

Over the impact of Precarity on the Health Status of the Italian Population

*A case study over one of the Social Determinants of Health
and its implications*

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Table of contents

Table of contents	2
List of Tables and Figure.....	3
List of Abbreviations	3
Abstract	4
Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION	5
1.1 Problem statement	5
1.2 Research Focus	6
1.3 Relevance of the research topic	9
Chapter 2. LITERATURE REVIEW	12
2.1 Previous work.....	12
2.2 Literature Gap.....	14
Chapter 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	16
3.1 What is precarious employment?	16
3.2 How does precarious employment affect health status?.....	17
3.3 Theoretical Model.....	20
Chapter 4. RESEARCH METHOD AND DESIGN	22
4.1 Research strategy.....	22
4.2 Research design	22
4.3 Case selection & Background.....	24
4.4 Research method.....	25
Chapter 5. RESULTS	31
5.1 Type of employment, income (in)security and material deprivation.....	31
5.2 Working Environment, Unfair Treatment and Discriminations	33
5.3 Social protections and Labour Unions Representativity.....	35
5.4 Health Outcomes: Stress and Frustration	41
Chapter 6. DISCUSSION	45
6.1 Theoretical discussion	45
6.2 Methodology and limitations.....	47
Chapter 7. CONCLUSIONS	50
7.1 Answer to the research question and confirmation of the hypotheses.....	50
7.2 Policy recommendations.....	53
BIBLIOGRAPHY	56
APPENDICES	65

List of Tables and Figure

Name of the element	Content	Page
Figure 1	New employment agreements per type and age (INPS, 2019)	Pag. 11
Figure 2	Social Determinants of Health framework (Whitehead & Dahlgren, 1991)	Pag. 19
Figure 3	Conceptual Model	Pag. 20
Figure 4	Coding Tree	Pag. 28
Table 1	The Interviewees (age, sex, residence, profession, contractual agreement)	Pag. 25

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Extensive form
CGL	Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (General Italian Confederation of Labour)
CISL	Confederazione Italiana Sindacati dei Lavoratori (Italian Confederation of Labor Unions)
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ILO	International Labor Organization
INAIL	Istituto Nazionale per l'Assicurazione contro gli Infortuni sul Lavoro (National Institute for Insurance against Incidents at Work)
INPS	Istituto Nazionale della Previdenza Sociale (National Institute for Social Security)
NASpI	Nuova prestazione di Assicurazione Sociale per l'Impiego (New Performance of Social Assurance for the Employment)
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
SD	Social Determinants
SDH	Social Determinants of Health
SOFL	Security Opportunity Fairness Life/work division
UIL	Unione Italiana del Lavoro (Italian Union for Labor)
WHO	World Health Organization

Abstract

Non-standard and flexible types of employment are on the rise in developed and developing countries. Their socio-economic limitations (limited income, fluidity and flexibility of societal status, lack of social security protections and exclusion from the welfare state) are highly researched by both academic scholars and policy-makers, but is it also possible to consider them as "unhealthy" forms of employment? This thesis aims to analyse precarity as a Social Determinant of Health through qualitative analysis, that can capture the multidimensionality of this socio-economic phenomenon. The research design through which the analysis will be conducted following both cross-sectional methods, with an in-depth country case-study focus: Italy. Despite an advanced democracy, health care and welfare system, Italy is one of the Southern European countries in which deregulations and liberalizations of the labour market have followed one another over the years, without being accompanied by a reform of the welfare state. The result is an almost complete exclusion of precarious employees from social security benefits and protections. The findings of the research have highlighted how differences in health status, (livelihood and employment) satisfaction and well-being can be drawn following (a) the age of the individual, (b) the sector of employment (public vs. private) and (c) the longevity in the labour market under fixed-term or non-standard types of contracts. Policy recommendations will interest the public and governmental institutions, in particular in their investment strategy, the reform of the welfare state and of those criteria that determine citizens' exclusion or inclusion into the existing juridical framework. Recommendations are also extended to the operations of labour unions which for too long have put aside the interests and the inclusion of non-standard labourers in their trade union struggles, ultimately harming labourers' democratic rights of being politically represented in the economic and political debate.

Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Problem statement

Globalization, societal changes and economic and climate crises had contributed to increasing inequalities between and within countries (McMichael & Beaglehole, 2000). In the last decades, the inequality gap between households has deepened, due to the deterioration of social and environmental conditions, privatization, and liberalizations (McMichael & Beaglehole, 2000; Local Government Association, 2021). Recently, the spread of the coronavirus disease (Covid19) pushed the attention toward reducing gaps in health inequality and inequity given the collision between the sanitary emergency and pre-existing social determinants (Bambra, 2020). This new humanitarian challenge has reinvigorated scholars', and policymakers' interest in what concern individuals' health, and health governance and the social determinants that affects them. Some have highlighted that Covid19 have slowed down the way toward achieving the Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs) in the field of climate change, poverty reduction and disease control (Elavarasan et al.,2022). Others have focused once again on healthcare systems to address their scope, efficacy and weaknesses (Peiris, 2021). Answers over the factors that have played a role in determining countries' health outcomes facing the pandemic are needed because they highlight weaknesses and benefits of the socioeconomic, political and cultural context in place in ordinary times (Kim et al., 2021).

The challenge resides in the fact that population health cannot be managed or changed in a couple of years: it is a step-by-step long-life process that starts at birth and continues through adulthood and elder age (Teutsch, 2016). Furthermore, physical and mental health status is not only determined by pure health-related factors (e.g., biology, healthcare system), since other factors play a role: they are defined as social determinants of health (SDH) (Ataguba, 2015). SDH are defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Commission on the Social Determinants of Health (2008) as “conditions in which people are born, grow, live, and work which are shaped by the cultural, social and economic forces operating at the national and international level”. Therefore, factors that play a role in determining the mental and physical health of the population are socioeconomic, political and cultural factors. Socio-economics determinants of health can be understood as socio-economic features and activities linked to the distribution of socioeconomic resources (e.g., safety and healthy environment, income). While political and cultural factors are linked to governance, policies (social, health, education), economic security and cultural, social norms and values (World Health Organization, 2019b). Thus, social determinants have played a pivotal role both Covid19 impacted the population (e.g., countries with higher rate of air pollution had higher infectious rate) (Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, 2022), and in the way governments have answered to the pandemic (e.g, lockdowns measures) and as an answer to the virus – through containment policies (Ataguba & Ataguba, 2020). Isolation measures (lockdowns), which are not directly linked to health, have helped achieving lower hospitalization rates, but at the same time, they impacted individuals' mental health and resilience (Kuriala, 2021). Therefore, it is possible to state that, the presence of stress factors can enhance risks for health. Stress factors can be

identified as economic factors (such as low income, insecure housing, insecure employment, poverty), and social factors (like social isolation, violent and discriminatory environment) (Fisher & Baum, 2010).

Therefore, using the SDH framework allows to gain deeper insight into inequalities in health outcomes. This is because determinants of equity in health (e.g., receive an education over the risks connected to unhealthy behaviours) influence the determinants of inequality in health (e.g., low-income households report lower health status) (Kawachi et al. 2002) are both included in the SDH. Political actors and decision-makers cover an important role, both in their ability to monitor and manage SDH (Islam, 2019). Understanding which social determinants, are the main cause of poor mental and physical health status is the key solution to developing better policies and governance (Ataguba 2015). Reducing the impact of those social factors that harm and jeopardize individuals' health is as crucial as solving problems strictly connected to healthcare provision.

However, the precise role played by singular SD on health is not defined yet, despite the growing contemporary attention of scholars devoted to reducing inequalities and increasing population wellbeing. Further studies are indeed needed to understand which social determinants play a major role in determining health equity (Bambra, 2020, Ataguba 2015). Here it is argued that employment insecurity (non-standard and precarious types of employment) plays a major role in determining health status, both in itself and as a factor influencing the other SDH.

1.2 Research Focus

Further studies are needed to understand which social determinants play a major role in determining health equity (Bambra, 2020). Understanding which social determinants, are the main cause of poor mental and physical health status is one of the key solutions for healthcare personal and policymakers to develop ad-hoc treatments, research focus, policies, and governance. Moreover, reducing the impact of those socio-economic factors that harm and jeopardize individuals' health is as crucial as solving problems strictly connected to healthcare provision.

From the 1970s the labour market has undergone several shift and adjustments in both industrialized and non-industrialized economies. One of the most prominent is the shift from full-time employment to what has been described as precarious employment. Precarious employment includes several types of employment agreements: short-term contracts, daily or hourly employment, organizational changes (e.g., privatizations, downsizing), home-based and part-time work (Quinlan, Mayhew & Bohle, 2001). Temporary employment has risen constantly in the OECD region since the 1980s. Figures are impressive in the European Union where temporary work increased by 115%. The threat posed by flexible work over increasing inequalities lay in those contexts in which precarious workers are left without any social or labour protections.

Employment insecurity is one of the SDH that fall under the category of the labour market and environment, following the framework created by Whitehead and Dahlgren (1991, 2006). As Kallenberg (2009) has defined it, “unpredictable work” can have consequences on work and non-work related spheres of individuals’ life. Negative effects might be found at the individual level (e.g., level of education, stress), at the social level (e.g., social network) and political discontent (Videt, 2020). Studies that recognize precarious employment as a determinant of health are not missing. However, studies that consider how precarious employment interact with the other variables conceptualized by Darren and Withed to assess the impact of social determinants on health, are missing or hardly present. Here it is argued that the conditions surroundings employment is a major cause in stress and frustration outcomes, mainly because it impacts all the other social determinants, such as housing, education, income and community network. Moreover, since precarious employment is not equally distributed within the society – young adults, women and migrants are majorly targeted in this case (Premji, 2018; Oddo et al., 2021) -, also health status will not be equal.

Therefore, this thesis will research the impact of precarious employment and its effect on mental and physical health. This is because the research aims to capture the cumulative risks initiated by insecurity over the other SDH. Comparisons will focus on precarity in the public sector and the private one, and whether there are differences between different layers of the population between juveniles and adults, women and men.

Thus, this thesis will try to answer the following question:

What is the effect of a Social Determinants of Health such as non-standard employment in determining individuals’ health status and resilience?

To find a suitable answer to the research question, the analysis will be based on a cross-sectional case study, conducted via qualitative data collection and investigation. The cross-sectional element of the research is represented by the sampling of the units of the analysis which are chosen randomly, but all presenting a common feature: individuals working in non-standard types of employment. Concerning the case study design, Italy was chosen given the fact alternative types of employment have increased after the application of policies deregulating the labor market since the 1990s. This “forced liberalization” of contracts has focused particularly on the public and retail sector. Furthermore, the economic recession of 2008/2010 has exacerbated the need of limiting public expenditure, increasing the existing vulnerabilities of the Italian state. Currently, the country is quite unstable and precarious, on both an economic, social and political level. Something that is believed can augment precarity (and one of the reasons why Italy was chosen) is the fact that the welfare state does not offer universal coverage. The dispense of social security protections is fully connected to employment: those that are highly assured, are the ones with stable, secured, and reliable jobs. Thus, non-standard employment is also accompanied by modest or absent social protections, leaving individuals relying only on their saving and resources, if any.

The qualitative approach should help enriching the results with a multidimensional perspective able to grasp those difficulties and cleavages that Italian precarious labors face, ultimately highlighting the link between employment insecurity, the lack of social protections and health status. To do so, the framework produced by Dalghren and Whithed (2006) over the SDH, the SOFL framework (Rubery, et al., 2018) and the Employment Strain Model (Lewchuk et al., 2003) which is more focused on wellbeing and sustainable employment conditions, will be kept in great consideration throughout the whole thesis.

1.3 Relevance of the research topic

1.3a Academic relevance

A satisfying amount of research has been done over SDH - such as education, risky behaviors, access to healthcare, environmental context – and their influence on health outcomes and disparities (Palmer et al., 2019; Islam, 2019). Scholars are still looking to find which factors influence all the others and produce higher health inequities within the population. However, the literature review has highlighted that, analyses able to assess how social and economic policies – therefore, policies not strictly related to “health”- interact with the existing context, influencing health outcomes are needed.

Despite, a lot of attention in this field has been dedicated to health and social policies, here it is argued that economic policies aiming to promote profit and societal growth at the expense of labour protection have played a major role as a determinant of health (Donkin et al., 2018). Indeed, precarious employment, has been analyzed and recognized by a few as a social determinant of health authors (Benach et al, 2014, 2016; Julià et al., 2017; Lewchuk et al. 2008), but not many have analyzed it in a broad sense, reconnecting it to the lack of protections, material deprivation and health outcomes. Moreover, only few scholars - like Murgia (2010) - have focused on the policy implications of precarity, and future developments for the welfare state and the impact that trade unions can have. This might be imputed by the novelty of precarious employment as a widespread common phenomenon in the world (Calbick et al., 2014).

Therefore, the academic relevance that this thesis strives to offer is a thorough analysis of precarious employment both in its social-economic implications (e.g., loss of income, stress level, loss of trust in State institutions and trade unions) and the policies formulated to manage it. Secondly, this thesis aims to use three different theoretical models to create an original conceptual framework, which hopefully will offer a multidimensional and broad explanation of the phenomenon. To achieve the first goal and depict the role of precarious employment as a social determinant of health the model produced by Whitehead and Dahlgren. (2006) will be used. Instead, to study how precarious employment is reflected within the society through practices, and connected policies, the Employment Strain Model, produced by Lewchuk and colleagues (2003) will be considered together with the framework developed by Rubery et al., (2018) called the SOFL framework (security – opportunity – fairness – life/work division) (2018). Hopefully, the integration of these few models will offer an analysis that take a variety of variables in consideration. The ultimate product should be descending from multiple factors linked to non-standard form of employment that affects health outcomes, as well as highlighting those features concerning precariousness that are the most likely to directly affect health outcomes.

1.3b Societal relevance

The shift toward a globalized supply chain pushed forward the interconnectivity of our reality, increasing also the likelihood that crises would have widespread effect, increasing inequalities and inequities between and within countries (McMichael & Beaglehole, 2000). Indeed, the pandemic emergency has shown

that health inequities (capacity to obtain, access or present positive health outcomes) play a bigger role than health inequalities (meaning inequalities in health outcomes) (Kawachi et al., 2002). Since health inequities are produced by social determinants, investigating the latter should allow scholars and decision-makers to create more tailored policies against those factors to reduce health equity (ibid.). This is the reason why this research wants to offer new information on the role played by precarious work environments in determining the health status of the population in developed countries.

