australian Branch Submission to Independent Inquiry into Insecure Work in Australia*, 2012

[30] A. Giddens, *The Third Way : The Renewal of Social Democracy*; Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 1999a, x, 166 p.

with the human pursuit of knowledge[31] is relevant to understanding insecure employment. The interrelatedness between risk and individualism[32] (U. Beck and E. Beck-Gernsheim 2002b) is particularly evident when employees are made to bear the risks associated with employment. Ulrich Beck describes this as the *"individualisation of social risks"[33]*. The spread of this form of individualisation has created a 'precarious' class of employee[34] in nearly every sector of the global economy, from the creative industries to the service industries. Andrew Ross[35] uses the 'dot.com' boom of the 1990s to illustrate aspects of neoliberalism that promote the acceptance of risk by the individual in order to accelerate success. He contends that a 'go out an' get 'em at all costs' mindset permeated the Silicon Valley creative industries, an attitude actively promoted by policy makers.

More recently, Christian Fuchs[36] has re-examined precariousness and risk in the creative industries through a critical theory case study of Google that provides a contemporary analysis of the 'good jobs, bad jobs' concept referred to by Ross[37]. Fuchs[38] juxtaposes two very different experiences of insecure work in Silicon Valley, that of software engineers and that of manufacturing workers. While both categories of worker are employed precariously, the manufacturing worker in the 'bad job' is engaged without the status or entitlements that accompany the highly valued software engineer occupying the 'good job'. The flexibility of individual contractual arrangements is commented upon by Beck[39] and Guy Standing[40] and it is

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[31] A. Giddens, *Runaway World : How Globalisation Is Reshaping Our Lives*; London: Profile, 1999b, 104 p.

[32] U. Beck and E. Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization : Institutionalized Individualism and Its Social and Political Consequences*, Theory, Culture & Society; London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE, 2002a, xxv, 221 p.

[33] Ibid., at 39.

[34] A. Ross, *Nice Work If You Can Get It : Life and Labor in Precarious Times*, Nyu Series in Social and Cultural Analysis; New York: New York University Press, 2009, viii, 264 p, G. Standing, *The Precariat : The New Dangerous Class*; London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011, ix, 198 p.

[35] A. Ross, *Nice Work If You Can Get It : Life and Labor in Precarious Times*.

[36] C. Fuchs, *Digital Labour and Karl Marx*; New York: Routledge, 2014, xv, 403 pages.

[37] 'good jobs, bad jobs' was a concept first devised by A. L. Kalleberg, *Good Jobs, Bad Jobs: The Rise of Polarized and Precarious Employment Systems in the United States, 1970s-2000s*: Russell Sage Foundation, 2011, 312.

[38] C. Fuchs, *Digital Labour and Karl Marx*.

[39] U. Beck, *The Brave New World of Work*; Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2000a, v, 202 p.

[40] G. Standing, *The Precariat : The New Dangerous Class*.

in their analysis that they both agree it is only the professional class that can afford to enter and exit the workforce as need dictates.

3.2 Insecure Employment in Australia

The most recent and comprehensive investigation into insecure employment in Australia was the Independent Inquiry into Insecure Work, chaired by Prof. Brian Howe. The inquiry defined insecure work as *"provid[ing] workers with little social or economic security and little control over their working lives."*[41] This definition, and the associated indicators [42] reflect that insecure employment extends beyond a narrow view that it is merely another mode of employment, like part-time or full-time. Moreover, it incorporates the many impacts it can have upon an individual's social and economic security. Historical context plays a particularly important role in how we define insecure work in Australia. Both Paul Smyth's concept of the 'Australian way' and John Buchanan's notions of the 'Federation settlement' and the 'Post-War Social Settlement' describe the unique development in tandem of social and industrial policy in Australia[43] This interrelatedness is a significant consideration in the work of Ian Watson, Iain Campbell, Chris Brigs[44], Barbara Pocock[45], Howe[46], and Jens Zinn[47].

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[41] Australian Council of Trade Unions *Lives on Hold: Unlocking the Potential of Australia's Workforce-the Report of the Independent Inquiry into Insecure Work in Australia*, Melbourne, 2012
[42] The inquiry determined the following indicators of insecure work:
1) *unpredictable, fluctuating pay;*
2) *inferior rights and entitlements, including limited or no access to paid leave;*
3) *irregular and unpredictable working hours, or working hours that, although regular,*
are too long or too few and/ or non-social or fragmented;
4) *lack of security and/ or uncertainty over the length of the job;*
5) *and lack of voice at work on wages, conditions and work organisation.*
[43] Australian Centre for Industrial Relations Research Training *Australia at Work: Just Managing?* , , P. Smyth, *Closing the Gap? The Role of Wage, Welfare and Industry Policy in Promoting Social Inclusion*, Journal of Industrial Relations, 50/4, 2008, 647-63.
[44] I. Watson et al., *Fragmented Futures : New Challenges in Working Life*; Annandale, N.S.W.: Federation Press, 2003, xix, 236 p.
[45] B. A. Pocock and J. M. Buchanan, *Social Exclusion and the Australian Labour Market: Reconfiguring Inequality in Work and Care*: Peter Lang Publishing, 2003.
[46] B. Howe, *Weighing up Australian Values : Balancing Transitions and Risks to Work and Family in Modern Australia*.
[47] J. O. Zinn, *Introduction: Risk, Social Inclusion and the Life Course*, Social Policy and Society, 12/2, 2013, 253-64.

Of the many distinct developmental phases described by Smyth it is the 'Harvester judgement' of 1907 that shaped industrial relations for over a century when it established a minimum wage sufficient for *"the normal needs of the average employee, regarded as a human being living in a civilised community"*[48]. The introduction of a 'living wage'[49] in this post-federation period was the beginning of the Industrial Award system, which was both a centralised mechanism for fixing wages and a regulatory framework protecting against 'labour commodification'[50]. The two subsequent phases of social and industrial policy development, the 'post-war' period and the 'Accord', further institutionalised the standard employment relationship through the pursuit of full employment[51] and the establishment of new social contract or Accord, between unions and the Federal government[52].

Up until the Accord, Australian workers had enjoyed increasing employment security and improved conditions of employment. However, the rise of neoliberalism in the 1980s triggered a phase of market deregulation[53] which would inevitably reduce the role of the SER as a key element of social and industrial policy. For the purposes of this research, it will suffice to acknowledge that the process of deregulation has continued to the present day. Poignantly, understanding the historical evolution of secure employment allows one to identify where and how security has been removed from the employment relationship, and the extent to which conditions of employment that protect workers against risks have been eroded, which in turn leads us to a consideration of the impacts such changes may have on the well-being of workers.

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[48] H. B. Higgins, *Ex Parte H.V. Mckay*, Commonwealth Court of Conciliation And Arbitartion, 1907

[49] *Waltzing Matilda and the Sunshine Harvester Factory* (2012) (Fair Work Australia) 1 streaming video (35 min.) : sd., col.

[50] B. Pocock, R. Prosser, and K. Bridge, *The Return of 'Labour-as-Commodity'? The Experience of Casual Work in Australia.*

[51] H. C. Coombs, *From Curtin to Keating: The 1945 and 1994 White Papers on Employment: A Better Environment for Human and Economic Diversity?* ; Canberra: North Australia Research Unit, Australian National University, 1994.

[52] P. Smyth, 'The Historical Context for Action ', in Alison Mcclelland and Paul Smyth (eds.), *Social Policy in Australia : Understanding for Action,*2nd edn.; South Melbourne Oxford University Press, 2010b, xvi, 304 p.

[53] P. Kelly, *The End of Certainty*; Sydney: Allen & Unwin., 1994.

3.3 Well-being

The term 'well-being' is often used, but rarely understood in all of its complexity. Aristotelian in origin[54], well-being referred to the pursuit of *Eudaimonia* - the self-realising process one experiences while striving towards virtue. Carol D. Ryff[55] asserts that a eudaimonic interpretation of well-being is a more accurate rendition of the term than a 'hedonistic' well-being centred around the pursuit of happiness. Psychologists Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci's paper '*On Happiness and Human Potentials: a review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being*' (2001) provides a comprehensive review of two distinct yet related schools of thought on well-being: subjective well-being (SWB) and psychological well-being (PWB).