Developed countries have been chosen since the presence of advanced healthcare systems allows us to exclude the adverse effect created by mediocre and insufficient health services on population health status. Moreover, since levels of wellbeing in developed countries are often taken as a goal or a standpoint to be imitated by developing countries, solving the weaknesses demonstrated by the former, can help create a more sustainable and healthy future in both. Given the fact that precarious employment is an expanding phenomenon (Quinlan, Mayhew & Bohle, 2001) which is believed will increase as a consequence of (i) the ongoing deregulation of the labor market, (ii) the spread of the gig-economy and (iii) the onset of hybrid or remote-working created for and during the pandemic (Matilla-Santander et al., 2021), investigating its effects on population health is vital now. Further research over the practices created by precarious employment can shed some light on the more sustainable paths to pursue and achieve major population's resilience and well-functioning.

Conclusions

In conclusion, crises – political, cultural, and economic - impact health, leading to an increase in suicides, homicides, cardiovascular mortality, more infectious disease, and worse mental health. These bad outcomes are symptoms of insufficient protections and resilience for citizens and non, reflecting the role played by the socio determinants in health status (Marmot & Allen, 2014). Better crisis management depends on prevention (Taneja et al., 2014), and prevention means a better understanding of those determinants that affect health. Since it is not clear, yet which SDH is predominant, the societal relevance of this research lay on recognizing a widespread phenomenon – precarious employment – as a major determinant and threat for health equity. The analysis will proceed as follows: in Chapter 2, the literature review will inform the reader over the previous work which has been conducted over the SDH and how do they impact health population. In the concluding section, it is presented the literature gap, and why and how this research aims to close this lacuna. In chapter 3, a deeper reflection over the variables of this research will be presented. Firstly, the researcher will thoroughly explain what precarity and non-standard types of employment is, relying of notable work of relevant scholars. Secondly, reflections over the causal relation between precarity, social security protections, and health outcomes will be introduced. Substantially, chapter 3 will offer a justification over why precarity is an SDH. Ultimately, in the last section the conceptual model together with the coding tree used to analyze the collected data will be inserted. In chapter 4, it is possible to find the research design and ulterior justifications over the decision behind this choice: qualitative analysis following a cross-sectional design with a case study focus. Furthermore, an additional paragraph will be dedicated to explaining why the Italian case was chosen

to research precarity. In chapter 5, the result(s) of the analysis, obtained through the coding process, will be depicted. The chapter will be divided in sections that represent the topics and subjects contained in the interviews. In chapter 6, it is to be found a critical discussion over the theoretical and methodological limit of this research, concerning problems of overgeneralization and those questions which unfortunately did not find an answer. In the conclusive section (chapter 7), keeping in mind the data analyses and the results, the research question will be answered, and the hypotheses (that are to be found in chapter 3) will be confirmed or disconfirmed. Ultimately, the researcher will be present the auspicated future policies and their possible implications.

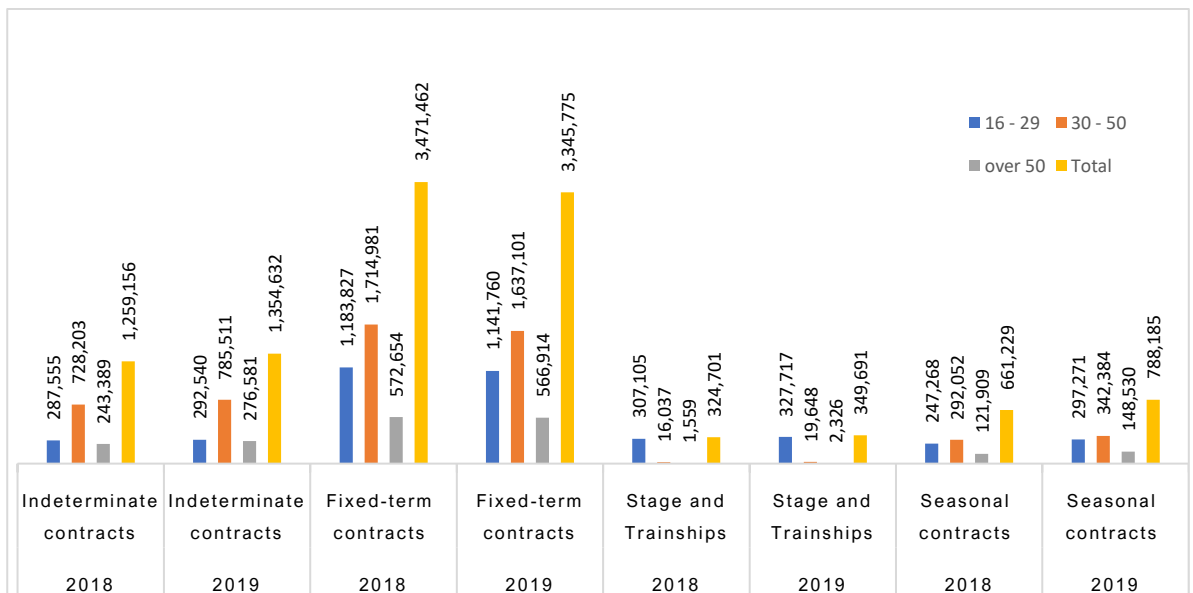
Chapter 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The influence of precarious employment – as a social determinant of health - has been investigated by several scholars. This chapter will give an overview of the relevant work produced on the topic.

2.1 Previous work

Precarious employment, which can be called also, employment insecurity is described by the International Labor Organization (ILO) as “uncertainty as to the duration of employment, multiple possible employers or a disguised or ambiguous employment relationship, a lack of access to social protection and benefits usually associated with employment, low pay, and substantial legal and practical obstacles to joining a trade union and bargaining collectively” (ILO, 2011). The definition produced by ILO includes all the features that have been recognized being typical of precarious employment. However, precarity (specifically, but not exclusively, in Italy) is broader than this since it is a situation which seems mandatory, for those firstly entering the labor market, and endless (Chies, 2015). Precarity in Italy rose at the beginning of the 1990s when the country had to adapt to the new policies concerning public debt and deficit, launched by the European Monetary Union (ibid.). Consequent liberalization and deregulations, to increase and maintain the market competitiveness, were not followed by a renewal of those labor security parameters, ultimately favored the creation of the “precarious for life” (ibid.). The graph (Figure 1), highlight the fact that precarity is an on-going and increasing phenomena within the country (fixed-term contract are more popular than standard ones), which majorly affects labourers between 30 and 50 years old.

Figure 1 - New contracts per type of employment and age range, in 2018 and 2019¹



¹ Data extrapolated from INPS Database (Retrieved May 2022)

Lately, precarious employment was recognized to be a social determinant of population health (Julià et al., 2019). Mostly because flex work is a contemporary phenomenon. Indeed, at the beginning of the research over SDH very few factors were taken into consideration, and precariousness was not included. McGinnis and Foege (1993) have been one of the first scholars focusing on social factors and their influence physical and mental health status more than individuals' behavior (such as tobacco, drug, and alcohol consumption). Following, Bunker et al (1995), more than twenty years ago, health care accounted for half when it comes to defining the health status of the individual. This early research missed addressing and even naming other factors that can account for health status demonstrating how challenging is to analyze these variables. From 1995, much more research over health inequity and what causes it has been done. McGinnis et al (2002) stated that social circumstances and environmental exposure are the main influencing factor over physical and mental health. Another important influence over health outcomes is individuals' health behavior habits. Surprisingly, healthcare systems seemed to be the most irrelevant variable. Other authors, impute more responsibilities to health governance than other factors. For Blas et al. (2008), health equity can and should be solved by governments through the procurement of basic services, promotion, education, and redistribution of resources good practices both in the public, private and individual levels. A new point of perspective was adopted by Blouin et al (2009) who have found that trade openness and liberalization are the main socioeconomic determinants of health. More specifically, more generous trade policies are linked with variations in structural and income inequalities, economic insecurity, and an unhealthy diet. Trade liberalization contributes to augmenting the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), but the Gini Index shows that wealth does not automatically distribute equally. Indeed, lower-income groups are keener to mature mortal illnesses – mainly chronic diseases, cardiovascular diseases, suicides. Even though trade policies are not completely in the power of national governments, these can still influence SDH in their country through social and health policies.

Other research has shown how successful government interventions toward reducing health inequities, are linked to housing and work environment. Bambra et al. (2010) have demonstrated how the main SDH are both housing conditions and the labour market – privatizations, unemployment, and lower social protection – since they affect mainly low and middle-low income households. Authors that wanted to research labour SDH have decided to shift their research focus from working conditions to the type of employment (Virtanen, 2005). Results highlight how employment instability causes poor mental and physical health. Clarke et al. (2007) have also investigated the phenomenon of precarious work and health. Interestingly their paper tried to link precariousness with other social determinants of health - such as isolation, and housing. The research also highlights how flexible work is increasing, not altogether with social support however, results may vary between individuals. Younger workers have been reported to have the worst health. While older, precarious workers were resigned, but less than the younger individuals. Mostly, older workers have sufficient social support that makes them cope with insecurity. Quantitative studies have been mostly applied to research effects of insecure employment over people health status. As pointed out by Rönnblad et al. (2019) research over precarious employment and health is still insufficient. Mostly because quantitative analysis has concentrated

on measuring one factor at a time, instead of considering a multidimensional approach to measure SDH and health outcomes (ibid).

Moreover, precarious employment is not equally distributed within the population. This employment condition affects women, immigrant, and juveniles (Eurostat, 2019; Premji, 2018; Oddo et al., 2021). The endurance of precarious employment within specific layers of the population will increase existing inequities in health as well as income and wealth inequalities (Menéndez et al., 2007). Qualitative analysis has succeeded in demonstrating how employment insecurity starts a negative chain effect that affects housing quality, nutrition, education of young generations and social networks. As stated above these are all social determinants of health. Therefore, precarious employment affects both workers' health and wellbeing in society as a whole. Benach et al. (2014), anticipate a reduction of flexible work which will increase the health status of the population. However, the researchers stated also that governmental action through social policies is expected to be necessary to address health inequities. Interestingly, some authors have found that precariousness in itself does not particularly affect negatively health outcomes. Following the work of Lewchuk et al. (2008), worse health outcomes were registered in those employees looking actively to secure future employment. While those labourers not looking to exit from their precarious situation reported the same health status as those under full employment. However, social support has been demonstrated to be one variable that positively affects health outcomes in both categories.

In light of this, Italy was chosen as singular case study to conduct this analysis because it is believed that all the features presented above are indeed present in the country. Quantitative studies found that the health status of non-standard employees was influenced by both life and work conditions (Rosano, 2008). This is because, often precarious employees accept or get assigned with unwanted tasks. The INAIL (National Institute Assurance Injuries on the Workplace), estimated that in 2007, 46% of the injuries happened on the workplace pertained non-standard employees (ibid.). Psychological wellbeing is also shattered in non-standard employees compared to their counterpart (ibid). Stress and frustration are highly present when it comes to precarious workers, given the fact that their access to social security benefits is not always granted, which is a feature that increases insecurity and their resilience in face of adverse life events (ibid.).

2.2 Literature Gap

The principal limit that the research has shown is linked to the challenge of measuring these social determinants of health since it requires a multifactorial approach, both quantitative and qualitative. But since taking into consideration all the SDH is not possible, further research should focus specifically on few elements that affect the overall health status. What we argue here is that research over the SDH requires an in-depth analysis that does not try to isolate any factors, but rather, take them all together. The consequence of these interrelations determines the cumulative benefit or risk in societies. Examining scientifically health status through social sciences lenses with a qualitative research design presents some challenges that quantitative analysis does not (Khankeh et al., 2015). Research over the SDH has been conducted mainly through

quantitative analysis since it based on large-N strategy that better highlight measurable and aggregate results (Bryman 2016). However, quantitative analyses are often producing incoherent results, mostly because they lack consideration of the cumulative risk effect produced by adverse social factors (Rönblad et al., 2019). In relation to employment and health outcomes, only few scholars have investigated differences in health outcomes between standard and non-standard workers (Rosano, 2008). Here, it is argued that the specific features of precarity (fixed-time contract, low salary, employment insecurity, limited career advancement, forms of stakhanovism) can endanger health status in the long term. The novelty that this research strives to achieve, compared to others, is to highlight that the risks for individual health are only partly due to employment precarity itself, but mostly due to the inclusion of non-standard employees in the welfare state. The exclusion of precarious employees is mostly due to their unclear legislative and juridical status, which alienate them from institutions and social organizations (Rosano, 2008; Murgia, 2010).

Further research, which succeeds in depicting causal relationships between social factors – in this case, precarious employment - and health disparities, is needed to develop better (health) governance practices (Palmer et al., 2019). Likewise, the existing academic debate is almost missing appropriate analysis of the SDH from a policy perspective that does not only focus on health related topics (Embrett & Randall 2014). In fact, policies that try to address inequalities coming from the status of employment are necessary to avoid further deterioration of health equity within the population (Lewchuk et al., 2003, 2008). New research shall therefore describe how the structure of welfare regimes, and regulations and trends of the labor market shape employment and perception of wealth and health status.

Chapter 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, the main concepts of this thesis and the perceptions of these concepts in the literature are discussed. First, the chapter starts with an overview of the existing literature on the concept of precarious employment. Subsequently, precarious employment's influence on health and mental health status is discussed. Finally, it will become clear how these concepts are placed in the conceptual model that is used in this study.