Hedonic psychology assesses SWB by measuring life satisfaction, positive mood and the absence of negative mood, whereas the eudaimonic view, as expressed by Ryff[56], assesses PWB by measuring autonomy, personal growth, self-acceptance, purpose in life, environmental mastery, and positive relations with others[57]. This multidimensional element of PWB[58] is also reflected in Amartya Sen's capability approach, which defines well-being in terms of the freedom to do something or be someone[59]. Sen uses the term 'functionings' to describe various activities and states that make up one's well-being such as a healthy body or an education, and 'capabilities' as the freedom one has to obtain them[60]. Sen also proposes

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[54] C. D. Ryff and B. H. Singer, *Know Thyself and Become What You Are: A Eudaimonic Approach to Psychological Well-Being, Journal of happiness studies,* 9/1, 2008, 13-39.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid.

[57] R. M. Ryan and E. L. Deci, *On Happiness and Human Potentials: A Review of Research on Hedonic and Eudaimonic Well-Being, Annual Review of Psychology,* 52/1, 2001, 141-66.

[58] C. D. Ryff and B. H. Singer, *Know Thyself and Become What You Are: A Eudaimonic Approach to Psychological Well-Being.*

[59] A. Giddens, *The Third Way : The Renewal of Social Democracy*, E. C. Martinetti, *A Multidimensional Assessment of Well-Being Based on Sen's Functioning Approach*, *Rivista internazionale di scienze sociali*, 2000, 207-39.

[60] S. Alkire and S. Deneulin, 'The Human Development and Capability Approach', in Severine Deneulin (ed.), *An Introduction to the Human Development and Capability Approach* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis,, 2012), 1 online resource (377 p.), Australian Council of Trade Unions *Lives on Hold: Unlocking the Potential of Australia's Workforce-the Report of the Independent Inquiry into Insecure Work in Australia,*

that well-being is the self-evaluation of one's state of wellness. Sen's[61] work shares commonalties with the eudaimonic interpretation of well-being as it includes having regard for others, confirming that functionings and capabilities are not solely related to one's own freedom and agency but also to that of others. A strength of Sen's approach is that it encompasses the social, economic and political nature of human existence[62], mirroring the spheres of influence that defined the evolution of work in Australia. Therefore, it is the combination of Ryff's and Sen's work that shapes the idea of well-being used in this research.

3.4 Existing Research

A significant body of international research into the impacts of insecure employment on a worker's PWB is splendidly summarised Nele De Cuyper et al.[63]. In Australia, such research tends to focus on specific dimensions that contribute to well-being, such as job satisfaction or the impact on work and family balance[64]. It is impractical to provide a comprehensive summary of all published work on insecure employment and well-being; however, key pieces of research will be commented upon. Three prominent general studies are: the Australian Work and Life Index (AWALI); the Household Income Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA); and the Australian Unity Well-being Index (AUWI)[65]. One benefit of using large datasets is the generalisability of the results, HILDA being a good example. Its longitudinal design[66] has allowed researchers to record the consequences of life events as they occur, a limitation of other

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[61] A. Sen, 'Capability and Well-Being', in Daniel M. Hausman (ed.), *The Philosophy of Economics : An Anthology*,3rd edn.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008, vii, 527 p.

[62] P. Smyth, *Closing the Gap? The Role of Wage, Welfare and Industry Policy in Promoting Social Inclusion*.

[63] N. De Cuyper et al., *Literature Review of Theory and Research on the Psychological Impact of Temporary Employment: Towards a Conceptual Model, International Journal of Management Reviews,* 10/1, 2008, 25-51.

[64] H. Buddelmeyer, D. Mcvicar, and M. Wooden, *Non-Standard "Contingent" Employment and Job Satisfaction: A Panel Data Analysis*, B. Pocock, N. Skinner, and R. Ichii, *Work, Life and Workplace Flexibility: The Australian Work and Life Index 2009, Accessed July,* 1, 2009, 2010.

[65] AUWI was discontinued in 2013.

[66] Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, The University of Melbourne *The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey: Selected Findings from Waves 1 to 12*, Melbourne, 2015a

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cross-sectional research[67]. Methodologically however, the structured nature of the survey and interview tools limits participant responses to a predetermined set of statements in interviews and self-completed questionnaires[68]. The consequence of this completely structured approach is that it becomes devoid of reflexivity and genuine participant interaction. In relation to well-being, the HILDA survey uses participant perceptions of their physical and mental health to infer SWB; for example the most recent publication of '*Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia: Selected findings from waves 1 to 12*'[69] proposes that 'life satisfaction' is greater for those living in smaller communities. While HILDA provides insight into well-being, it does so from a hedonic point of view. This sentiment is further emphasised by the press release that accompanied the publication of the report that replaced the technical term of 'life satisfaction' with 'happiness', also consistent with hedonistic interpretation[70].

Analysis and interpretation of HILDA data by Prof. Mark Wooden and Dianna Warren in 2003 observed that those employed on fixed-term contracts are not a homogenous group and that there is a positive correlation between fixed-term employment and job satisfaction[71]. They state that case-study research conducted into insecure work *"remains unconvincing"*[72] as it is selective and incapable of measuring job quality. Interestingly though, Wooden and Warren also acknowledge that job quality is hard to measure objectively and that for the purposes of their research 'job satisfaction' is suitable proxy for 'utility at work'[73]. Equating job satisfaction with utility is problematic, particularly in this context, as it is used to infer that jobs that have a higher degree of utility constitute

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[67] M. Wooden and N. Watson, *The Hilda Survey and Its Contribution to Economic and Social Research (So Far)**, *Economic Record,* 83/261, 2007, 208-31.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, The University of Melbourne *The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey: Selected Findings from Waves 1 to 12*,

[70] University of Melbourne, *Major Cities Create Unhappy Australians: A Snapshot of Our Nation Revealed*, <http://newsroom.melbourne.edu/http%3A//newsroom.melbourne.edu/news/HILDA2015>, 27/72015, 2015

[71] M. Wooden and D. Warren, *The Characteristics of Casual and Fixed-Term Employment: Evidence from the Hilda Survey*: Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, The University of Melbourne, 2003.

[72] Ibid., at 2.

[73] Wooden and Warren base their decision to use 'job satisfaction' as suitable proxy for 'utility at work' based on the 1997 British research conducted by Andrew E. Clark's entitled *Job satisfaction and Gender: Why are Women So Happy at Work ?*'

'good jobs'. The HILDA interview asks participants how satisfied they are with: pay, job security, work itself, hours of work, ability to balance work and non-work commitments, and overall satisfaction[74] and allows researchers to comment on latent unobserved measures such as job dissatisfaction. That said, the Likert scale used in the HILDA interview instrument limits the participant's ability to explain what it is about their job security or wages that they are in fact dissatisfied with. Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman[75] comment on this inability to describe 'how' and 'why' an outcome occurs and conclude that it is a limitation of the quantitative method. In 2007 Wooden and Nicole Watson revisited the HILDA data and queried the suitability of measuring job quality based on job satisfaction. They suggest that *"rather than measuring overall worker well-being, job satisfaction may be a measure of how well present well-being compares with expected well-being at some previous date"[76]*. While a quantitative methodology does measure the outcome of the employee's experience of fixed-term employment on a single dimension of well-being, it cannot elucidate the processes leading to such an outcome or examine in sufficient detail the numerous dimensions required for a eudaimonic interpretation.

In addition to HILDA and AWALI, the Australian Unity Well-being Index sought over the ten years of its operation to establish a national well-being index that reflected both societal and personal well-being[77]. Furthermore, it proposed that positive well-being is an abstract concept that is both non-specific and highly personalised to the individual[78]. The study used the Comprehensive Quality of Life (ComQol) scale to measure personal well-being. The scale was devised by identifying 64 variables used in existing quality of life measurements across the disciplines of sociology, psychology and medicine[79] and ordering them into the following seven

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[74] *Hilda (Living in Australia) Continuing Person Questionaire (Cpq) W15m*, <https://www.melbourneinstitute.com/hilda/doc/questionnaires/q15.html>, 13/09/15, 2015b

[75] M. B. Miles and A. M. Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1994.

[76] M. Wooden and N. Watson, *The Hilda Survey and Its Contribution to Economic and Social Research (So Far)**, at 19.

[77] R. A. Cummins et al., *Developing a National Index of Subjective Wellbeing: The Australian Unity Wellbeing Index*, *Social indicators research*, 64/2, 2003, 159-90.

[78] Ibid.

[79] R. A. Cummins et al., *Validity Studies the Comprehensive Quality of Life Scale (Comqol): Instrument Development and Psychometric Evaluation on College Staff and Students*, *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 54/2, June 1, 1994 1994, 372-82.

domains: standard of living; health; achieving; personal relationships; how safe you feel; community connect, and future security[80].

In 2013, the AUWI included a number of work-related variables, allowing researchers to examine the relationship between work and well-being. The study examined participants employed in paid work engaged on a full-time, part-time and casual basis, however, there is no evidence in the report to suggest that the researchers tested for a statistically significant reduction in personal well-being for those employed on a casual basis.

Research from the United Kingdom examines the relationship between insecure forms of employment and well-being based on data collected from the British Household Panel Survey[81]. The research measured the impact of insecure employment on four domains of well-being: mental health, general health, life satisfaction and job satisfaction. Specifically these domains were measured by using a mental health indicator[82], an assessment of perceived general health, a subjective determination of life satisfaction, and a subjective indication of job satisfaction. This study found no correlation between insecure employment and well-being, although it did confirm a negative correlation between insecure employment and job satisfaction. Interestingly, these findings are inconsistent with those reported by Wooden and Warren[83] and while they are suitable for comparison, one must be cautious about the generalisability of the findings as they are derived in the context of the British welfare state, which is markedly different from Australia's.

3.5 Impacts of Employment on Well-being in the Education Sector

The Australian Principals Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) and Well-being Survey is a longitudinal study designed to assess the well-being of school Principals and Deputy or Assistant Principals. The research reports that lack of professional support, insufficient professional

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[80] Australian Centre on Quality of Life, School of Psychology, Deakin University. *Part A: The Report. Australian Unity Wellbeing Index Survey 30 . The Wellbeing of Australians: Social Media, Personal Achievement, and Work.*, Melbourne, Australia, 2013a

[81] The HILDA survey was based on the British Household Panel Survey M. Wooden and D. Warren, *The Characteristics of Casual and Fixed-Term Employment: Evidence from the Hilda Survey.*.

[82] The mental health indicator was derived from the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ).

[83] M. Wooden and D. Warren, *The Characteristics of Casual and Fixed-Term Employment: Evidence from the Hilda Survey.*

development (PD), high work demands, and occupational violence all contribute to poor well-being[84]. Similarly to HILDA, data was collected on the families of the participants in order to provide a broader context and like the AUWI, it uses a set of self-assessed quality of life indicators. Uniquely, this research considers aspects of OH&S theory regarding risk removal and minimisation[85] however, it does not identify whether or not principals are employed on a fixed-term basis and what impacts this may have.

Evidently, Australian studies have focused more on well-being than on insecure employment, and, while these post-positivist approaches are useful, they are methodologically constrained in their ability to measure eudaimonic multidimensional well-being. In addition, an absence of transcendental phenomenological research, particularly for specific occupations, leaves many questions unanswered about the human experience in this area of inquiry.

4. Methodology

Insecure work is a complex phenomenon and further complicated by the need to explore its impacts upon a multidimensional notion of human well-being[86]. Methodologically, it is important to ask ontological questions about the reality of human experience and epistemological questions about the research techniques used to validate them[87]. If the constructivist proposition that *"individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work"[88]* is accepted, then the subjective meaning of an experience must be both appreciated and respected when devising an appropriate methodology.

The raw data for this research was gathered in ten semi-structured in-depth interviews with LSOs. However, in order to increase internal consistency and reliability, a secondary data gathering and validation mechanism, namely a focus group, was conducted after the interview

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[84] *Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety & Wellbeing Survey. 2011 - 2014 Data*,

[85] Ibid.

[86] E. Bardasi and M. Francesconi, *The Impact of Atypical Employment on Individual Wellbeing: Evidence from a Panel of British Workers*, *Social science & medicine,* 58/9, 2004, 1671-88.

[87] J. W. Creswell, *Research Design : Qualitative & Quantitative Approaches*; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1994, xix, 228 p.

[88] J. W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design : Choosing among Five Approaches*,3rd edn.; Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2013, xxi, 448 p. at 8.

phase. Importantly, having two sets of data and linking them back to existing research allows us to improve validity by triangulating the results[89]. In addition, this research contains a detailed step-by-step methodology to improve its reliability and consistency[90]. Demographic data was collected to promote internal consistency, as well provide the necessary reference data for future quantitative research to test the generalisability of the findings. Purposive criterion sampling[91] was used to identify the ten interviewees and the five focus group participants. Two key characteristics: 1) LSO and; 2) Fixed-term employee, were provided to the three unions who agreed to assist with this research, the Australian Education Union (AEU) and the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) who both represent LSOs in VGS and the Independent Education Union (IEU) who represent LSOs in Catholic and independent schools. Sampling based on select criteria was considered appropriate, as the objective of this research is to explore the human experience of fixed-term employment. It was envisaged that the interview sample would be approximately representative[92] of the portion of education delivered by the government and non-government sectors. Unfortunately, this was not achieved due to the limited availability of participants, resulting in interviews only being conducted with LSOs from Catholic schools. This limitation was partially offset as the focus group consisted of mostly LSOs from VGS.

4.1 Interviews

On commencement of the interview, participants were provided with an overview of the process, given a copy of the consent form and given an opportunity to ask any questions. The structured part of the interview consisted of demographic questions and specific questions that introduced the various dimensions of well-being. During the interview,

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[89] Ibid.

[90] Ibid.

[91] J. W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design : Choosing among Five Approaches*,2nd edn.; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2007, xvii, 395 p. A. Bryman, *Social Research Methods*. J. Ritchie, J. Lewis, and G. Elam, *Designing and Selecting Samples*, *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers*, 2003, 77-108.

[92]J. Ritchie, J. Lewis, and G. Elam, *Designing and Selecting Samples*.

participants were asked a series of questions to clarify, explain, explore and challenge the statements they made[93].

4.2 Focus group

The focus group consisted of five participants, three from VGS and two from Catholic schools, selected using the same sampling and recruitment process as the interview phase. At the start of the focus group the participants were given an overview of the process and a copy of the consent form. Prior to group discussion, demographic data was collected via the Participant Questionnaire so that comparisons could be made to interviews. During the hour-long focus group discussion was guided to ensure that a) insecure employment and; b) dimensions of well-being were discussed.

4.3 Phenomenology

Consistent with the phenomenological research design described by John W. Creswell[94] the participant responses were subsequently coded to identify the key themes. As indicated, analysis will be influenced by Clark Moussakas'[95] 'transcendental phenomenological' approach, one which moves through four distinct phases in order to distil the 'essence' of the phenomenon[96]. This form of phenomenology was favoured over 'Realist' or 'Existential' phenomenology because its methodological processes seek to separate the experience of the observer from the observed.
The four phases are: 1) The creation of the '*Epoche'*, a process designed to identify potential researcher bias and separate the experience of the researcher from that of the participant; 2) The process of phenomenological reduction, whereby the participant's experience is presented in textural account that describes the experience in rich, adjective-laden language. In this phase, the concept of 'horizonalisation' is also introduced, requiring the researcher to acknowledge the limitless nature of experiences and to treat them all equally; 3) The process of 'imaginative variation', where the key structural elements of the experience

[93] R. Legard, J. Keegan, and K. Ward, 'In-Depth Interviews', in Jane Ritchie et al. (eds.), ibid.; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 2013.

[94] J. W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design : Choosing among Five Approaches*.

[95] C. Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods*.

[96] A concept derived from the earlier work of philosopher and scientist Edmund Husserl in ibid. A. Bryman, *Social Research Methods*.

are identified and examined from alternate perspectives, roles and functions; and 4) The synthesis of essence and meaning. It is this final inductive phase of the phenomenological process that results in the *"intuitive integration of the fundamental textural and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole"*[97].

In this research, the creation of the '*Epoche*' is a reflexive process and undertaken in recognition that a researcher, no matter how careful, invariably influences the way in which knowledge is constructed[98]. As the author is an employee of IEU, the bracketing out of his experiences[99] was particularly appropriate during the interview and phenomenological reduction phases. Evidence of this is provided for in a methodical and reflexive interview procedure and the presentation of data in the form of excerpts which lend varying degrees of support to the hypothesis that insecure work has a negative impact on well-being.

In this research, this reduction process has been hybridised with Creswell's[100] data analysis procedure, together with the coding steps posited by Renata Tesch's qualitative coding method[101]. The coding process consisted of three stages. First, an initial reading of the transcripts and the annotating of codes in the margins to reflect participants' experiences. Second, the organisation and the consolidation of these codes in a coding book (Appendix 2). The final phase of the coding was the re-examination of all transcripts and the re-coding of their content in a manner consistent with the coding book. The coding book has been converted into a thematic network (Figure 3) to depict how the themes and sub-themes of the participant's experience interact with various dimensions of well-being.