3.1 What is precarious employment?

The concept precarity connected to socio-economic conditions was first mentioned in 1970 by French scholars. The term *précarité* describes a social condition entailing some latitude of material deprivation that later in time got was identified as a new reality in the labor market (Lazar & Sanchez, 2019). In the early 2000s the term got enriched by features such as insecure employment, social exclusion, and uncertainty. Ultimately, a political charge was added to the term when juvenile and researchers started claiming that they will be less wealthy than the generation before (ibid.). Investigating precarious employment is highly relevant since it has become starting from the 1970s more and more popular in developed countries, and it is spreading in developing ones as well (Quinlan, 2016). The spread of this practice is connected to the global popularity of neoliberal policies, and the development of the global supply chains that have allowed developing countries to export alternative types of employment all over the world (Quinlan et al., 2001). Furthermore, facing the coronavirus pandemic has led employers to develop even more types of flexible employment, which are likely to remain even after the end of the pandemic (World Economic Forum, 2021)

Precarious employment and contingent work are synonymous that strive to describe a series of work arrangements that present an atypical working situation compared to a standard full-time, permanent occupation (Benach & Muntaner, 2007; Quinlan 2016). The European Foundation for the Improvement of the Living and Working Conditions has adopted a definition that state that “precarious employment is equated with non-permanent contracts” which also includes self-employment and involuntary part-time (Duell, 2004). ILO in 1992 listed for the first time the four criteria necessary to define something as precarious employment. The four criteria were (I) the level of certainty over the continuation of the employment, (II) transparency over hourly wage and working conditions, (III) social protections extended to flexible workers and (IV) income level, inequalities, and vulnerability (Duell, 2004). In 1999 more criteria were added, such as labour market, employment, occupational, and work security, besides the possibility to gain knowledge from the occupation and labour representation (ibid.)

Thus, precarious employment is a broad label that includes several different types of working arrangements. Furthermore, Quinland et al. (2001) have found five main categories of employment that enter the definition of precarious employment. First, temporary work which concerns all the individuals employed through a short-term contract. This category can once again divide between short-term contracts and very short-term contracts. However, this distinction is not universal since only some countries make this distinction

in their labour legislation. The second category concerns those sectors which are undergoing an organizational transition (eg. downsizing, privatizations, and workplace restructuring) which therefore lead to job losses and insecurity. What is important to notice is that downsizing is not an isolated event, but rather a cycle that can last years, until the firm found an optimal equilibrium. The third and fourth categories include outsourcing/home-based work and part-time jobs. Ultimately, the authors have included also the employment contracted under micro or small businesses (like start-ups) since they often deploy a large number of temporary, part-time, home-based, and volunteer contracts. Moreover, small businesses are also keener to open up cycles of outsourcing and organizational changes. As it can be noticed, these categories are not mutually excluded, rather concepts of precarious employment often overlap, making social research over the topic more challenging (Quinlan et al., 2001). However, scholars are still debating whether considering only employment status is sufficient to define precarious employment as so. Lewchuk et al. (2011), for example, argue that also the time spend to find a job and the social protections offered either from the state or from the firm should be included as measures to identify precarious employment. Following this, Johnstone et al. (2012), have argued that scholars should reframe precarious employment as precarious work since a growing number of individuals are not legally employed (meaning that they have not signed a contract with an employer) but are self-employed. The authors argue that self-employed people should also enter in the category of precariously employed given the fact that often (public) social protections do not apply to them, even though these occupations are more vulnerable to economic shifts (Johnstone et al., 2012).

In any case, independently from the definition, what these types of employment have in common is a lack of continuity and (social) protections, vulnerability, and variation in income and wealth (Quinlan et al., 2001). Moreover, temporary employees often enjoy less autonomy and control over their tasks and schedule than standard workers (ibid.). Indeed, also employment under informal economy is considered precarious since labours do not enjoy any protection and they live in uncertain working and living conditions (ibid.). Moreover, scholars agree over the fact that precarious employment affects some specific class of the population in particular. Those are namely women, young people- in particular during the transition from education to the job market -, immigrants, disabled and low-skilled people (Duall, 2004). Even though precarious employment is a relatively new phenomenon, scholars have dedicated a lot of attention to the causes and effects of precarious employment, on multiple dimensions of life. However, previous studies have lacked a clear and definite causal correlation between precarious employment and health. Mainly because the grouping of many different employment arrangements was found too general (Kim et al., 2012) and therefore did not offer any universal explanation.

3.2 How does precarious employment affect health status?

Studies over the effects of precarious employment on the employees have started to be published around the 1980s, given the spread of the phenomenon in the 1970s (Quinlan, 2012). Some authors have focused on how contingent employment casts aside once again the already weakened unions (Stone, 2004). Others have identified how precarious employment makes it harder for policymakers and regulators to set

minimum labour standards (Lippel, 2006). Others have focused on the effects of flexible employment on well-being, health, income (Aronsson et al. 2005) and increased exposure to risk factors (Stegenga et al. 2002). The latter is also the focus of this research, with a twist: following our hypotheses, precarious employment is neither the necessary nor the sufficient source of the negative effects, mentioned above.

In other words, it seems that precarious employment does not directly affect health status, rather this employment condition implies and affect a series of other conditions that ultimately interact with an individual's health status. For example, in the beginning, it was believed that the negative impact that flexible work has on individuals highly depended on the wages originated from employment. Lower wages in contingent employment were conceived as the major source of inequalities and inequality in health status (Lewchuk et al., 2003). However, without jumping to conclusions, hourly wages for flexible workers are not, nowadays, necessarily lower than full-time employees (Benach & Muntaner, 2007). Also, Darmon et al. (2002) did not find any correlation between an atypical form of employment and worse working conditions (Duel, 2004). Even though scholars have found that bad working conditions and level of wages still highly depends on the sector, and level of skills requested (ibid.).

Social protection also plays a role in determining inequalities between full-time employees and flexible ones. Health inequalities are indeed exacerbated by different availability of employment protections which are independent of the type of employment, already weakened by the reduction in public spending and welfare state scope (Kim et al, 2012). The reduction of social protections has also contributed to reducing unions' bargaining power (ibid.). Furthermore, it was found that precarious employees report sickness and absenteeism less than their full-time colleagues. This can be explained by the fact that higher threshold to call for sickness are deployed, and paid leave are rare when it comes to flexible workers (Kim et al., 2012). Considering the longer-term, flexible employment and unemployment decrease individuals' social security, in particular when it comes to pensions in pay-as-you-go (Duell, 2004). It is possible to say that the welfare state scope of action is determinant in reducing the possible adverse effects originated from precarity (Kim et al, 2012). More specifically, precarious workers present better health outcomes where the welfare has a broader scope, like in Scandinavian countries compared to Bismarckian, Anglo-Saxon, Eastern European and East Asian countries (Kim et al, 2012).

Ultimately, also whether flexible employment was contracted voluntarily or involuntarily, play an important role in determining well-being and life satisfaction concerning an individual's employment (Benach & Muntaner, 2007). This indicator has become particularly relevant after the 2007/08 economic crises, where the number of people involuntarily employed through flexible contracts sharply increased, together with poorer perceived health statuses (Caldbeck et al., 2014). A popular model used to assess the impact of contingent employment over health is the Employment Strain Model, produced by Lewchuck et al. (2006), which have been used by many scholars in the last decade. The model builds upon the Job Strain Model of Karasek and Theorell (1990), adding indicators over future employment, conditions of employability, efforts consumed in

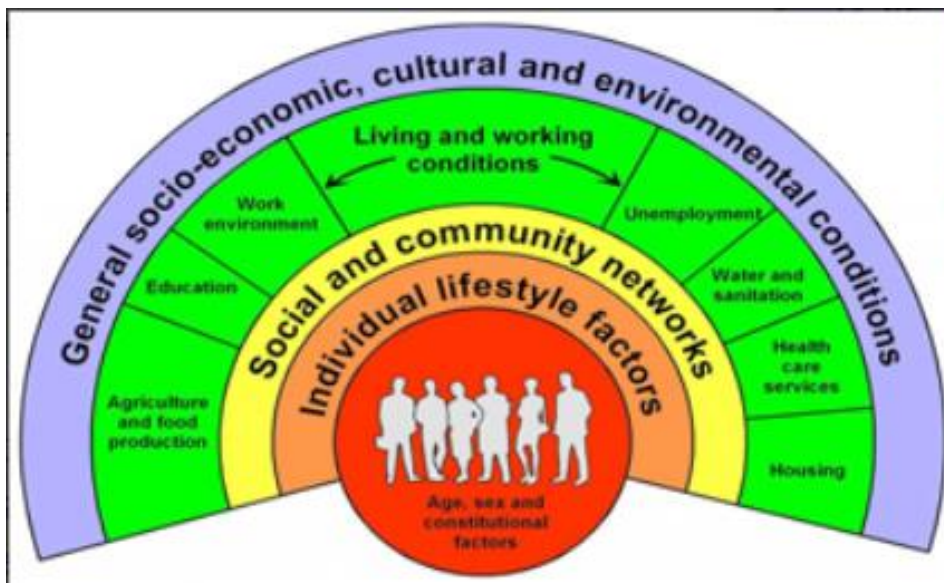
maintaining the employment (“employment relationship effort”), and employment relations support – to be intended both as social protections and support at work (Lewchuk et al., 2008). Precarious employment was connected to worse health outcomes when individuals were reporting both high levels of uncertainty and relationship efforts (ibid.).

Another theory-based approach that strives to study the effect of contingent work through a multidimensional perspective is the Employment Precariousness Scale (EPRES). Six dimensions are usually analysed following this model: (i) temporality and uncertainty, (ii) low wages and material rewards, (iii) weakening of labours’ rights, (iv) lack of representation, (v) vulnerabilities, discriminations, and undesired treatment, and (vi) democratic values and representative powers at the workplace (Julià et al., 2017). Through this method, it has emerged from a study conducted on the Spanish population in 2005 that worse mental health and perceived wellbeing was more common between flexible employees, but more in particular between women, migrants, young, blue collars (ibid.). A similar framework is the one depicted by Rubery et al. (2018) and the conceptual model created for this thesis in will be used as an instrument to examine and aggregate the results obtained and answer the research question. The idealized framework – called SOFL framework – produced by the authors reports four conditions that discern between standard employment and precarious employment. Firstly, all the members of the staff should be granted with enough monetary security, including an adequate income and subsidies in case of reasonable absence from the job place or labor activities. Bosmans et al. (2016) have added another shade over this feature, namely lack of social support that can cause isolation and the feeling of being different or discriminated compared to standard employees.

A further relevant theoretical framework used to depict the consequences on health produced by employment conditions is the one developed by Tompa et al. (2007) which in turn was inspired by the theoretical framework formulated by Rodgers (1989). Tompa et al. (2007) took in consideration variables such as the (a) perception of certainty of future employment, (b) control over work processes, (c) legal and institutional protections, income and benefits adequacy, (d) role, tasks and status, (e) work environment and social support at work, (f) exposure to physical hazards and (g) training and possibility to advance career-wise. Following, the variations of frequency, duration and intensity of these factors can produce three different but connected pathways which are namely physical exposure, stress, and material deprivation. Favourable or adverse health outcomes depend on the intensity in which these three pathways present themselves in individuals’ life. Compared to other frameworks, the one produced by Tompa et al. (2007) allows the research to take into consideration also risky coping strategies and material deprivation (Caldbeck et al., 2014)

In conclusion, following the “rainbow” model offered by Whitehead and Dahlgren in 1991 over the SDH, multiple factors can impact negatively and positive health outcomes. However, living and working conditions are major indicators that influence almost all the other spheres composing humans’ life. (Figure 1) (Dahlgren & Whitehead, 1991).

Figure 2- Rainbow Model by Dahlgren and Whitehed (1991)



Therefore, following the research and methods summarized above, it is possible to draw a direct causal relation between precarious employment and health. However, previous studies and theories have highlighted that the negative impact is not produced solely by precarious employment per sé, but rather by the conditions surrounding it. Limited rights, unequal power relations and uncertainty are a few of those conditions that are quite common when it comes to contingent work, but they can apply as well as to standard employment.

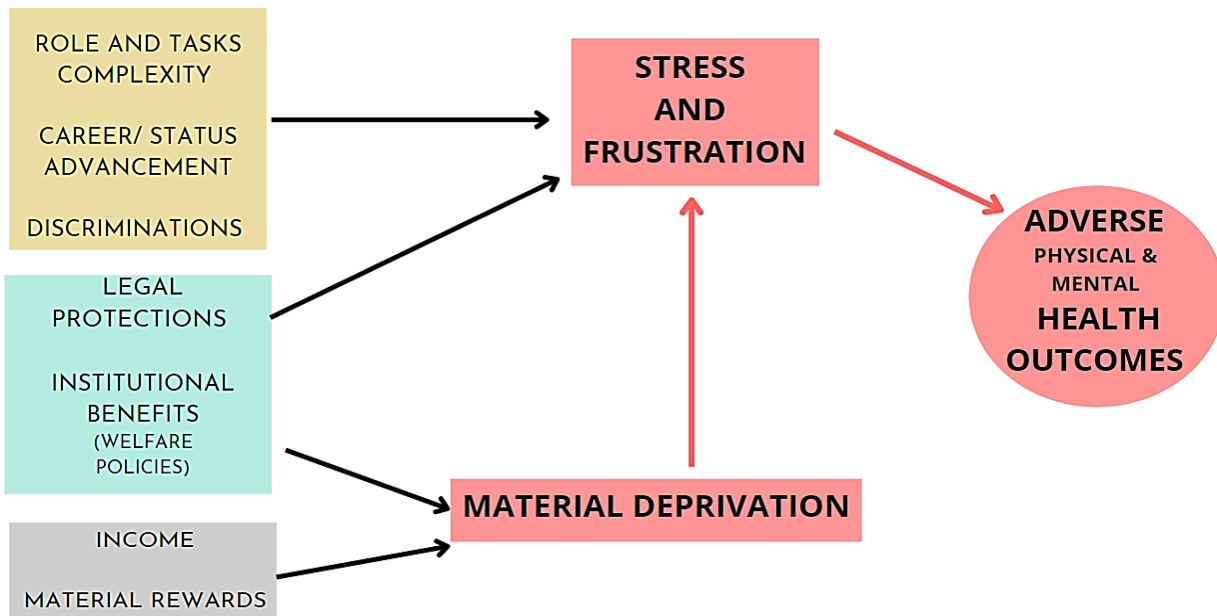
3.3 Theoretical Model

To ultimately answer our research question – whether precarious employment produces a negative effect on health status – it is required a theoretical framework that allows the research to thoroughly analyse the condition of precarity in the first place. Consequently, the theory should offer a way to connect the features of precarious employment to indicators that are linkable to health status. The model (Figure 3) that will be used to conduct this research will take in consideration a mixed bucket of variables coming from the relevant theoretical frameworks presented above.