In this research, the power imbalance between the researcher and participant is particularly evident in relation to the control of knowledge. All reasonable efforts were undertaken to ensure that the research was conducted in an ethical manner. Numerous safe-guards were used to protect the well-being of participants; steps were taken to minimise the power imbalances; and strategies were implemented to avoid potential conflicts of interest.

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[97] C. Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods* at 100.

[98] M. Guillemin and L. Gillam, *Ethics, Reflexivity, and "Ethically Important Moments" in Research*, Qualitative inquiry, 10/2, 2004, 261-80.

[99] The author's role at the IEU has on occasion required him to represent fixed-term employees who are dissatisfied with their employment status.

[100] J. W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design : Choosing among Five Approaches.*

[101] Ibid.

This research elicited many responses from employees that could be considered critical of their employer and, if attributed to them in an identifiable way, could have a significant adverse impact upon their re-employment. To protect against this both the interviews and the focus group were conducted offsite to reduce the probability of participants being identified by their employer during the data gathering stage. The reporting stage was just as critical in relation to the protection of identity, it is for this reason that the report uses pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the participants and does not link those pseudonyms to data that could subsequently be used to identify them.

Very early in the design of this research it also became evident that a potential conflict of interest could arises between an IEU member participant and the author in his capacity as an employee of the IEU. As an organiser, it is part of his role to represent the interests of members in a specific group of schools. To avoid this potential conflict, the participant identification process was designed to ensure that participants were not nominated from the author's allocation of schools. Further to this, undertakings were given that in the event a conflict arose the IEU would, if requested, appoint an alternate representative for the participant.

5. Results

From the data collected by this research it is evident that each participant's experience of fixed-term employment is different and that these differences can be divided into two distinct categories. The first difference is that of the participant's 'dominant experience'[102]. The second difference is the 'phenomenological experience', which describes the degree of interaction that their experience of fixed-term employment has had on various dimensions of well-being. The results section will firstly provide a textural account of five of the participants' dominant experiences. In line with the eudaimonic definition of well-being, these experiences have been selected because highlight the impacts of insecure employment on worth, respect, relationships and agency. This will then be followed by a summary of the participant collective phenomenological experience as represented in a thematic network[103]. Finally, before moving

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[102] The dominant experience is defined as the part of the participant's narrative to which they have attributed the most relevance or emphasised in the most detail.

[103] J. Attride-Stirling, *Thematic Networks: An Analytic Tool for Qualitative Research*, *Qualitative research,* 1/3, 2001, 385-405.

to the textural accounts of the dominant experiences, a summary of demographic information is provided to contextualise the participants.

5.1 Summary Table of Demographics – Interviews

Figure 1

5.1 Summary table of demographics – Interviews — Figure 1

Age	Gender	Relationship Status	Dependents	Highest Qualification	Education Sector	Type of School	Employment Method	Years Employed Current	Years as Ed. Support	Employment Fraction	Avg. Hours per Week	Job Class	Avg. Weekly Wages* Gross
59	Female	Partnered	0	Cert III	Catholic	Primary	Fixed-term 12 months	8	8	.52	20	Cat B ES2.2	$498.47
47	Female	Partnered	1	Cert III	Catholic	Secondary	Fixed-term 12 months	1.5	1.5	.6	22.8	Cat B ES2.1	$553.99
58	Female	Single	0	Cert IV	Catholic	Primary	Fixed-term 12 months	15	13	.85	32.5	Cat B ES2.1	$784.21
51	Female	Partnered	2	Cert III	Catholic	Primary	Fixed-term 12 months	11	15	.52	20	Cat B ES2.1	$480.12
47	Female	Partnered	3	Cert III	Catholic	Primary	Fixed-term 12 months	12	12	.43	16.5	Cat B ES2.1	$397.02
62	Female	Single	0	Cert IV	Catholic	Secondary	Fixed-term 12 months	9	15	.8	30.4	Cat B ES2.3	$785.34
25	Male	Partnered	0	Cert III	Catholic	Primary	Fixed-term 12 months	7	7	.39	15	Cat B ES2.1	$360.09
56	Female	Partnered	2	Cert IV	Catholic	Primary	Fixed-term 12 months	12	12	.52	20	Cat B ES3.5	$588.70
54	Female	Partnered	0	Cert IV	Catholic	Secondary	Fixed-term 12 months	8	9	.8	30.4	Cat B ES2.3	$785.34
50	Female	Partnered	2	Cert IV	Catholic	Secondary	Fixed-term 12 months	5	8	.8	30.4	Cat B ES2.4	$808.68

* Average weekly wages calculation = (annual salary as per classification / 52.18) x employment fraction

* Average weekly wages calculation = (annual salary as per classification / 52.18) x employment fraction

5.2 Summary Table of Demographics – Focus Group

Figure 2

5.2 Summary table of demographics – Focus group — Figure 2

Age	Gender	Relationship Status	Dependents	Highest Qualification	Education Sector	Type of School	Employment Method	Years Employed Current	Years as Education Support	Employment Fraction	Avg. Hours per Week	Job Class	Avg. Weekly Wages* Gross
31	Female	Single	0	Cert IV	VGS	Primary/Secondary	Fixed-term 24 months	2	2	.8	30.6	ES 1-2	$642.62
34	Female	Partnered	2	Diploma	VGS	Primary	Fixed-term 7 years	1	3	.63	24	ES 1-3	$527.91
53	Female	Partnered	3	Secondary School	VGS	Primary	Fixed-term 7 years	2	3	.79	30	ES 1-3	$661.99
53	Female	Partnered	3	Secondary School	Catholic	Primary	Fixed-term 12 months	12	12	.42	16	Cat B ES2.3	$412.31
64	Female	Single	0	Secondary School	Catholic	Primary	Fixed-term 12 months	8	8	.79	30	Cat B ES2.3	$775.53

* Average weekly wages calculation = (minimum classification annual salary / 52.18) x employment fraction

* Average weekly wages calculation = (minimum classification annual salary / 52.18) x employment fraction

5.3. Textural Account of Dominant Experience

Consistent with transcendental phenomenology, the following textural account describes the experiential and structural elements of the phenomena such as, how it actually feels to be financially insecure. Importantly, it respects the language of each participant and is designed to promote understanding and empathy with those who have experienced the impacts of insecure work. Furthermore, it reminds us that social science research is more than the analysis of quantitative data, it is an encounter with real people and their experiences.

Maria

Maria's experience is a conflicted one; she has concerns, but doesn't have the confidence to raise them and while personally satisfied with her job, she was not satisfied with the amount of support the children she worked with were receiving. Ultimately, there is a sense that she does not feel valued for her contribution:

> …everything ties into that feeling of not feeling worth anything, you know the PDs and not being involved in PSGs [planning support groups]; all that sort of thing just makes us feel like we're babysitters.

Maria's tone of voice reflects the frustration she feels and the examples she articulates reinforce the depth of her professional knowledge and the considered nature of her commentary.

Christine

Having worked in both the Catholic and government sectors, as well as both primary and secondary settings Christine has a well-developed understanding of what it takes to be a successful LSO. Christine loves her job and values the close relationship between LSOs and students; in her words, *"by their success, you've got success".* Christine has faced numerous challenges during her time as an LSO, but her narrative is punctuated by the loss of her contract and reduction in hours five years ago.

> "It gets very nasty at the end … five, six years ago the CEO said we had too many people here, and it had to be a cull. I was five days. I lost a day. Two people lost their jobs. We all had to interview…It was just nasty. You couldn't really talk to people… People…taking sides; created divisions, although we tried not to. It just wasn't nice. We supported

each other, but it wasn't to the full extent of what the support was before all this nasty business was going on because we all had to go for our jobs.

[It made me feel] Yuk. I'm not a good person in that situation. I lost a day, and …this is my income. I haven't got a partner who we supplement incomes like the others… I live on what I've got."

Though generally positive throughout the interview, Christine exhibited a sense of lingering trauma from the contract non-renewal process. In the colloquial tradition of understatement, the term *'yuk'* was perfectly used to emphasis the offensive nature of the process and the results that she had experienced.

Matthew

Matthew has been working as a LSO for seven years and is studying to be a teacher. He gets joy from *"seeing the children succeed"* and satisfaction from his *"interactions with his co-workers"*. Matthew recognised that seeing so many of his colleagues not have their contracts renewed has impacted upon him.

...last year was particularly hard…the boss just said to us, we're not going to be able to employ all of you. All the LSOs were in the room and they were just looking around at each other. It was just sort of a heart-dropping moment … I just felt uneasy and anxious...putting my union hat on for a minute. We lost about seven fixed-term support staff and there was some people with families, I found that very hard to take, to see them leave with their children and partners. I found that harder on me than my own issues because I don't have any dependents or anything or I didn't have a partner at that time….