The theoretical model depicted below briefly describes the central assumptions at the core of this research project. It is argued that precarious employees register worse health outcomes, originated from higher levels of stress and frustration, partly but not solely coming from a greater material deprivation compared to standard, full-time employees. Stress and frustration are indeed partly originated from material deprivation because they can also be derivate from aspects connected to the workplace features (e.g., discriminations and task complexity) and future advancement – to be intended as the possibility to advance of status in the current workplace or another. Also, the fact that precarity does not always and universally guarantee social protections (e.g., unemployment benefits, paid sickness, and maternity leave) can evoke feelings of preoccupations and uncertainty for and fear of the future. The lack of social protections contributes to augmenting the existing

material deprivation that many precarious labours register, given the fact that often their wages are lower compared to standard employees, and material rewards are almost inexistent.

Figure 3- Conceptual Model



Considering the concepts expressed in the Literature Review (chapter 2) and the Theoretical Framework, the hypothetical result(s) that the analysis once done will offer, are the following:

1. Stress, frustration, and resignation are highly present in individuals that has spent more years with non-standard type of contract
2. Non-standard employees have an unsatisfactory and modest income, which produces forms of material deprivation (e.g., skipping or neglecting medical examinations, renouncing to achieve educational degree)
3. Non-standard employees face discriminations and unfair treatments on the workplace
4. Non-standard employees more often perform those tasks that their counterpart does not want to accomplish
5. Career and status advancement are highly unlikely and rare for those with a fixed-term contract
6. Precarity, in its dimension of unclarity over the juridical status, and the exclusion as members of trade unions, produces:
 - (a) Hardship or impossibility of achieving social security benefits
 - (b) Difficulties in enforcing legal protections in labor's favor

Chapter 4. RESEARCH METHOD AND DESIGN

This chapter deals with the design of the study and the methods used to conduct the research. The research strategy will be presented, as well as the methods that are used to collect and analyze the data. The motivation behind these choices is discussed in the following chapter.

4.1 Research strategy

Qualitative analysis was preferred to quantitative analysis given the fact that studies on this topic using the former are missing or insufficient. Moreover, given the complexity of the topic and the mutual covariation affecting the social determinants of health, quantitative studies, even though used greatly compared to qualitative design, have missed to determine a strong causal relation between precarity and health outcomes. The limits of using a qualitative research design consist in the small sample of researched units that therefore do not allow the research to widely generalize the outcomes of the study.

This study uses a case study strategy with a co-variational approach. The case study is a suitable research strategy to develop an in-dept analysis on real-life social phenomena on which the researcher has little or no control (also called non-experimental) (Yin, 2013). Thus, this research strategy is considered appropriate since this study aims to analyze a complex social phenomenon, which entails a various number of variables and conditions. Co-variational analysis is often used to investigate the impact of a variable (called independent variable) on another variable (the dependent variable). This is to understand whether a phenomenon or a condition does not or does impact negatively or positively other socio, political or economic conditions (Blatter & Haverland, 2012). Moreover, these designs are often described as X-centered since they focus more on explaining how and what influences the outcomes, instead of explaining why research are witnessing a particular outcome, which is typical of Y-centered designs (ibid.).

In this study, the independent variable (X) is precarious employment, which is understood as a stand societal point, while the dependent variable is (worse) health outcomes in the population. Our study can therefore produce a positive (or negative) correlation between Y and X, in which higher levels or the widespread of the independent variables produces higher levels (or lower) of dissatisfaction over health and wellbeing. The opposite counts for negative correlation (ibid). Concluding, covariational analysis is part of the qualitative research methods, therefore the data that will be used are majorly of qualitative nature.

4.2 Research design

It is called research design a framework containing guidelines on which is the most appropriate unit of analysis and how many, whether the variation between unit of analysis should be spatial or temporal, and how to collect and analyze data needed to answer the research question(s) (Bryan). To conduct this analysis features of cross-sectional design and case study design have been chosen. The description of these two strategies and the motivation behind will follow.

A cross-sectional design to be so has to present some key features. First of all, since it is concerned with variation and diversity, the researcher must take in consideration more than one unit of analysis. Indeed, often (successful) cross-sectional analysis presents a large-N cases analyzed through quantitative strategies since it is interested with determining whether there is a notable variation subsequently the introduction of a variable (A) that interact with the independent variable X, or a variation of the X itself (Bryan, 2016). Thirdly, cross-sectional design requires to collect data at a (more or less) same point of time (ibid.). Connected to this last point, drawing concrete and solid causal influence between variables, since the data are collected at the same time therefore the internal validity is not as strong as in experimental designs since control and treated study group are missing. Thus, cross sectional design rather than presenting causal relations, describes associations between phenomena (ibid.). Concerning instead the external validity of cross sectional design that is much stronger in particular when the sampling is random, like in this case. Like the external validity, also the replicability of the experiment is usually highly present, especially if the researcher thoroughly depicts the procedure used to form the sampling, define how concepts are measured, the research instruments utilized, and the strategy adopted to analyze the data (ibid). Ultimately, as written in Bryan, while cross sectional design using quantitative analysis is more concerned with external, internal and measurement validity, qualitative analysis is more immune to these flaws and increases ecological validity – concerned with the manifestation of a phenomenon in the real world and their replication in experimental settings - too. To conclude, this research is definable as a cross sectional design since the sampling is random and includes more than one case – in this case, precarious employees -, each of those are observed only once, at the same moment in time. Semi-structured interviews will be used since it is one of the most typical instruments used to conduct cross sectional analysis accompanied by qualitative data.

Although this, this research also presents some features of a case study design, in the way that takes in consideration only one national reality: Italy, in this case. Case study design, differently from other designs, focuses on highlighting the complexity and specificity of a singular unit of analysis. It is a very common design in social and behavioral research since it allows too deeply dig in a certain event, phenomenon, community, organization, or person, even though locations are most common unit of analysis. Moreover, a mix of quantitative and qualitative data is preferred for this type of design, however, qualitative strategies are more common given both that it allows to elaborate over concepts and discern shades of meaning and, as said before, is very popular within social research which in general prefers qualitative over quantitative designs. As Bryan noted case study is not considered a research design apart, mostly because it often includes features of others research designs, and, vice versa, other designs present the feature of a case study, namely the focus on a singular unit of analysis. But what clearly distinguish a case study from other design focusing on singular unit, is the intention of the researcher to depict and highlight the uniqueness and special characteristics of the case study. Clearly, the motivation behind the selection of the case study is crucial in case study design.

4.3 Case selection & Background

In all European countries, the economic and financial crises of 2008 had a serious impact over employment (Solidar Foundation, 2012). The crises increased both the levels of unemployment and precarity, for younger generations which accounted for a quarter of the total workforce unemployed in 2012 (ibid.). the focus over youth, employability, and labor protections have become central in many states agenda setting and policies, some more effective than others. As stated before, precarious employment is more of a condition induced by several dimension (e.g., low bargaining power of union, crises, lack of social protections, and so on). Moreover, precarity does not translate in one specific employment arrangement rather the opposite: it concerns all the work arrangements that do not fall under standard full-time contracts (Rasmussen, 2019). Uncertainty originated from precarity can be analyzed from two different stand points: job insecurity, which refers the perception that employment is volatile as well as future prospects, and income insecurity, which concerns the insecurity over individuals' finances (Ibid.).

The choice over the study cases lay on the level of non-standard type of employment, its geographical distribution and temporal endurance, the public policies concerning precarity and social protections. Narrowing the field of study to high income countries in which it is expected a well-developed welfare state, as a case study, the Italian national context was chosen.

In Italy, precarity started spreading widely in the late 1980s, increasing constantly in the 1990s, in line with the deinstitutionalization and liberalization of the labor market happening in those years in all the Global North (but not limited to it), as a way to reduce the high levels of unemployment, especially common between juveniles and women in Southern Italy (Choi, 2010). Four legislative pieces has been recognized as main forces behind the flexibilization of employment: the “Ciampi Protocol (1993), the “Pacchetto Treu” (1997); the Legislative Decree of September 6, 2001, n. 368; and the Legge 30 and Decreto Legislativo 276 (ibid.). Currently, the Italian market is one of the most flexible around Europe (ibid.). Italy, as well as Denmark and Germany, do not have a legislation about minimum wage: indeed, agreements are conducted by sectoral labor unions and employers' representatives (McKay, 2012). However, when the economic crises of 2008/09 hit the country, trade unions were unable nor to control the spread of precarious form of employment not to protect and implement social and labor protections for non-standard employees (Murgia, 2014). And the situation did not change in the past ten years. Moreover, the Italian welfare state provision is not as efficacious and equipped like the Danish one. In fact, for non-standard Italian employees is almost impossible to access sick and maternity leaves, claim pensions rights and unemployment benefits (ibid.). In the last decade, precarity has become normality, a step of life that starts when juvenile start engaging with the labor market, which unfortunately for many continues in adulthood (meaning, after the thirtieth, thirty-fifth year of life). Italy occupied the 11th place in the Eurostat database, together with Spain, over precarity in 2020, ten points ahead than the average score of the European Union (27 members). Precarity have increased constantly in the country in the las decade maintaining it above the EU average (Eurostat, 2020). Concerning income insecurity, Italy placed 14th (once again above the EU average) considering the proportion of people in-work below the soil of

poverty, and 15th when considering the percentage of people between 18 and 64 years old facing material deprivation. Furthermore, employers' contributions are one of the highest in the European Union (10.5%), factor that offers a plausible motivation behind the diffusion of non-standard types of employment (Eurostat, 2019).

Concluding, Italy has been chosen to conduct this research, to demonstrate that non-standard types of employment do not directly entail a precarious sense of being, nor a worse health and wellbeing perception, rather the absence or difficulties to access subsidies and resources makes it challenging. Therefore, if the formulated hypotheses are correct, the health status and wellbeing of those able to access these services is better than the ones who cannot, and not because precarity is different in its substance, but because the welfare coverage is extended to contingent workers.

4.4 Research method

With research method is intended the technique or instrument(s) used to collect the needed data. For this research the preferred method is the conduction of semi structured interviews on a casual sample composed by a small-N of cases.

4.4a *The interview*

In order to find an answer to the research question and sub-questions, the researcher aspires to gather a substantial part of qualitative data, that will be used for the analysis, through the collection of fifteen voluntarily interviews. The interviews will target individuals, since as explained in the previous chapters, precarity is a sociological term that describes a perception or condition (Lazar, 2019). Therefore, despite current precarious employees are the main target of the research, also whoever defines herself or himself as precarious or was precarious until non long ago, is invited to release an interview. These people are acquaintances, but for the greatest part they will be strangers who reached through social media networking (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn) and referral. Besides them, people of expertise in the labor market legislation and behavioral sciences (e.g. labor psychologists) will be included. For them who covers official positions, official channels are preferred with the singular addition of LinkedIn, which is seen as more formal and profession oriented.

The researcher is committed to inform each possible interviewee clearly and thoroughly about the topic of research, the nature of the questions that will be asked, its goals, future use and domain. Once a meeting is set, the interviewees receive by mail the consent form necessary to collect their private data. The meeting is all taking place on-line and once there they will be reminded that the interview is recorded. During the interview, the researcher aims to collect enough data linked to the three main topics, illustrated later on. However, since the information needed are the qualitative nature as well as the topic, interviewees are let free to emphasize the aspects that are important for them. Performing interviews was indeed preferred to conduct this research since it allows to capture the emphasis over a theme, a word, a memory (Bryman, 2016).

4.4b Interviewee selection

Finding the answer to the research question entails carefully direct some interviews to individuals, organization and agency that are relevant in the field of labor security, precarity and health. Therefore, three categories of actors will be interviewed.

First, as said previously, the research will particularly target individuals that are working or worked under precarity in Italy are reached and interviewed. The researcher is engaged in achieving a satisfying number of interviews from a variety of sectors, that can help us depict a general picture of what it means to be precarious in Italy. More specifically, the target sectors are well-known to be uncertain for labors. Those sectors are education, health care, hospitality, justice, and arts (such as journalists and so on). The selection of the interviewee does not fall features such as age, citizenship, or sex. However, the researcher is engaged in presenting a very equilibrate picture of the Italian scene that represents equally males and females

Secondly, representatives of trade unions will be interrogated over the status of precarity in their respective countries. Labor unions not solely are up-to-date for what concern labor legislations, but also, they can appeal to a vast network composed by laborers but also decision-makers and technocrats. Hopefully, their contribution will help to generalize the impact of precarity over all population, independently from sex, age, and profession.

Thirdly and ultimately, labor psychologists will be invited to release some interviews from both countries. Once again, as it was worthwhile for the trade unions, the contribution of labor psychologists will help to generalize some findings coming from the interviews and document research. While, the trade unions contribution will be more centered over employment conditions and its features, together with welfare programs applied or not to precarious workers, the interviews conducted with psychologists will be more centered over the state of mental and physical health of their clients. This, once again, should allow the researcher to discover and contextualize whether employment uncertainty has an impact on health and whether individuals are aware that employment can affect their health outcomes.

The part written above is the ideal plan that the researcher strives to achieve, however given the constraint of time to conclude the thesis, not all the professional entities could be reached, and therefore, their contribution is absent. In the table below (Table 1) are presented the interviewees that participated in the research, whose experiences and testimonies will be used in the results section (chapter 5).

Table 1 – The interviewees				
NAME ²	SEX, AGE (range)	GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION	PROFESSION(S)	TYPE OF CONTRACT & WEEKLY WORKED HOURS ³
Leonardo (#1)	Male, 30-50	Center Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Journalist for two newspaper agencies (freelancer) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Freelancer / Collaboration agreement
Maria (#2)	Female, 30- 50	Center Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educator in a (private) afterschool, recreational cooperative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indefinite, Zero-hour contract (38h)
Stefano (#3)	Male, 30- 50	Northern Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administrative assistant in the legal sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fixed term, Part-time (36h) contract
Beatrice (#4)	Female, over 50	Center Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support teacher in a public school (high school) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fixed term, Part-time (18h) contract
Francesca (#5)	Female, 30-50	Center Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Receptionist (seasonal job) Singer and musician Music teacher in a (public) Conservatorium (high school) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Season contract, part-time (n/a) contract Freelancer Fixed term, Part-time (18h) contract
Federico (#6)	Male, 16- 29	Center Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Musician Teacher in a (private) Conservatorium (high school) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Freelancer (12h) Fixed term, Part-time (9h) contract
Markol (#7)	Male, 16- 29	Northern Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Barman Ryder Volunteer in syndicalism activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fixed term, Part-time (36h) contract Zero-hour contract (20h)
Giorgia (#8)	Female, 16- 29	Northern Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shop assistant Hostess, Organization and management of events Administrative intern 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fixed term, Full-time contract Zero-hour contract (occasional work) Intern contract, Full-time
Guglielmo (#9)	Male, over 50	Southern Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carpenter Welder Gastronomic entrepreneur Porter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seasonal contracts
Manuela (#10)	Female, over 50	Southern Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educator for after school initiative Socio-sanitary operator (OSS, in Italian) both in the public and private sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fixed term, Part-time (36h) contract

² Some of the names are fictional as requested by the interviewee(s). Surnames will not be included to maintain interviewee privacy, unless they cover a professional position

³ Specific details over the exact firm or workplace interviewees' work for, were excluded to avoid adverse action from their employers

Alessio (#11)	Male, 16- 29	Center Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waiter • Barman 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fixed-term, Zero-hour contract (25-35h)
Nicola (#12)	Male, 30-50	Center Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journalist (freelancer) for a newspaper 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quasi-subordinate, Full-time contract with variable schedule
Anna Pompele (#13)	Female, 30-50	Northern Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labor Psychologist (autonomous worker) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freelancer, Full-time

4.4c Interview structure

The interview structure will slightly change accordingly to the functions that the interviewee cover in his or her life. However, independently from this, all the interviews will cover three main topics.

First, there will a few questions in which the interviewee is required to describe its employment situation, the contract that they possess, daily tasks, and schedule. Then, the researcher will guide them toward more precise questions that contains variables and factors that have been found in the literature review as relevant in both defining precarity and its contribution to negative health outcomes. Therefore, the following questions will cover subjects such as the level of satisfaction concerning their employment conditions, the perceived possibility of advancing career wise and ultimately whether their current employment was wanted and programmed or unwanted and undesired.

Secondly, the following group of questions will cover instead the social protections (subsidies and benefits) applied to them, if any. Following it will be asked the perceived level of satisfaction connected to the welfare state programs: their adequacy, applicability, and accessibility.

Thirdly and ultimately, the interviewee will be asked if they perceive that their employment situations and their being precarious has any effect on their perceived health status, with particular reference to their mental health status. Clearly, to not violate the interviewees' privacy this question will be posed with reference to stress and frustration connected to the employment condition, and it will not be asked anything about psychological treatments, unless the interviewee spontaneously introduce it. Moreover, it will also be asked to elaborate on whether their employment situation, in all its nuances, compromises their capability or willingness to sustain medical examinations, of various type.

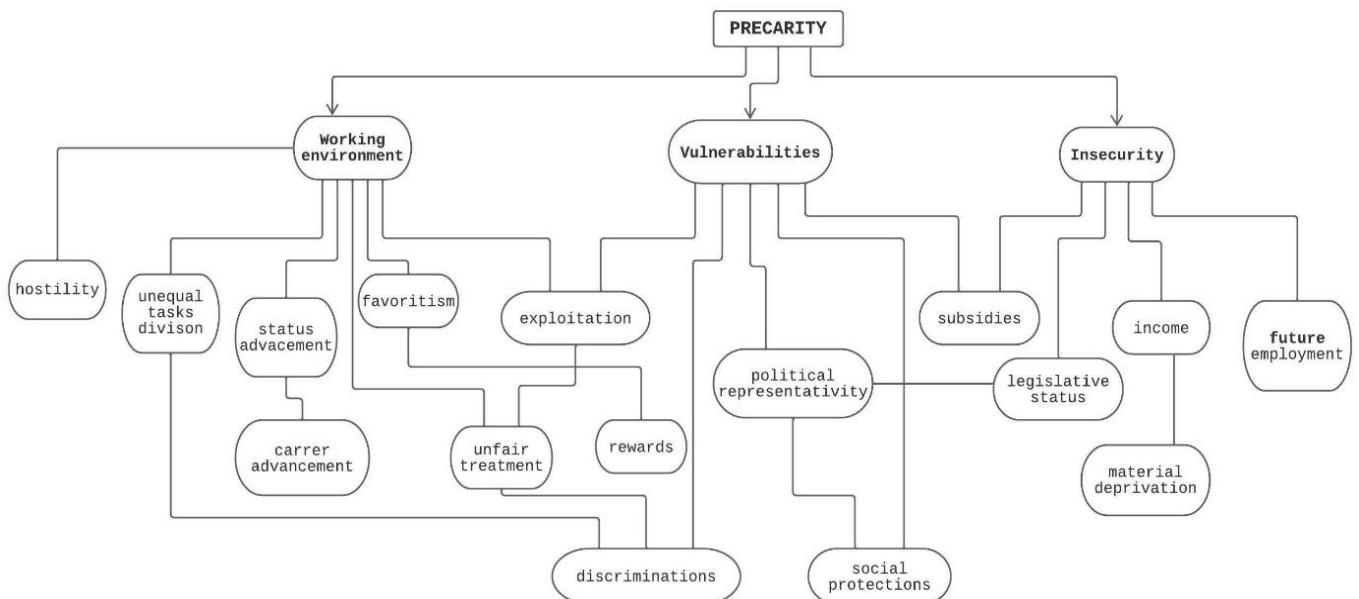
As said before, the specific questions might slightly change between the interviews that concern individuals and psychologist and trade unions representatives since these two last groups are not part of the sample concerning employees with non-standard types of contracts.

4.4d Data analysis

Considering the goals and the methods of this research described in the previous chapters, the analysis of the collected data will be conducted through the grounded theory that will be presented below. To properly realize grounded theory few steps are to make, starting with theoretical sampling, and coding, followed by theoretical saturation and ultimately, comparison (Bryman, 2012). Keeping in mind the research question and the goals of the project, the researcher starts with theoretical sampling which entails reaching individuals or looking for events that contain or bear theoretical relevance to answering the main question (ibid.). After this, the interview will take place with the selected interviewee, which is as said before chosen casually, apart from their current or previous employment which has to enter the category of precarious employment. Once, the interview is completed, the registration of the conversation will be converted into writing, in order to maintain all the specific details and stories presented in the interview.

Once the material is collected and transcribed in written words, the coding process can start. Coding is considered the key central process of qualitative data analysis since it allows to organize and discern parts of the transcript highlighting relevant theoretical concepts and expressions used by the interviewee, how frequent they are and how they are connected to each other. Phrases and words are labelled and conceptualized in broad categories which are more empirical than the concepts found (ibid). To do so the transcripts of the interviews will be uploaded to ATLAS.ti, a program that allows conducting precise qualitative analysis through codes applied to written documents. Once the transcripts are in the program, key points, and concepts, such as the one represented in the coding tree (Figure 4), will be highlighted in order to focus on the key points and the relevant details needed to conduct this analysis. Finding the concepts included in the coding tree, or not finding them, will allow us to graphically observe which concepts, expressions and words are more common and repeated – or vice versa.

Figure 4- Coding Tree



After all the data collected have been coded, the next step is called theoretical saturation or saturate categories in which the researcher has gained enough insight for the research who can decide to continue collecting data to gain new insight or stop because it appears that nothing else is insightful anymore (ibid). Once the researcher is satisfied with the data and the concepts and categories extrapolated, he or she starts reflecting, elaborating, and comparing the relationship between categories, in order to realize whether they confirm, or disconfirm the initial hypotheses (ibid). Given that the sample of this research will be composed of a small number of cases, making universal strong assumptions and conclusions is challenging (ibid, p.574) and always not as accurate as it would be with a big numerical sample. As Bulmer (1979) presented, it is challenging when it comes to grounded theory to produce strong, universal, and explicatory theories for two main reasons. First, theory-neutral observation is not totally feasible since also researchers are objective bodies that resent external influences, which means that researchers bear biases and what is believed are truths and facts. Secondly, qualitative research revolves greatly over previous studies and literature, meaning that new studies are built upon previous ones which may or may not carry biased conceptualization (ibid., p.574).

In the light of this, the researcher must be committed to following the scientific method which implies limiting the biases and presenting those conceptualizations, narratives and results that disconfirm her hypotheses. The outcoming theory will be based on the cleavages highlighted by the existing literature and the frequency in which a certain concept or expression appears: if a concept is repeatedly present in different interviews, then it will be interpreted as an inner feature or effect of the phenomenon, and not a personal or specific condition.

Chapter 5. RESULTS

5.1 Type of employment, income (in)security and material deprivation

This section presents the various positions and the details of the contracts, highlighting commonalities, frequency, and exceptions. As written in the previous chapters, precarity does not have a precise normative definition, nor it is a specific type of contract, with universal features (e.g., weekly hours, fixed-time or indeterminate contract). It is more a condition, a feeling comprehending - following the hypotheses - (a) sense of income insecurity, (b) which can get translated into some sort of material deprivation). If a broad definition has to be done, previous scholars have included in the category of precarious employees, workers under fixed-term, interns, freelancers, and on-call and part-time contracts. Therefore, in order to depict a thorough picture of precarity, representatives of these four categories were interviewed and asked to describe their form of employment and elaborate on their overall satisfaction – in relation to their daily tasks, schedule, and wage. In line with the literature, it was asked to elaborate over whether the current situation was wanted or not. Therefore, the following section depicts the most relevant results of the coding linkable to "contractual type", "weekly/daily schedule", and "wage". However, this must be said that references about the work-type of the interviewees will be done throughout this chapter. Hopefully, this will give an idea of the various – but similar - faces of precarity within the Italian economic and political scene.

Starting from the most common arrangement, part-time (maximum 38h) and on-call (zero hours) contracts cases, are now presented. #7 has described his employment (Bartender) saying that he wanted and signed for a part-time job which, however, ultimately required a full-time commitment, maintaining the salary of a part-time. Although he worked for the same employer for more than a couple of years, he was never proposed nor invited after requests to sign a full-time contract. As #7 said, the reason is that:

“... in the hospitality sector, they have all the advantages in not making you sign a full-time contract since without it they are not obliged to pay any contributions for you as well as extra worked hours and benefits...”

This was also confirmed by #11, another young man working in the hospitality sector, recently promoted from waiter to bartender. He also has an on-call contract for a minimum of 25 to a maximum of 35 hours per week. #11 described himself as satisfied with his new job, salary, and weekly schedule, in particular, if compared to the one he had before. Despite the type of contract did not change, #11 depicted a much more precarious, and unstable situation when he was working as a waiter where the weekly schedule was changing every week and the shifts go overtime. Moreover, as #7, he said:

“The policy of the company is to maintain a high number of on-call contracts since they can give you fewer hours (compared to a full-time) but still make you work for almost 40 hours per week without paying any taxes for you [...]. The most annoying part is that there is no limit fixed by law for the

renewal of a zero-hour contract, therefore if none of the full-time employees gets promoted or leave, we can be precarious for years to come...”

Both interviewees elaborated the question on their awareness of what a zero-hour contract would entail, and they both said that it was what they hoped for at the beginning, but after a few years, their satisfaction and motivation declined. They, also, focused on the fact that overtime work is usually not retributed as it should be, and weekly hours can often change.

Similar testimony is the one coming from #9, 50 years old, who has been precarious since he was 16 years old when he started working, and #5, currently a precarious teacher. While the experience that he recalled was the one he had as a porter, she recalled her summer job as a receptionist for a hotel that lasted for 10 years, and her current job as a teacher for the public school, both part-time and fixed-term contract. What is interesting, once again, is that both have described a condition of exploitation in which one feature was that upfront a signed part-time contract, the real weekly schedule and daily shift did not match the one agreed upon. Besides this, the hourly wage is below the average for part-timers, and extra hours are not retributed, a detail which constitutes, considered what said before about the schedule, a great loss, firstly in income and can constitute a reason of fatigue, and distress.

Someone who expressed a situation of perceived was #2, an educator in the private sector, with an on-call contract and a part-time schedule: also, her weeks can change from one another. #2 described a very precarious situation in which:

“My superiors can tell me one week that the next one, or the next month I will work half of the hours, with consequent reduction of fifty per cent of my salary, and that’s what it is. If I am fine with it, good! if not they are going to find someone else...”

She quite complained about her situation: precarious for at least 7 years, with a child and husband. Her employment situation got complicated after a reform that stopped her from working in the public sector as a teacher. With an hourly wage of 6 euros per hour, her ambitions to go back to study and take the degree that would finally allow her to pursue a career as a teacher have vanished. It should be also kept in mind that during the summer break, when school children are on holiday, also the cooperative is closed, leaving #2 with zero entrances for these months, which makes her income even lower than expected. These types of treatment – late and not agreed-upon changes in the schedule, violation of rights, and mistreatments of various forms – are way more common when you are precarious.

On the other hand, fixed-term employees feel the pressure to demonstrate that they are initiative-taking and hard workers, which leads them to accept conditions and situations that their permanent colleagues would not accept. One example is #10 and #1's story: the former is working as a socio-sanitary operator for the public health system, and the latter is a journalist that only recently exit from precarity after 25 years. What these two

interviewees have in common is the willingness to demonstrate to be diligent and eagerness to work, despite their status. Both have affirmed that their unstable and indeterminate position has pushed them to give and show more at the workplace, to the point to take over assignments and shifts those other colleagues did not want – such as nights, weekends, and festivities. Consequently, #10 and #1 have admitted that this has led to an increase in weekly worked hours and the creation of a sort of habit within the working environment. Elaborating on this topic, the interviewee said:

“Once they (employer(s) and colleagues) know that you do not have preferences, like festivities etc, or that you are willing to work a little bit more, that is going to be your average week, which is fine because I want to show that I am eager to work. The problem is that they take it, as a rule, therefore the first time you ask for a change or a free weekend, they will be disappointed...”

The experience described above is relevant for this research since it describes a sort of subtle trap of distress: on one side, the employee wants to show how dedicated he or she is to his/her job, but on the other hand, this (extra) dedication is taken for granted to the point that an exception becomes a routine. In #1’s words *“precarity, and the system around it, pushes you to move from hard-worker to a Stakhanovite - trap from which is hard to exit”*.

Other interesting testimonies are those coming of #12 and #6. #12 complained that after years of service, he is still precarious with a quasi-standard contract: fixed monthly wage, a reduced schedule and little social contributions paid for his social insurance. #12, similarly to #5, complained about (a) the delay in achieving a stable employment position and (their hourly wage) considering their qualifications and professional experience. Those who are not cited here, declared themselves overall satisfied with their weekly schedule. #3 and #4 were perceived as the most satisfied, concerning this topic. Both are public servants, and both have been precarious for a long time, however, they found the weekly schedule overall satisfying together with the monthly income.