As he recounted the details of these events, there was a tension in his voice accompanied by an air of disappointment and sense of helplessness.

Debra

Debra *"love[s] the variety"* of her job as she works both in the classroom with children and as a Library Technician. What she is less thrilled about is the low wage she is paid for the hours she works combined with the insecurity of not knowing whether she'll be employed from one year to the next.

> Well, yeah, I didn't buy myself a home for about three or four years specifically for that reason … I decided in the end just to take the plunge….What do you do? If it happens, it happens. If it means I've got to leave this place, and get a full-time job at a supermarket, that's what I've got to do…. It's more the insecurity of not knowing that you have a job from year to year. You know, I just put myself into a 20 year loan and to think every year, jeeze, where do I go now? It's more well, if I don't get the job or don't get the hours, I'd have to then start looking, which just puts pressure on your private life.

Debra was clearly apprehensive at the start of interview, reinforced by the shortness of her answers and her closed body language. While this excerpt describes her dominant experience, Debra repeatedly referred to the financial strain that she attributed to her work being lowly paid.

Helen

Helen loves her work with the students and enjoys the challenges presented by specialising in Maths support. Ironically, the work value of this specialist knowledge is not recognised by her employer; in fact her employer reduced her classification level causing her significant distress.

> ...they decided that to make it all equitable, that all the learning support officers should be a level 3 so they downgraded me…to say that we're all the same is ludicrous because we all bring different skills.…I was told if you don't sign it, you don't have a job, so it doesn't really leave much for negotiation…. That caused a lot of stress because I don't think I signed the contract and I didn't know whether I had a job over the whole Christmas break. I was distressed. I was crying. It was a terrible time, the uncertainty of it all …I just felt a bit rejected, actually,…worthless.

Unfortunately, Helen's experience has left her feeling that her contribution to the school is not recognised or valued. The inflection in her voice that accompanied her use of the term 'ludicrous' demonstrates that to this day she resents this experience and views it as an injustice

5.4. Thematic Network

Figure 3

5.4 Thematic network   Figure 3
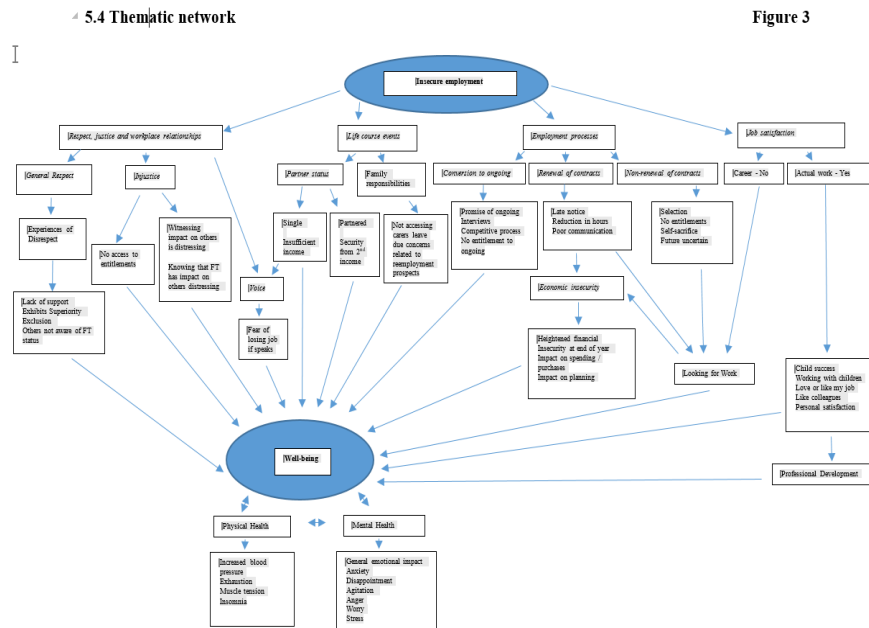
6. Discussion

Considering the wealth of data gathered it would be impossible to examine each participant's experience of insecure employment individually, therefore the discussion of results will be managed in the following manner. First, commentary will be provided on two dominant experiences to contextualise them within the broader phenomenon of insecure employment and eudaimonic well-being. Second, select examples will be presented from the data depicted in the thematic network (Figure 3), highlighting how the various themes and sub-themes are organised. To conclude, Moustakas' process of 'imaginative variation' will be applied to one of the sub-themes, allowing consideration of the experience from the alternate perspectives of different actors. It is posited that this multi-faceted approach will allow for the exploration and interpretation of participant experiences.

6.1 Contextualising Dominant Experiences

Debra's and Matthew's dominant experiences have been selected for analysis as they reflect key themes pertaining to insecure work and eudaimonic multidimensional well-being. Debra's experience exhibits significant examples of financial insecurity, a theme reflected by the rise and fall of the SER in the Australian narrative, while Matthew's experience relates to the impact that insecure work has upon others, a concept fundamental to eudaimonic well-being.

Debra delayed her decision to purchase a home for four years after separating from her husband because she felt financially insecure. This is significant, as home ownership has been and continues to be part of 'the Australian dream'. The status and security provided by home ownership is recognised by Castles[104] as part of the 'working man's welfare state' playing a dual role of financial investment and protection against the risk of homelessness. In Debra's case, home-ownership can be defined as a risk towards her well-being for two reasons: one, because Debra's employment is insecure and she acknowledges that there is no *"knowing that you have a job from year to year"*; and two, she is a single woman over the age of 50 in part-time employment. In Debra's case, the SER that guaranteed employment security and a living wage substantial enough to afford home ownership does not exist. It is also tangible to propose that her occupation has not been a beneficiary of centralised wage fixing and the Award system that created the 'Harvesterman'[105] as those who work as LSOs are predominately part-time, insecurely employed and female. It is this fact that gives rise to the proposition that insecure employment in this occupation is gendered and therefore has unequal impact upon women.

The impacts of Debra's experience upon her well-being is further compounded by her age and the variability of her part-time hours. In her words *"I just put myself into a 20 year loan and to think every year, jeeze, where do I go now?… the whole thing of not being an ongoing employee is struggling to realize that you… may not have the hours the following year. You may not even have a job"*. For Debra this means that exposure to the risks of unemployment or under-employment will continue well past her retirement age, even though she works another job on the weekends.

Matthew's dominant experience occurred when seven of his colleagues did not have their contracts renewed. This experience impacted on

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[104] F. Castles, *The Wage Earners Welfare State Revisited*.
[105] J. Buchanan et al., 'Beyond Flexibility: Skills and Work in the Future', (Sydney: NSW Board of Vocational Education and Training, 2000).

Matthew's well-being in two ways. First, it impacted on him directly by making him feel *"uneasy and anxious"* when he and his colleagues were notified by the employer that many of them would not be required the following year. Matthew said he found this process distressing because "*there was some people with families*" who had lost their jobs and while it was possible that he would not have his own contract renewed, he was more concerned about the impact that the contract nonrenewal would have on others. This reinforces the proposition that not only is well-being multidimensional, but it is also eudaimonic[106]. As proposed by Ryff in her definition of PWB, well-being is influenced by relationships with others and in Matthew's experience it was the knowledge that his colleagues were insecure in their employment and that it may have negative flow-on effects for their families as well *"that was particularly hard"* for him.

Matthew's dominant experience is pertinent because it shows us that well-being cannot be conflated with individual happiness. It is also important because employment insecurity relates to another dimension identified by Ryff's PWB, mastery of one's environment. The second impact on Matthew was a reduction in hours of employment resulting from the contract renewal/non-renewal process. He recalls *"We just got hours cut back and at the end of every year, we get the same old sort of talk from the boss, you know; less money, less employment. It wasn't a massive surprise. It's just disappointing that it still happened".* In this example, Matthew's feelings of 'disappointment' relate to his inability to exercise control over his income. Effectively, his employment insecurity translates to financial insecurity which directly impacts upon his well-being by limiting his capacity to master his environment.

6.2 Relationships within the Thematic Network (Figure 3)

The coding process, essential for the 'horizonalisation' and organization of the data, did not provide any information about the nature of the interactions between insecure employment and its various impacts upon the dimensions of well-being. Therefore, a thematic network[107] has been devised to illustrate the interaction between the themes and sub-themes, and to indicate the sequence and direction of influence within the relationships. It is important to note that this network proposes

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[106]R. M. Ryan and E. L. Deci, *On Happiness and Human Potentials: A Review of Research on Hedonic and Eudaimonic Well-Being.*

[107] J. Attride-Stirling, *Thematic Networks: An Analytic Tool for Qualitative Research.*

plausible[108], not causal, relationships between the themes, sub-themes and states of well-being it illustrates.