5.2 Working Environment, Unfair Treatment and Discriminations

This section will introduce the finding of the analysis connected to the working environment, which includes relations with colleagues and managers, perceived unfair or unequal treatment, discrimination in the workplace, daily tasks, future opportunities and career or status advancement. Treating this feature of precariousness was needed since the working environment can be a little bit more hostile when someone is precarious. Firstly, tasks, rights and duties can apply differently to regulars and precarious employees. Secondly, employees can put in place different and discriminatory treatments toward precarious employees, which have a lower status. The interviewees were therefore asked to reflect on these themes and try to recollect if something similar happened in their own experience. A positive and thorough answer came from #8 who elaborated on the question over the three working experiences that she had in her life, all of them with a fixed-term contract. Starting from her first working experience as a shop assistant, #8 said that the environment was highly competitive since the employees were getting bonuses based on the commission. Therefore, she

remembered that even though she was following a customer for the majority of the time, the actual sale was always conducted by a regular employee, even though there were no rules stopping the interviewee to finish the transaction. A similar situation was described by #1, over 40 years old, journalist, who also suffered from unfair treatment which was privileging regulars over determinate employees. #1 stated that in the journalistic field, discriminations have at least two faces:

“First, precarious employees and freelancers are not allowed to spontaneously represent or use the name of the newspaper to gain interviews, reports, documents and so on, even though you worked for them for more years. Not using the name of the newspaper means that getting the material is much harder because you are not as notable as under a well or half-known publisher. Secondly, at the moment a person or an event of a certain interest, even though, you (precarious employee) took care of it from the beginning and part if not all of the current attention is your merit, the piece is entrusted to someone regular and indeterminate”

If the first example gives the idea of how challenging for a freelancer is to collect the material or get the appointments needed to perform his or her job, the second represents the fact that after the first challenge, merits and credits are given to someone else. Therefore, as a precarious employee not solely obtaining acknowledgement is harder, but also not recognized, which makes career progress arduous since personal achievements are vanished and thwarted.

Back to the #11 testimony, she also pointed out that she and her precarious colleagues were not allowed to enter the staff room and consume their meal there. In her second working experience, this time as a hostess with an on-call contract, the working environment was in her words:

“[...] completely different given the fact that the majority – if not the totality – were precarious with a determinate, zero-hour contract. I would say that between colleagues there was great solidarity and a completely different vibe compared to the one at the perfumery. The welcoming environment and the relationship with my colleagues were one of the reasons I stayed so long”

However, the relationship between the employee and her employer fell apart when after numerous delays in payment and some unacceptable requests, she decided to leave this experience. After asking to elaborate on the delays she was continuously facing, #8 added:

“Whenever something wrong happened to a regular employee, the employer was keener to fix it personally or sent the relevant documents to the human resources. Instead, we (irregulars) were discouraged to ask human resources given our unprecise status within the agency [...] I believe that the impossibility to have a direct exchange with the human resources office was one of the causes that pushed the payments even further in time, followed by ridiculous demands from my employer, as finding a lawyer to obtain what I rightfully earned...”

Excluding any commitment of precarious employees toward the human resources offices might mean that they are either not considered an organic part of the human capital and future investment of the agency, and therefore also their administrative concerns are to be addressed privately albeit created by the firm.

Another testimony, linkable to hostile treatment or alienation from the workplace is the one coming from #4 and #5. Since a precarious teacher might not be part of the organigram of the same school in the year coming, augment negative feelings over their employment. The opinion of #4 was ignored when it came to deciding the textbooks for next year or taking administrative decisions. As a consequence, both #4 and #5 felt sometimes “inferior” or “not as part of the staff as” their counterpart: an element that augments frustration and sometimes resentment. #5 was startled by the fact that independently from her international professional experience as a singer, she was looked at as an “accessory”, and “not as good” or “not in the position for” advance requests.

Concluding, #11 depicted a much more stressful work environment partly given how the daily tasks and schedules are divided between on-call and full-time employees. Standard employees have shifts without interruptions, with a meal included. While precarious waitresses, waiters and bartenders usually start around 11 a.m. until 15 p.m. and then again at 18 p.m. when the restaurant re-intensify the number of personnel for dinner time. Elaborating on this, the interviewee stated:

“Even if your shift is going to be divided into two parts, this does not make it better or more relaxing: actually, the complete opposite. For some of my colleagues that are not living close by the workplace, this break of 3 hours in the middle of the afternoon meant not going back home and continuing to be outside, but without being paid. For others like me those living overall close by, meant going back home, eat have a break of 30 minutes and then being back on the road. At the end of the day, none of us felt like we had a break of 3 hours, rather than we are waisted that time for a not very relaxing break...”

As stated in one of the previous sections, #11 added that being in possession of a zero-hour contract does not allow to plan life ahead since the schedule changes week by week, which clearly adds another stressful component and a condition that full-time do not face since they have a more fixed weekly schedule.

Concerning the rest of the interviewees, overall, they did not experience nor recall any experience linkable to the variables cited above.

5.3 Social protections and Labour Unions Representativity

This section will explore the analysis of the category of data linked to the degree of limitation in access or inclusion to social support and services. Authors that can be found in the literature review have included free professionals and part-times as precarious, and this is also why the researcher has included few interviews

from exponentials of these categories. The data obtained from the interviews conducted have indeed highlighted this phenomenon. Moreover, the interviews have highlighted that when it comes to welfare and social protections, an important distinction appears between those working in the private and those working in the public sector. Luckily, because the sample was created casually, the researcher achieved the testimony of four teachers and educators working from different employers – public and private – and with different contracts. This comparison is believed to highlight that independently from the profession, the guaranteed or existent benefits and social protection vary greatly. After being analyzed, the data extrapolated from the interview conducted with #4, a teacher with a fixed-term contract, working for the State, have highlighted overall satisfying employment, coming with all the social and security protections that are well-known guaranteed to all public officials. Indeed, the interviewee appeared more than satisfied with her job as a teacher and the social protections included. She confirmed the distinction between the private and public sector when it comes to subsidies while elaborating on all the welfare services she was entitled to, saying:

“[speaking about leaves of various genres] I cannot complain, working for the public school, you are more than covered, a thing that in the private (sector) did not happen...”

Of course, since she signed a subordinate contract for a determined time with the public, her salary was delivered throughout all the specified time, without any variation, even when after the Coronavirus hit Italy in March 2020, followed by the closing of all schools.

Another testimony as a public servant comes from #5, a music teacher in high school in her fifties. Like many musicians, she has a long story of part-time, and zero-hour contracts type of employment. Currently, she works for a well-known high school, with a contract that will expire this summer. When I asked about the social protections that apply to her category – teacher in the public sector, with a fixed-term contract – she replied focusing on sick leaves which are:

“[...] in general, badly received and often ignored. [...] The only thing me and the other precarious can ask for, even in case of emergency or medical reasons, is a non-retributed permit, which is hard to achieve, even though I have been working there for a few years now.”

This topic was particularly sensitive for the interviewee since she required specific treatments and medical attention, but this helped to dive into what this category of teachers faces in case of reasonable absenteeism from work. Moreover, #5 referred to the fact that working seniority, and the rise in wage that corresponds to it, does not apply to those under determinate contract, which therefore face inflation and the fluctuations of the economy – first the crises of 2008, then Covid19 and now the energy crises – without a wage that adapts to it, despite the long experience as professional. Also, she had to buy new technologies in order to properly teach music online, during the lockdowns, and without any refund nor contribution from the school, or from any public initiative to help teachers adapt to online teaching.

A very different story instead is the one coming from, an educator working for a cooperative (private sector) in possession of an indeterminate performance contract (0 hours). The particularity of this case is that despite the interviewee being in possession of an indeterminate contract, her situation is perceived as very precarious. At the question of whether she has any income support in case of absence of work for a reasonable reason (illness, pregnancy, care of an elderly and so on), she answered with a

“Yes, but given that my salary is very low, also the subsidies that are granted are modest, requesting them is extremely time-consuming and once you finish all the practices, often the money arrives six or seven months later. Therefore, is more reimbursement than an actual subsidy [...] For example, when the first lockdown happened in 2020, my unemployment subsidies were from the municipality not from the State. [...] the municipality decided to laid-off my cooperative to obtain the liquidation, which was then partly distributed by the cooperative to us.”

The situation that #2 described was a solidarity move that public entities use in order to assist vulnerable agencies, firms or enterprises, which happens through liquidation. In the case of #2, the municipality fired the cooperative to let them apply for unemployment benefits, which are consequently privately dispensed. She also added that the money obtained from the liquidation - which was more than the one delivered from the State - was just enough to get through the long period of lockdowns that happened between 2020/2021. The case of #2 becomes even more precarious if it is considered that in the summer period, when the children are on holiday, the cooperative is closed and therefore people with a performance contract do not get paid anything. Therefore, in 2021 she only worked 8 months, with a drastic reduction of the monthly wage, and the contributions that she will pay for the 2022 allowance.

A similar situation was depicted by #10, a socio-sanitary operator (called OSS in Italian), who worked for the private sector until 2021. She was able to receive compensation for all the patients – and the corresponding money - that she lost during the lockdowns put in place to fight the coronavirus pandemic. Like #2, #10 did not get any income subsidy from the public and official channels – mostly because her employer does not pay any contributions for her since she is part-time and determinate - but luckily, she was introduced by her employer to a consortium – namely, Consorzio Solidarietà- that takes care of income subsidies. However, the interviewee stated more than once that obtaining the contact and the subscription to the consortium was a *favour* that her employer personally gave her after she manifested some preoccupations concerning the loss of 80% of her patients and clients. Moreover, the interviewee also remembered from this experience that the reimbursement of expenses – mainly for the transportation expenses, like the fuel, which is very expensive in Sardegna since she had to visit her patients at home – was not included. This is a detail that augmented her material deprivation and her sense of social abandonment, ultimately pushing her to leave her position and the indeterminate contract she signed, to go back to precarity in the public sector, which assures a satisfying social security coverage.

Another testimony with high comparative potential comes from #6, a teacher from a private musical conservatory. Interviewee #6, like #5, has a long history of precarity since he is also a musician, and therefore he is used to moving often on the national territory, absolving a function for a determinate period. From 2022 he is working for a private musical school, as an occasional autonomous employee without any subordination constraint, which means that he gets paid based on the lessons he sustained as a teacher, and his schedule is kept around nine working hours per week, so the employer can avoid paying the contributions to build up #6's allowance. As the interviewee explained, sick leaves and reasonable absenteeism are not reimbursed nor covered.

“In case I get so sick that I cannot even do the lesson online, I am personally responsible and not covered. [...] From the standing point of protection, we are at zero. Consider that in my school only one, maybe two, out of the ten teachers that work there are in possession of a regular contract, with the allowance derived from it. [...]”

Hopefully, these four examples have highlighted that for the same profession or category, social security protections and guarantees applies differently based on the contract and the taxes paid to the various allowances by employers. Another clear distinction highlighted here is the one to be made between the public sector – which in general offers a satisfying coverage – and the private sector, which in some cases signified a higher wage, but lower or completely absent benefits, subsidies, and reimbursements. To stress more this point, the analysis will continue with the other testimonies, like the ones coming from #11, #7 and #8 all working in the hospitality sector, with a zero-hour contract. All three of them had similar experiences concerning social security benefits and subsidies. In case of injuries in the workplace or strictly connected to it, they all can appeal to the INAIL (National Institute for Insurance against Incidents at Work) which covers the time the employee is inactive from work. However, the reimbursement offered by the INAIL, even though satisfying quantitatively as described by all the interviewees, was also described as late in most of the cases. #11, for example, is still waiting for the subsidy consequent to an injury recorded one year ago, that is nullifying the usefulness and ultimate reason behind this insurance mechanism. None of the three of them had maternity and sick leaves covered, given the absence of a regular, full-time contract and, the modest contribution paid by the employer. Even though the three interviewees were living their uncovered situation consciously, an exchange with #11 revealed an interesting detail that did not come out in the previous interviews: also, zero-hour contracts can request an unemployment benefit through NASpI (New Performance of Social Assurance for the Employment). After the researcher stated that previous interviewees did not mention this social protection, the interviewee promptly replied:

“I also did not know until middle 2021. It is very complicated to understand what benefits and if there are any for my category. [...] I was always sure that for zero-hour contract employees there was no unemployment benefit until Covid19 arrived, I was at home like everyone, without any in-coming income, struggling to pay the bills... then I decided to call the syndicate to see if it was possible to get

anything, and I found it [...] however, if I would not have been proactive, I would have never found out.”

Not solely this episode describes a very common situation among precarious employees which relates to the regulative confusion that surrounds precarious employment. But also, the situation depicted by #11, represents another major theme surrounding precarity and rights: the almost total absence of the intervention and collaboration of the labour unions. The episode cited above makes it possible to connect the presence and acknowledgement of social protections to labour unions' representativity of precarious employees, which many interviewees have complained about. Civil education is not present within the Italian school system; therefore, it is reasonable to suppose that most citizens do not know a lot about what is guaranteed, what is not, and what is legit to demand. #11 stated that he was never approached by any major trade union; #9 used the words “*sad*” and “*frustrating*” talking about the situation concerning the economy, the Italian labour market, and the absence of any connection with the labour unions. #1, a journalist in his 50ies, admitted that his category is deeply and negatively biased toward the labour unions which:

“[...] are always advocating to increase the benefits and the protections of the regular, indeterminate journalists, forgetting about the great majority that is precarious and exploited. An example of this is the fact that the collective contract for the profession of journalist in its broad sense does not get renovated from 2014...”