6.3 Employment Processes – Renewal of Contracts

Figure 4 is a depiction of the impact of insecure work on well-being. It identifies that insecure work has a number of specific employment processes associated with it[109]. One process is the renewal of fixed-term contracts, which occurs at the end of every year. LSOs articulated that they find this process difficult for several reasons including: late notice, the possible reduction in hours of employment, and poor communication. Debra, Susan, Leanne, Christine and Lisa have all experienced this first hand and it is Lisa's account that exhibits a number of the key characteristics associated with this renewal process.

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[108] M. B. Miles and A. M. Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook.*
[109] Figure 4 is an excerpt from the *Thematic network.*

Figure 4

Figure 4.
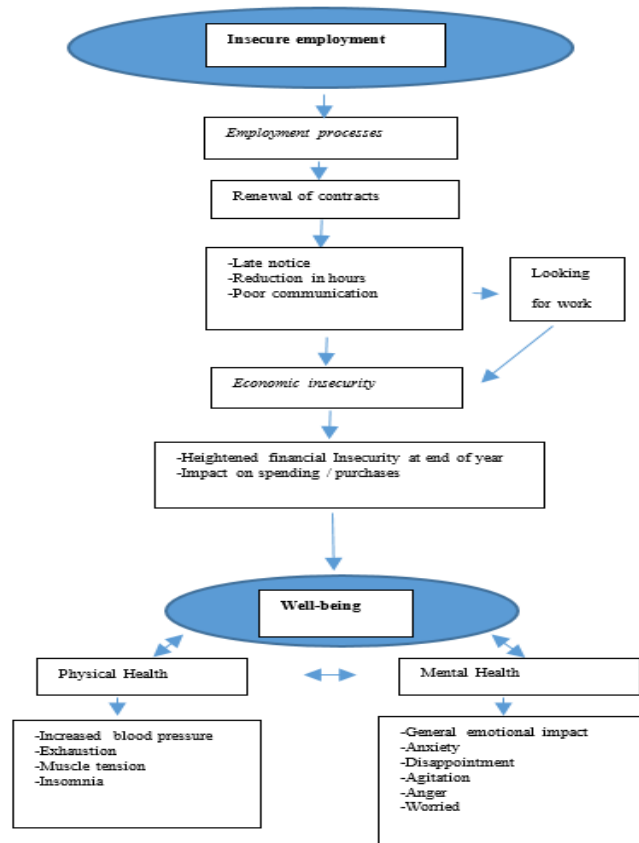
Lisa

> Yeah, it puts a lot of worry on you for a few months because funding doesn't come through usually until the end of the year, sometimes early January. So it's not until the last minute quite often that you know whether or not you're employed. So from October/November particularly in the last few years …you think do I look for something else or what do I do? I love my job. I don't want to not work there, but those questions continue to pop up.

The thematic network uses the broader theme heading of 'economic insecurity' to represent the sub-themes that arise out of the contract renewal process. The experience of financial insecurity is prevalent amongst the LSOs who participated in this research, especially when their contracts near their expiry date. Debra's case of delayed home ownership is the most extreme example but Susan, Matthew, Julie, Leanne and Christine all presented examples of where the uncertainty associated with their employment had directly impacted upon their spending or purchasing decisions.

Matthew

> It's …Christmas time… You know you're not going to buy a jumper or that shirt, you're just going to get your Christmas presents because money's a bit tight.

Susan

> So, you don't buy those little luxuries until you know you're safe. It does affect your decision making if you've got work or not, that's for sure.

Leanne

> Furniture or not going on holiday…because things have to be booked in advance …you don't know whether or not… come after Christmas, you're going to have a job.

Christine

> You sort of go into what I term depression mode so you don't spend as much money. You maybe start stocking up on specials just in case you haven't got any money…. You buy extra soap or deodorant, or toilet paper, things like that.

While it is normal for people to decide not to make a significant purchase because they simply cannot afford it, this is not so in this example. The decision not to make a purchase in the case of Matthew or Susan is directly linked to their fear of not being able to afford it if their contract were not renewed. In Christine's case, the motivation to purchase sale items is an attempt to minimise the potential impacts of unemployment. In addition to 'mastery of environment', Ryff's definition of PWB also includes 'autonomy'. Therefore, it is proposed that the financial insecurity resulting from insecure work limits the autonomous decision-making of an individual and consequently impinges upon their sense of well-being. The impact upon autonomy manifests itself by not only restricting the individual's ability to plan for the future but also their family's ability. Leanne and Maria expressed that this was the case, with Maria stating that *"every year, you can't plan holidays…it's financially difficult on contract"*. Finally, our thematic map links well-being to physical and mental health in a two-way relationship to reflect that in some experiences the impact upon well-being results in poorer mental health, as in Julie's case, where she reported increased levels of anxiety around the time of contract renewal.

All three of the 'employment processes' sub-themes: 1) conversion to ongoing; 2) renewal of contracts; and 3) non-renewal of contracts, presented distinct and memorable experiences for most participants. It is proposed that these experiences can be summarized as generally having a negative impact on the well-being of those subjected to them.

6.4 Employment Processes – Conversion to Ongoing

Ironically, even the process of converting employees from fixed-term to ongoing present as a negative experience when there is a lack of process surrounding the appointment. In Lisa's case, a colleague with fewer years of experience was converted to ongoing without a transparent process, continually leaving Lisa to ask herself *"Have I done something not right, am I not performing?"* Sharon recalled a situation where relationships between her colleagues had become strained because of a promised ongoing vacancy. As she described *"the school's been saying oh, yeah, we're going to have an ongoing position, but nothing's happened."*

6.5 Employment Processes – Non-renewal

The non-renewal process has presented the most pronounced impact upon well-being and it does so in three distinct ways. First, LSOs are

presented with a scenario in which they are required to compete or qualify for a reduced number of positions. Second, they might not be successful and find themselves without work and without redundancy entitlements. Third, even if successful, they are vicariously traumatised by witnessing the impacts of non-renewal on their unsuccessful colleagues.

For both Susan and Matthew, the requirement to compete for their own position was both stressful and disruptive. Susan described her experience as *"Just that churning; it's almost like going for a job interview again even though you know everyone and it's sort of sweaty palms; all that anxiety".* Matthew's experience was not dissimilar, he recalled that it was *"particularly nerve-wracking because I knew I was right around the cut-off like either I won't get it or I will. …I was very nervous, butterflies in the stomach and all that."*

The second, and most severe, potential impact of the process is non-renewal. Christine described the process as *"just horrible"* and recounted that even though the employer found her alternate employment her income was reduced, which has had a lasting effect. As the research sample was limited to current employees it is difficult to comment further on the actual impacts of non-renewal of LSOs. However, LSOs who did not have their contract renewed could face two additional barriers to employment. One, it is unlikely that they would have receive a redundancy payment (to minimise the immediate risks associated with loss of income) and two, the age of the employee, which is likely to be over 45[110] making it more difficult for them to find employment.

Finally, the third impact of non-renewal is the effect it has on those who remain. Lisa described it as *"… horrible… It is distressing to see good staff not be reemployed."* In Susan's example she described the impacts with particular reference to feelings of guilt, *"We all felt just terribly guilty… because… I've got a job and she hasn't and it's a little bit cut-throat …you don't like to see people upset."* The emotional impacts are clearly long-lasting, with Lisa's incident occurring six years ago. In addition, the process amplifies the prevalent feelings of uncertainty and financial insecurity that occur at contract renewal time.

6.6 Respect, Justice and Workplace Relationships

The representation of 'Respect, justice and workplace relationships" in Figure 3 is an interesting example as it reflects a series of responses that are partially contradictory. When participants were asked about whether

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[110] The average age of participants in this research was 49.6 years.

or not they felt respected by their colleagues, they invariably responded 'yes'. However, after further inquiry it became evident that many of them had experienced quite significant feelings of not being respected. When asked to illustrate the instances of disrespect, numerous examples were provided and these were consequently condensed into the following sub-themes: (1) lack of support; (2) exhibits superiority; (3) exclusion; (4) no awareness of fixed-term status.

The following example, provided by Christine, highlights what types of interactions makes her feel respected:

> We work as a team. She asks for my ideas. I give them. She includes me, she asks my opinions of reports; what do you think about this? What do you think about this class? This is what I'm going to do. She keeps me up-to-date with what she's going to do.