Indeed, #1 cited the so-called CASAGiT, health insurance to reimburse medical examination of any sort, from prevention to treatment created appositively for journalists, but not all of them: it is indeed automatic for standard journalists, but not for the precarious ones. The latter has, what #1 described as “*modest and not worthy of all the documents to sign*”. His story evidenced how precarious employment, in the two dimensions of (a) (perceived) low or modest income, and (b) lack or insufficient social security coverage, can easily translate into a factor that can jeopardize life expectancy (e.g., neglecting preventive medical examinations), and the health-resilience of a country. The lack of appropriate (social) health insurance, and parental and medical leaves is a sign of the absence of labour unions' inclusion of non-standard employees in their bargaining with the public institutions. Freelancers and zero-hour contract labourers are completely missing in the dialogues between trade unions, the private sector and the government, which makes them *half citizens* as defined by #1. To emphasize this point, he recalled when in early 2010, tired of the negligence of the labour unions, with precarity on the rise, he and some other journalists decided to collaborate to draft the *Chart of Florence (Carta di Firenze*, in Italian) a deontological document, calling for solidarity between standard and non (freelancers) with the goal of eliminating and reducing exploitations and labour abuses. Also, #7 has a story as a precarious employee: first, as a bartender in the hospitality sector, and secondly, as a biker for a few delivery companies. Speaking about rights and social protections that apply to him as a rider, he said:

“[...] companies have all the interest to make you sign a contract as a freelancer, and not as a subordinate not solely to diminish the contributions that they pay for you, but also because they take

away the possibility to be included in a syndicate since there are no trade unions for autonomous workers ...”

His frustration was not totally directed toward the private companies but, alike #1, he had a negative image of trade unions as well. He perceived the operations of the major Italian trade unions as unsatisfying and modest. He described them as “*passive*”, “*mild*” (to be understood as the opposite of fierce) and “*too entangled with the political powers and elites*”. Elaborating on these conceptual points, the interviewee pointed out that:

“Trade unions have lost their point of focus and also the meaning and means needed to properly conduct trade unions activity. [...] In Italy the major trade unions, are so widespread, big, and known that they do not even try anymore to enlarge their civil participation, nor its variety [...] the result is that a broad and various category such as those that are indeterminate or autonomous does not have a voice to present their interest in the political scenario...”

The view of #7 partly matched #11’s one in the way that on one side precarious employees are left often out of welfare programs, but on the other hand, sometimes employees are not completely aware of what is and is not guaranteed or granted. This can be partly explained by the lack of a scholarly education on labour rights and law. But also, the laissez-faire and lack of adaptation to new phenomena and types of employment displayed by trade unions have stopped reaching new categories of labours, like for example the one working for the gig economy. Alike #1, #7 felt that nobody could or wanted to take care of his category therefore he translated his sense of abandonment and disappointment for the major Italian trade unions, with civil engagement through participating in the activities of smaller, self-organized syndicates. Given the fact that more modest and not-official trade unions are often managed and organized by ex-precarious employees, the reachability of this category has sharply increased. Interestingly, #7 added that:

“Despite the much lower number of subscription, smaller syndicated have the potential to be more present on a specific region or municipality, projecting actions and projects ad hoc to bring up the preoccupations of the participants [...] It sometimes resemble a form of activism in which instead of fighting for a particular profession or category, we fight for right and the end of exploitation, this allowed us not only to reach precarious employee but also migrants, which are completely forgotten by the major trade unions”

To summarize this section, it is possible to see how dissatisfaction and limited social security services are more common for those working for the private sector. Those, instead, working for the public one demonstrated to be more satisfied, since they have all the insurances that the State offer. Moreover, it is possible to see here how the interviewees connected their provision of benefits to the unsatisfactory operations of trade unions, which do not include the category of non-standard employees as their “subscribers”. Trade unions are seen as responsible for (a) the absence of a precise normative status for non-standard employees, which produces (b) the exclusion from (major) social security benefits and their membership as insured citizens.

5.4 Health Outcomes: Stress and Frustration

This section will present the most interesting and relevant points made by the interviewee, related to their health status and wellbeing. A clarification must be made over this section and its content. Since this qualitative research strives to detect the effect of a specific type of employment on human health, this is still socio-political research. This is to say that this thesis is not interested specifically in quantifying the interviewee's health status nor to detect any specific medical disease or condition. What this research is interested in determining is whether a SDH – like the type of employment – affects the perceived health status and overall wellbeing. Therefore, to draw the results of this last part of the analysis, Interviewees' elaborations that have been labelled as “*stress*” and “*distress*”, “*frustration*”, “*insecurity*”, “*instability*” and “*dissatisfaction*” will be presented.

Before entering in the heart of the topic, this section starts reporting the testimony of doctor A. Pompele a labour psychologist, who mainly focus on team building, and augmenting the satisfaction of employees through the development of some techniques. The conversation with the A. Pompele has highlighted, in her experience, there are not so many differences between precarious and standard employees for what concern mental health status. However:

“... it is indeed possible to hear more complaints from precarious employees, but they are not alone: much has to do with the environment that managers afford to create within the workplace [...] something that I have definitely noticed in these years is that, even if labour agreements are clear for individuals, sometimes what this entail in the long term, is not. And this can be the main cause of stress and frustration: keeping up the pace, not knowing if it will lead to something”

Out of the twelve⁴ interviews conducted, only two individuals, namely #2 and #8 clearly stated that they requested or felt in need of psychological support. Despite the young age, #8 stated that in January 2022, she found herself in need to obtain psychological support to face the pandemic and the consequent lockdowns. She also added that:

“[...] Covid19 gave me the ultimate push – also given the fact that I had more spare time- to look for the psychological support that I wanted for many years. [...]”

The elaboration of interviewee #8 continues by stating the reasons behind her sense of dissatisfaction and discomfort, saying that:

“My frustration originated mainly from the fact that despite a bachelor's and a master's degree, I feel that the future stable employment that I was expecting to find after finishing my studies will not come soon. My worst fear is that it will never arrive.”

⁴ The interview with psychologist Anna Pompele is excluded from this counting since she was interviewed as an expert and she is not part of the sample of precarious employees

Moreover, #8 admitted that her sense of frustration was also augmented by her dissatisfaction with her current employment (administrative intern) which not solely does not represent what she studies for, but also entails simplistic tasks. Ultimately, she elaborated on her well-being saying that since she finished the university it was jeopardized by unfair treatment and the lack of protection and rights when it comes to labour agreements and conditions. Although #2 expressed the same concerns and feelings, they originate from different factors. The frustration and stress expressed by #2 are linked to income insecurity – originated from her zero-hour contract, which makes future planning more challenging – and the consequent impossibility to undertake a new degree, in order to raise her career status and consequently aspire to a better employment agreement. Likewise, #8 also #2 felt the necessity to have some psychological support, however, they could not reach it given time constraints and their modest income.

A satisfying number of interviewees have elaborated on the fact that having a fixed-term contract leaves you always wondering if next year your job will continue being yours. The data have highlighted that this sensation and the consequent doubts increase after someone has been working for the structure or firm for years. This can be justified by the fact that working for the same employer for many years more might not change the situation. For example, #6 manifested a sense of discomfort, distress and tension every year, when the spring begins, since she is under a fixed-term contract since 2017, and the awareness that she was reconfirmed for five years or so by the same employer is not of any comfort. Some other respondents have highlighted that the life of a precarious employee is full of uncertainty since it is not possible to make important investments for the future. But also, it is a working-activity that requires high flexibility. Like #9 who talking about her health and well-being status referred to the fact that she decided to accompany her career as a singer, with teaching music in order to find stability. But it went quite the opposite. She said:

“I wanted to work in a school to find a place to stay, but when I started, I did not consider that I was going to add myself to a very long queue of precarious teachers. Every year I got relocated to a new school that not solely makes me lose the bond and relationship with my previous scholars, making always restart from zero – new colleagues, new students – but also entails finding a new apartment, in a new city and move. After a few years, this has started to get heavy, psychologically.”

The continuous transfers, or even the possibility that it might happen, were cited also by #3 as factors that were exacerbating her sense of frustration.

An interesting, and unexpected, concept came out in a good number of interviews around the question(s) about the interviewees’ mental and physical health was their past experiences with banks and loan systems. A satisfying number of interviewees have in fact associated stress and frustration with banks that apparently have high and strict standards, connected to employment and income when it comes to delivering loans and funds. Terms connected to “bank”, “loans” and “requirements” appeared in six (namely #6, #11, #1, #9, #10 and #13) out of twelve interviews. All the interviewees named above had trouble obtaining loans from the bank to conduct important investments, such as buying a house. What came out from the interviews is that

banks necessitate certain kinds of requirements, which are often not present when someone has a fixed-term contract. Therefore, banks ask to present a guarantor, which can either be a parent or a partner. Interviewee #1 elaborated on this situation (after he became a father, he was in need to buy a more suitable house) saying:

“[...] It was a ridiculous situation, however real: I was 30 years old and the bank would not concede any loan unless one of my parents accepted to be my guarantor [...] This was the ultimate proof that precarity does not allow to conduct an adult and mature lifestyle: you are treated like a failed adult...”

Both #1, #11 and #13 called this system *unfair* since it does not allow some labourers to invest for the future, and it is discriminatory toward those that do not have any guarantor, like interviewee #6 who, indeed, reached 40 years old could not obtain a loan to buy a house since she was without a guarantor given the fact that her parents were missing, and she was not married.

Following this, a portion of interviewees have conceptually elaborated on the question over their health status and wellbeing, focused more on their disappointment over the national situation than their private one. This has been highly common among male interviewees while women have elaborated more on their own specific situations. Frustration was highly linked to the current Italian economic and political situation for five interviewees (namely, #4, #7 #, #10, #5 and #13) out of twelve interviews. Interviewees #4, #10 and #7 stated that is frustration originated from the sensation that the political elites do not show or have any interest in solving precarity in Italy, rather the opposite. For them, the lack of legislation against exploitation and illegal work is justified by the fact that policymakers are biased and absolutely in favour of entrepreneurs and elites. #7 also added that this “*stationary miserable situation*” is making labourers and juveniles less serene, more passive and resigned. Greater fault is given to the incapacity of the Italian market to absorb graduate students and unemployed, which ultimately reduces the bargaining powers of workers in many different sectors. This feature was noticed through his activity as a syndicalist, through which he noticed that people are keener to accept the unfair and less favourable conditions as long as they receive some sort of income. While #10 was mainly worried about the academic inflation – the fact that Italian universities produce a high number of graduates that are not Interviewee #5 speaking about the labour market, described himself as resigned because he has lived all his working life as precarious, but he would auspicate a healthier and more sustainable economy for his son, but he was highly pessimistic over any possible amelioration.

Concluding, six (#8, #9, #1, #12, #7, #11, #2) out of the twelve individuals that have been interviewed, more or less in detail, admitted to neglect specialist and/or a preventive medical examination. Not causally, all these people are employed in the private sector, and not in the public one. The reason was diverse of course: for the youngest interviewees (#8, #11, #12) the main reason was that they did not consider it needed given the young age. Despite this, #11 stated that given his extremely variable schedule, even when it was needed on one occasion it was very challenging to fix an appointment. Others, such as #8, #1, #12, #9 and #2, stated that the reason behind their negligence was due to (a) a perceived high cost to sustain the examinations, (b) a (perceived) modest or limited economic resources to cover extra expenses and (c) the absence or insufficient

social health insurance. This, out of all the results from the analysis, is modest but it is the most relevant to answer the research question. Even if only half of a very modest sample have encountered this limitation, this is the proof that precarious employment in its dimension of conjugating inadequate and narrow salary, together with the total or partial absence of satisfactory subsidies and insurances, get translated into a possible threat for well-being and health. The prolonged disregard of preventive medical examinations can jeopardize the capacity of the health structure and personnel to address illness and sickness in time, ultimately harming the life expectancy of the most vulnerable layers of the population.

Conclusions

This chapter have reported the main results of the coding process, following the broad thematic tackled with the interviewees. The theoretical implications of the outcomes obtained will be summarized and analyzed one last time in the conclusive remarks (chapter 7), in order to answer the research question (chapter 1), and the hypotheses formulated (chapter 3). In the following section, it is to be found the critical discussion over the theoretical and methodological limitations of this research.

Chapter 6. DISCUSSION

In this section, the theoretical and methodological limits of this thesis will be described, separately. First, it is a widespread practice to test the integrity of the analysis, test the collected data for rival or alternative explanations. However, given the small sample and the fact that structured interview – which means that quantitatively the data collected were satisfying, but qualitatively they were not very diverse and broad - were applied, it is not possible to test the collected data in the light of other theories. Therefore, other theories and relevant explanations over what else except precarity produce adverse health outcomes will be presented. Secondly, the methodological limitations that were already introduced in the research design will be examined in more detail.

6.1 Theoretical discussion

The aim of this thesis is to analyse precarious employment in the light of the theoretical framework created by Dahlgren and Whitehead (1991) as an SDH, that can negatively impact the population's health status and wellbeing. Given the constraint of time and the time constraint to conduct each singular interview, in depth questions covering other SDH were not possible. The theoretical limit of this thesis is that does not succeed in understanding how social determinants are intertwined with precarity representing a threat to a fully healthy life. The research focussed on employment security, specifically non-standard forms of employment since they have increased in popularity in the last decades, and the advent of Covid19 makes believe scholars that hybrid forms of labour will continue to increase their frequency. However, as presented in the SDH framework (figure 2), other variables can equally negatively affect health, together with employment. Following a review of those factors and how they can be connected to precarity and suggestions for future analyses.

The environmental surroundings (to be intended as the physical environment, characterized by a certain level of pollution or toxic substances in the soil and the water) in which someone lives, for example, are a factor that can directly affect health. Boost in longevity and well-being is directly related to potable water, appropriate daily kcal assumption, consumption of healthy food, clean air and ultimately a safe and sustainable living space (The Hastings Center, 2018). Heart disease, asthma and cancer are only a few of the many illnesses produced by an environmental hazard (Ibid.). Future research could link how income insecurity, due to precarity, increase the possibility of living in polluted or degraded areas where rent are lower. Wilkinson (1997) have found that income insecurity is connected to a reduced liveable domestic area per household. It would be interesting to connect this studies to households highly precarious. Another factor that can trigger adverse health outcomes is related to the specificity of the job, more specifically those occupations called by Oginska-Bulik (2005) “direct-person-related jobs” in which the main point is to handle or modify the customer's or individual's physical or psychological behaviour. Some examples are social services staff, prison guards, teachers, psychologists and psychiatrists and so on. These jobs can be in some settings be particularly stressful since they imply a consistent level of emotional intelligence intended as the “ability to manage control others

and its own emotions” in order to “better cope with stress and suffer less from adverse health outcomes” (Oginska-Bulik, 2005). Also, the social environment in which someone lives can exacerbate adverse health outcomes. For example, a violent environment, like one characterized by forms of bullying, lack of social support, poor working conditions, lack of rewards, routinization and exploitation can trigger depression, anxiety, and some forms of mental illness (Hansen et al., 2006). These are variables that this thesis strived to access and analysis but the findings were modest and insufficient to draw any valuable theoretical achievements and knowledge.