Conversely, Susan provided us with an example of lack of support:

> Sometimes, I find it … frustrating…. When teachers know about our students but work isn't always set for them. They don't always think about our kids.

Unfortunately, both Matthew and Debra have experienced quite disrespectful treatment from teachers. Matthew recalled that:

> He kind of appeared somewhat elitist like what he says is gospel….Whatever my opinions or my thoughts were, they were still relevant.

In Debra's experience, the teacher had said to her:

> You don't know what you're talking about. You don't have the experience. I've got a certificate. She threw all those things at me and I said okay and let it go. I was belittled. It didn't make me feel very good.

Feelings of 'exclusion' and 'lack of support' from other employees are reasonably common problems associated with insecure work[111], yet this does not help us to understand the reasons behind the two examples of assumed superiority by teachers towards LSOs.

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[111] Australian Council of Trade Unions *Lives on Hold: Unlocking the Potential of Australia's Workforce-the Report of the Independent Inquiry into Insecure Work in Australia*,

6.7 Voice

The Independent Inquiry[112] identified '*lack of voice at work on wages, conditions and work organisation*' as a significant part of the experience of insecure workers. This research found a mixed response from participants on this dimension, with some LSOs insisting that their employment status had no bearing on whether they felt comfortable raising issues in the workplace. Christine, Debra, Maria and Helen expressed that they did feel unable to speak up for fear of jeopardising their contract renewal. For Christine and Debra their feelings were exacerbated because both are single and consequently do not have an alternate source of income.

Debra's experience reflects her inability to speak up about the organisation of her work and also a broader feeling of collective disempowerment. She recounted how she often says:

> If I was permanently on staff… I'd actually have a say and you'd actually listen to me. I suppose we've grown to accept that we're just weak, that we're nothing much.

Christine feels that her contract renewal is conditional upon her not speaking up, as she puts it *"I want my job. It's better to shut your mouth and keep my job"*. Christine's lack of voice has prevented her from dealing with issues in her workplace which subsequently had a negative impact on her physical and mental health.

In her words*:*

> You don't sleep because you're thinking about it all night and then you drop into an exhaust sleep for couple of hours and you're up and running for the next day. Two or three days of that you can't do it, but one or two you're right; three, four, you don't. Generally, by then you fall into an exhausted heap.

While Helen did not elaborate on how she felt as a result of not speaking up, she did make it clear what she believes the consequences of speaking up would be:

> I just feel as though if I do say anything else, I'm considered a trouble maker and therefore I'd be out the door.

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[112] Ibid.

Maria eventually summoned the courage to speak up but in her mind this still came at a significant cost:

> It wasn't easy, no. It wasn't easy and nobody asked me about my well-being and how I felt about it and how stressed I was.

6.8. Life Course Events and Gender

Life course events, and in particular when a participant's partner status is 'single' (Figure 3), appears to have a negative impact on the willingness of an employee to speak up. Being 'partnered' appears to have a positive influence on well-being, with some LSOs like Sharon expressing that: *"I don't worry … because I've got a husband who's got a pretty good job, so I'm just sort of like the top up wages doing what I want to do for personal satisfaction."* Again, this raises interesting questions about the replacement of the 'male breadwinner' model by a 'one and a half' or 'two' income model. These new normative income models are confirmed by Leanne, who makes it plain: *"Whether your kids are old or not, you still got bills and everything else and there's no way my husband and I could live on one wage."* Helen acknowledged that LSOs not in relationships feel this insecurity more acutely: *"Well, I'm lucky I'm married and my husband works, but if I was a single mother like a couple of my single friends, it's not a great wage to survive on really."*

While only one LSO indicated that their fixed-term status had impacted upon their ability to balance work and 'family responsibilities' it must be acknowledged that women still bear a disproportionate share of caring responsibilities and that is statistically evidenced by the Australian Work Life Index data[113]. The lack of evidence of this impact upon family or caring responsibilities may exist because in a school environment it is more likely that both employee and employer understand the need to balance work and care[114]. Alternatively, it could exist because the age demographic of participants means that most LSOs have completed the most intensive phase of caring for children, so no longer feel as conflicted about balancing work and family. This said, Leanne was the exception, providing us with a clear example of how caring obligations can

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[113] B. Pocock, N. Skinner, and P. Williams, *Time Bomb: Work, Rest and Play in Australia Today*.

[114] B. Pocock, R. Prosser, and K. Bridge, *The Return of 'Labour-as-Commodity'? The Experience of Casual Work in Australia*, B. Pocock, N. Skinner, and P. Williams, *Time Bomb: Work, Rest and Play in Australia Today*.

exacerbate feelings of employment insecurity and potentially result in the non-renewal of a contract:

> My daughter got eczema really bad, so she had to do some sort of testing which was over a week and I had to go and see the boss and say look, I'm sorry, but I need every second day off, and you do worry. You go okay, is he keeping a check with how many days you take off? Scared that he's going to say no and scared he's going to think oh jeeze, she's had a couple of days off. Maybe we won't have her next year.

It is possible that the absence of experiences that reflect negative impacts of insecure work on family responsibilities may have arisen out of an unintended sample bias as no interviews were conducted with LSOs who had caring responsibilities for children younger than secondary school age.

6.9 Phenomenology – Imaginative Variation

The discussion of the various themes and sub-themes reflects Moustakas' reduction process by ensuring that *"Throughout, there is an interweaving of person, conscious experience, and phenomenon"*[115]. In addition to the examination undertaken up to this point, a final process of 'imaginative variation' will be applied to the sub-theme of the employment processes – 'no entitlement to ongoing'– before examining the results of the focus group and moving on to the conclusions of this research. The purpose of imaginative variation is to examine a theme from different perspectives with regard to the roles and functions of the actors. To illustrate this, an imaginative variation of fixed-term employment has been applied from the view points of the employee, the employer and the union.

6.9.1 Employee

When asked about the appropriateness of using fixed-term employment, LSOs generally responded that it wasn't desirable but invariably qualified that statement in one of two ways: (1) the position was accepted in the knowledge it was fixed-term; and (2) the employer receives variable funding for students with disabilities. When asked about the use of fixed-term Matthew responded negatively but qualified it with, *"I just try to just accept it; like I signed the contract. I'm aware it's a fixed-term."* The second qualification pertains to a belief that because funding for students with

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[115] C. Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods* at 96.

disability is variable then it is reasonable for their employment to be treated in a similar fashion. As Susan put it, *"I feel a bit if you don't have work, that's the nature of the beast because you can't have work without students."*

6.9.2 Employer

Employers use a mixture of employment methods to meet the variable demands of service provision. In the Catholic system the employer is required to state the reason for using fixed-term employment in the letter of offer they provide to all fixed-term employees[116] . Commonly, these letters state that fixed-term employment is because funding has been provided for a 'specific project'. It is conceivable that the employer benefits from using this mode of employment in the following ways: greater flexibility; no redundancy payments in the event of redundancies; no administrative on-costs associated with facilitating paid and unpaid parental leave; the ability to not re-engage employees they are not satisfied with; and greater employee compliance through fear of contract non renewal.

6.9.3 Union

Put simply, the IEU, AEU and CPSU believe that variable disability funding is not a legitimate reason for engaging the vast majority of LSOs on a fixed-term basis. The unions propose that, regardless of the mode of employment, insecure work is undesirable and that employees have a right to promote the use of ongoing employment to protect against the risk of contract non renewal[117].

This process of imaginative variation presents three very different perspectives that highlight a number of the factors that must be considered when discussing policy implications.

6.10 Focus group

The focus group consisted of Sarah, Tracey and Rebecca from VGS, and Margret and Robyn from Catholic schools. The cross sectoral participation allows for the experiences of LSOs in government and

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[116] Fair Work Australia ,*Victorian Catholic Multi-Enterprise Agreement,* 2013, Melbourne, Commonwealth Government Printer
[117] IEU Victoria Tasmania *Ieu Submission* Melbourne, Australia, 2016

Catholic schools to be compared and contrasted. There were many similarities between the experiences and it was roundly acknowledged that working with children was the most satisfying aspect of their work. Robyn reports the pleasure she receives from her students simply saying *"bye Robyn, have a nice weekend"*. This sense of appreciation was quickly contrasted by Tracey, *"So I get appreciation from the students. I don't get appreciation from our Principal team."* The participants provided a number of examples to evidence the lack of appreciation, respect and support, including: exclusion from staff meetings because they are held after LSOs finish work; no scheduled meetings for LSOs to discuss their work; limited access to Professional Development (PD) even if it is available; having to pay for their own PD; and not being replaced when they take extended leave.

Interestingly, the discussion about the lack of opportunities to meet at work to discuss professional matters diverged into a discussion about what the respective employers would think about the participants being involved in the research. The contributions ranged from Tracey's schools where LSOs were encouraged to participate to Margaret's schools where she felt *"if [her] principal knew that [she] was here… it wouldn't go down well."* Generally, it was the view of participants that the idea of LSOs getting together to discuss their experiences would be viewed negatively by their employers and have a 'definite' impact on the renewal of their fixed-term contracts.

The discourse about the length of fixed-term contracts highlighted a significant dichotomy between the experience of LSOs in VGS and those in Catholic schools. VGS employees Tracey and Rebecca were employed on seven-year fixed-term contracts whereas Catholic school employees Margaret and Robyn where employed on 12 month fixed-term contracts. Robyn stated that she worked with other LSOs in the Catholic system that had been employed on 12 month contracts for 25 years. On hearing this the other participants voiced their disapproval by exclaiming *"that's terrible"* and *"that's abuse"*. Financial security was discussed in the context of not being able to purchase a home, Sarah, on year-to-year contracts, offered her situation as an example to the group: *"what happens if I don't have job next year? What am I going to do? How am I going to pay the mortgage especially me being on my own? I don't have a partner to rely on to pay the mortgage if I don't have a position next year."* Again, this example serves as further evidence that the intersection between insecure work and the 'one and a half' or 'two' income model impacts upon LSOs in both government and non-government schools.

The group discussed ongoing employment compared to fixed-term employment with participants from both sectors remarking that they felt that employers could employ LSOs as ongoing but were choosing not to. There was unanimous agreement amongst participants about this and a noticeable degree of resentment about the use of fixed-term contracts, as it was seen to have been a reflection on the real value given to the work of LSOs in general. This was again re-examined towards the end of the focus group; all agreed that employment should be ongoing. Sarah used her previous work experience in retail to pose the question: "*if a retail store can provide ongoing employment, why can't a school?*" Participants felt that this should be achievable especially considering the benefits that stability and continuity have for the children they support.

The group was also concerned about the process of having to re-apply and compete for positions that they were already working in. They described having to re-interview every year as "*horrible*" and "*unfair*". Before concluding, the group then briefly discussed the amount they were paid for the work that they do. There was furious and emphatic agreement that their work is undervalued yet still deeply satisfying. Regardless of the sector, it was evident that LSOs often felt excluded and marginalised in their workplaces, and attributed much of the lack of respect or appreciation they encounter to their insecure employment status, reflecting the traditional understanding that if employers value someone's work, they give them a secure job.

7. Conclusion

Through the application of a combined qualitative method based upon transcendental phenomenology, this research has contributed to the collective understanding of insecure employment and its consequences. It provides a rich account of the human experience of insecure employment and demonstrates the impacts of this phenomenon on eudaimonic multidimensional well-being. The approach has been transparent and methodical, from the creation of *'Epoche'*, as a reflexive process to bracket out researcher bias, to the application of validity tests, exemplified by the triangulation interview data, focus group data and the literature [118].

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[118] J. W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design : Choosing among Five Approaches*.

7.1 The Essence of the Phenomenon

Consistent with the final phase of Moustakas' transcendental approach the phenomenon of insecure work as experienced by LSOs, has been distilled to its very essence:

> At best, it presents as an inconvenience, impacting on dimensions of well-being like job satisfaction in an otherwise rewarding occupation. At worst, it is a source of ongoing disruption that accentuates financial insecurity and reduces autonomy, control of one's environment and ultimately human agency.

The impacts of insecure work upon the well-being of LSOs are many and varied. This research presents multiple examples of the emotional distress associated with employment processes experienced by Christine, Debra, Matthew, Lisa and Helen. Through the accounts of Lisa, Matthew, Susan, Leanne and Christine it is also confirmed that insecure employment has an impact upon financial security. Furthermore, the testimony of Susan, Matthew, Debra, Helen, Christine and Maria confirm that it is reasonable to associate insecure employment with feelings of disempowerment and disrespect. This research, like all research, has limitations, in this case that the sample size is small, restricting the generalisability of the results. The combined interview and focus group sample also contained a disproportionate number of LSOs from Catholic schools compared to VGSs and it did not contain any LSOs working in independent schools. Researchers who take a positivist approach may also express concern regarding the fact that participants have self-reported the impacts insecure employment has had upon their well-being.

So after the in-depth examination of such a complex phenomenon can it be concluded that insecure work is a 'wicked'[119] problem without solution? The answer to this question is that no problem should ever be considered without solution and that with careful analysis and thoughtful consideration appropriate policies can be developed.

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[119] A wicked problem is both difficult to define and hard to solve. Often possible solutions to this type of problem generate additional unintended problems. C. Althaus, P. Bridgman, and G. Davis, *The Australian Policy Handbook*,5th edn.; Crows Nest, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin, 2013, xii, 296 p.

7.2 Industrial and Employment Policy Implications

Macro policy solutions to insecure employment such as 'flexsecurity'[120] or Transitional Labour Markets[121] have been proposed, however due to the scope of this project they cannot be adequately examined here. Regardless of the policy being proposed in response to the phenomenon, it must be consistent with the Australian narrative of work and welfare, and acknowledge the changes that have affected the nature of work in Australia since the demise of the 'wage earners' welfare state'[122]. Additionally, new policies must also respond to the challenges of maintaining balance at the work-care interface[123] and to the introduction of new technologies[124].

Unfortunately, the visionary transformation required to see the implementation of a macro policy such as a Transitional Labour Market is unlikely to occur in the current Federal political climate as this type of policy proposal would require significant investment and cooperation between the myriad political parties, particularly in the Senate. Pragmatically, it is the pursuit of micro policy initiatives through enterprise bargaining agreements (EBA) that present the most achievable and timely solution to minimise the impacts of insecure work on LSOs. Informed by the process of imaginative variation it is reasonable to accept that employers need to utilise a mix of employment methods, including fixed-term and casual employment, to provide services commensurate with demand. However, to ignore the degree of insecurity currently experienced by LSOs is to ignore that the risk, once borne by the employers, has been shifted unfairly onto the shoulders of the employee.

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[120] J. Allebone, 'Fexibility with Security. Driving a New Compact Downunder. ', *Social Polciy Working Paper No 11* (Melbourne, Victoria: The Centre for Public Policy and Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2010), 19, G. Belchamber, 'Flexicurity: What Is It Can It Work Down Under?', (Australian Council of Trade Unions 2009), 26.

[121] G. Schmid and B. Gazier, 'The Dynamics of Full Employment Social Integration through Transitional Labour Markets', *Labour Markets & Employment Policy* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2002), 1 online resource (464 p.), G. Schmid, *Full Employment in Europe : Managing Labour Market Transitions and Risks*; Cheltenham, UK ; Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2008, x, 385 p.

[122] F. Castles, *The Wage Earners Welfare State Revisited*.

[123] B. Pocock, N. Skinner, and P. Williams, *Time Bomb: Work, Rest and Play in Australia Today*.

[124] Australian Council of Trade Unions *Lives on Hold: Unlocking the Potential of Australia's Workforce-the Report of the Independent Inquiry into Insecure Work in Australia*,

To restore the balance, a combination of the following micro policy initiatives could be introduced by employers, with the agreement of the respective unions:

- Review the use of fixed-term employment to ensure that it is being used correctly and as per the relevant industrial instruments (with a view to reducing it to the national average of 7.25%)
- Implement a conversion process from fixed-term to ongoing, based on years of service
- Introduce provisions into EBA that require fixed-term LSOs to be converted to ongoing after 12 months
- Devise fair, transparent and timely processes to manage the renewal or non renewal of fixed-term contracts.

For change to eventuate, further research utilising the themes identified in this research will be needed. Quantitative surveys could be designed to test generalisability and frequency of the experiences identified in this research and used to inform the Agreement-making process. It is the hope of the researchers that these findings, and any future research in this area, adequately recognises the gendered nature of the experience of insecure work for LSOs and has a transformative effect by contributing in some way to an improved life experience.

Finally, a few wise words from Susan about tackling the phenomenon of insecure employment. She believes that: *"Until people start kicking up a fuss and waving the flag, saying this is not good enough…",* LSOs will continue to be employed on fixed-term contracts, a method of insecure employment that this research concludes has negative impacts upon well-being.

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