Other factors that can directly affect human health are risky or hazardous behaviours, such as consumption of tobacco (both voluntary and involuntary) (Feinson & Chidekel, 2006; Gehrman & Hovell, 2003), drugs, and alcohol consumption and bad alimentary and sleeping habits (Harris, 1999; Cherikh et al., 2020). The uprising of risky behaviours is dependent on the level of education (Winkleby et al., 1992), the external environment, in particular from the habit of the community or social group someone belongs to. Particularly at risk to develop these habits are juveniles (Hawkins et al., 1999) and migrants (Harris, 1999). The insurgence of these behaviours seems negatively affected by education (Cutler & Lleras-Muney 2010; Glanz et al., 2008) therefore also the level of education (coming from both the school system, but also from parents and other model figures) obtained during a young age count as a factor that can affect the health status of adults (Lantz et al., 1998). Further research could connect precarious employees’ children level of education. Low level of education in their children can be a proof that the wealth during the year of precarity, (a) are a double (because it affect two generations) loss in human capital and (b) a double reduction in the internal demand, since lower education is connected to lower paid jobs (Bradford et al., 2015, Siahpush, 2005; Winkleby et al., 1992).

Moving more toward economic variables, there are other factors, besides precarity, that negatively affect physical and mental health. Moment of economic and political recession is often associated with an increase in unhealthy habits (major consumption of drugs and alcohol) and mental disorders, such as stress, anxiety, depression and ultimately, suicidal rates (Frasquilho et al., 2015). Since recessions hit different layers of the population differently (concentrating more on women, juveniles, elderly, low-skilled labourers and migrants), also the health outcomes will be uneven within different layers of the population (Premji, 2018; Oddo et al., 2021). Unemployment and poverty, also, favour the uprising of adverse health outcomes. Intense material deprivation can indeed jeopardize the ability of individuals to purchase necessary and basic goods, such as food, housing and pharmaceutical drugs (Mathers & Schofield, 1998), opening to the risks cited above. Clearly, social security benefits, whether present and sufficient can alleviate the situation. However, solely the absence of employment, even if not accompanied by any sort of material deprivation, can constitute a risk for individuals' mental well-being since employment status is connected to someone’s psychological sphere (ibid.). Low self-esteem, social – negative - stigma, marginalization, and alienation from the rest of society and the self could be possible effects (ibid.). Ultimately, scholars have noted that through unemployed layers

of the population, the probability of developing unhealthy and risky behaviours increases, in particular in less wealthy areas and regions (ibid.).

Some scholars have focused on the health impact originating from the conflict between someone's working and personal life. Frone et al. (1997) conducted a study on work-family conflict, both as working life interfering with family life and vice versa, finding that only family life interfering with the working one produces adverse health outcomes. This can be justified by the fact the lack of sufficient social security protections, that do not allow labourers to comfortably deal with familiar issues (Nandi et al., 2018). Medical and parental leaves, in particular, are designed to help employees to deal with familiar responsibilities and health issues, as well as, improve productivity (ibid.). Giving the possibility to people to leave for a determinate period of time the office, not solely helps them to maintain certain career prospects but also contributes to maintaining the same income and savings (ibid.). Thus, it is possible to say that the presence of policies in favour of paid leaves – for both women and men – helps reduce family-work conflict, ultimately reducing levels of the stress connected to maternity/ paternity, and personal and other's illnesses. Moreover, it was noticed that allowing parents to easily obtain parental leaves impact positively the health status of the infant(s) with lower child mortality rates in all populations (ibid.). This, in line with the hypotheses of this thesis, means that adversities coming from employment conditions and not exclusively can be faced in an easier way by individuals when social security protections are present. The flexibility that is often asked to precarious employees, can be a factor influencing their capabilities to put roots down, and build a family. Future analyses can try to link precarity and the likelihood to have children and at what age.

6.2 Methodology and limitations

Conducting qualitative analysis presents as many limits as quantitative does. However, while the second is supported by statistical convalidations, the second is described as a creative method that therefore implies a certain degree of interpretations made by the researcher (Bryman, 2016). One of the methods to amplify the validity of qualitative research is to triangulate -a sort of counter-test- the result. Triangulation can happen through different strategies: methods and theory triangulations imply testing the result through another method or theory to observe whether the result is the same or whether another theory better explains the phenomenon. In addition, there is also investigator triangulation, which entails letting another analyst conduct the analysis to eliminate possible biases coming from the original researcher's biases and subjective opinions (Grodal et al., 2021). Lastly, the researcher can also conduct a data sources triangulation which comprehends an ulterior check of the interviewees or data sources: the researcher can decide to (i) compare what is obtained with observational data, (ii) decide to listen to the interviewee(s) in a different setting, (iii) conduct another round of interviews in a second moment and (iv) interview different people in order to obtain a second perspective (ibid.). Given the time constraint to conduct this analysis, no triangulation was done, a thing that slightly jeopardize the validity of this research. The missing triangulation opens up for criticism of over-generalization of the findings of this research since qualitative analysis is highly linked to the context of the case (ibid.), and this research is no exception.

Some scholars have found that a remedy against overgeneralization might be the creation of more and more categories (Patton, 1999). The process of knowing and learning is strictly connected to the creation and splitting of categories: during the learning process children tend to overgeneralize concepts adding them to the same broad category, which then gets sub-divided into smaller ones and linked to others (ibid.). This process can be utilized by researchers to broaden their research, the data collection and enrich the analysis of concepts and narratives that were not initially considered, which ultimately allow for maintaining or abandoning the initially formulated hypotheses (ibid.). Splitting categories can therefore enrich the analysis of meanings, giving new shadows to theories taken as the initial model. This process also allows for finding alternative and contrasting narratives, which increase the reliability and validity of the analysis and allows for the creation of new theories and the discard of others because obsolete or tightly linked to some phenomenological features. The explicit transcription of the learning process conducted by the researcher, enhance the transparency and reliability of the analysis, and simplifies future replications and contestations (ibid.). Concerning this analysis, the researcher has strived to clarify as much as possible her learning and research process.

Concluding, since the research topic was broad (investigating precarity in the light of the SDH framework), unified with the limited time in which the interview was conducted (30/40 minutes), not many other categories and topics, other than the ones theorized in the conceptual framework, were identified looking at the coded transcripts.

Conclusions

This chapter highlights the limits of this analysis when it comes both to theoretical simplifications and methodological limitations. To summarize, when it comes to population health status many factors can negatively and positively affect it, as described by Dahlgren and Whitehead (1991, 2006). Trying to connect employment conditions to the other SDH was one of the main objectives of this thesis, which was unfortunately partly not fulfilled. The reason behind this “failure” is (a) the limited amount of time to conduct the research, (b) the limited amount of time at disposal to conduct the singular interviews, and (c) the small sample that does not allow wide generalizations. However, it must be said that interviewees were left free to elaborate on what they felt was *their reality*. Therefore, for example, this research is not able to connect precarity to the likelihood of living in a polluted and unhealthy environment mostly because (1) the questions would have been perceived as out-of-topic and (2) this is not information that average citizens are in possession of. The researcher takes for granted that if an interviewee felt that for some conditions connected to his/her employment, he/she was “forced” to live in an unsafe environment, they would have said so like they did when they admit their neglect of specialistic medical examinations. Overall, the elaborations of the interviewee were in line with the societal and theoretical implications imagined by the researcher except for a few concepts (such as their occasional problematic relation with credit institutes, and the frustration of some toward the state institutions). However, the result(s) of this thesis does not allow to determine whether precarity negatively affects other SDH, mainly because it was not possible to deeply consider the other SDH. Moreover, given the limited

lifespan of this research, it is not also possible to determine whether precarity compared to other forms of employment, harm the physical and mental health of the examined subjects. Future studies should strive to analyse this phenomenon through different research lenses, such as quantitative methods or comparative covariational analysis. Comparing two similar case studies that covariate only over a variable (like the extension of social security benefits to precarious employees) could highlight even a stronger relation between employment condition and health status. Furthermore, the opportunity to access medical records of large-N of precarious labourers will offer a stronger explanation of all phenomena. The utilization of a larger sample could also highlight category patterns, for example, gender or age differentiation in health outcomes in relation to precarity. Therefore, future research should determine after how many years of precarity, adverse health outcomes start rising. This research has highlighted how more this precarious situation is protracted and the more passive and resigned someone will be.

Chapter 7. CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Answer to the research question and confirmation of the hypotheses

The results obtained by the analysis of the data collected have highlighted some concepts and narratives in line with those presented in the literature review and conceptual framework. In the following section, these concepts will be summarized, and explained by the relevant academic literature, in order to answer the research question and confirm or not the hypotheses. The figure of determinate employees is sometimes an unstable and vulnerable position since they enjoy way fewer social protections and benefits, compared to those with a permanent contract given their indeterminate and blurred normative status (Alberti & Bessa & Hardy & Trappmann, & Umney, 2018; Burgess & Connell & Winterton, 2013). Their hourly working schedule is kept below certain limits (less than 40 hours per week) to cut labour costs, composed of salary and contributions for employees' social insurance (Burgess & Connell & Winterton, 2013). Moreover, often precarious employees are required major flexibility for what concern schedule, work location and salary (Murgia, 2010).

Starting from, wealth and social security protections, which in the conceptual model of this thesis are variables such as (i) income, (ii) material rewards, and (iii) institutional benefits which can constitute some sort of material deprivation. As the analysis has highlighted, a good portion of interviewees working or who have worked for the private sector was partially lacking a satisfying income and almost completely miss the social protections (e.g., parental, and medical leaves) that are instead totally guaranteed to standard employees in both the public and private sectors and fixed-time employees in the public one. A distinction must be made about unemployment benefits since Italy as a Christian Democratic welfare state has strong national welfare policies, with subsidies and benefits dispensed by a federation of syndicates (CGL, CISL, and UIL are the major ones), which however does not aim at a universalistic and egalitarian coverage. Indeed, also the interviews have highlighted the fact that even though some trade unions have extended some social security benefits to non-standard employees, these are (a) limited and modest monetary wise, (b) they are specific for some professions and not for others and (c) not well advertised, meaning that precarious employees are not reached nor by the trade unions and consequently their policies are not known. Thus, together with the sixth hypothesis, also the second one is found to be true.

Often the reductions of worked hours got translated into higher availability of non-standard employees, who are keener to take those shifts and tasks that others do not want favour for two main reasons: (a) augment the worked hours and increase their income and (b) demonstrate that they are valuable workers who deserve a standard, full-time contract. Furthermore, the interviews have also revealed that extra working hours and working during festivities and weekends do not -always- translate into a higher hourly salary. Then, it can be said that hypothesis four, was also confirmed by the results of the coding.

The semi-structured interviews which have been conducted have highlighted that except for those with a contract in the public sector, the other categories do not enjoy the full package of welfare protections. For

example, all the autonomous workers and freelancers who are paid based on their performance, are not recipients of the salary, in case of no activity, but also no appropriate and sufficient subsidies are dispensed (Burgess & Connell & Winterton, 2013). The same story is worthy for those who are kept under forty working hours per week (part-time), allowing the employers to avoid paying contributions and taxes used to build a private allowance (ibid.). Moving toward the legal protections intended as the insertion of a specific contractual arrangement into an institutional framework to clearly specify the rights and responsibilities of employees and employers, and their scope of action within the rule of law, the data have confirmed that due to the unclear legislative status many could not access social security benefits, harming the first variable that was presented – income security. So, the sixth hypothesis, in its first dimension was highly confirmed by the analysis.

Speaking instead about the relationship between precarious employees and the labour unions, a relevant number of interviewees made a reference to them and their activities. As hypothesized, the overall judgment over the major Italian syndicates is mediocre from the perspective of precarious employees. To begin with, this is explained by the fact that precarious employees are not included in the propaganda nor in the ultimate collective agreements negotiated by trade unions, given their non-being part of the organigram of the firm (Mantouvalou, 2012). Therefore, those battles that were undertaken by labour organizations not solely were modest in their achievements – given their reduced capacity to shape the labour market and regulations - (Regalia & Regin, 2018; Keune & Pedaci, 2020), but also do not apply to precarious employees, nor are they in their favour. In light of this, also hypothesis six in its second dimension was found to be felt by the interviewees.

In the conceptual framework (Figure 3), it is possible to find three variables connected to the work environment, namely career advancements, task complexity, and discriminations. Concerning the opportunity to advance in career and status which also includes the educational perspective (e.g., the possibility to obtain a university degree, or technical certificate), this analysis has presented a mild and not very clear result over this factor. In general, it is possible to say that in the public sector, individuals did not notice any difference in how opportunities, responsibilities and future advancement were proposed to them and to standard employees similarly. Instead, those in the private sector have elaborated on this concept reconnecting it to the unsatisfactory salary and income that they possess, stating that ulterior educational achievements or training were not possible for monetary reasons, the absence of time or the impossibility to have a fixed schedule. So, hypothesis number five is truer for those working in the private sector, than in the public one. The analysis has also shown up a mixed situation: severe episodes of unfair treatment at the expense of precarious employees were present in some cases, while others were completely or almost totally absent. Those who do not face important discrimination stated that it really depends on the personality of the individuals, whilst those who have witnessed discrimination and unfair treatment have indicated as responsible for the firm itself (as a perpetrator of classist narratives) and the impossibility to speak to the managing board or the human resources offices. In fact, not allowing all the employees to reach the human resources can be a sign of unfair treatment, since the main objective of these types of offices is taking care of the human capital of an agency, together

with documentation and bureaucratic affairs in a sustainable and goal oriented-way (Chams & García-Blandón, 2019). However, given the reduced number of confirms from the interviewees, the third hypothesis cannot be confirmed.

Moving the level of satisfaction concerning daily mansions and the position occupied. Considering this, the analysis has highlighted that the interviewees' perceived level of satisfaction concerning the role occupied at work, heavily depended on (a) the time spent under the same employer (b) the time actively spent in the labour market, (c) the level of appreciation of the daily tasks and (d) and the environment at work. In fact, it is possible to notice that a great difference can be drawn following age and years of labour market activity: younger people were in general more satisfied with their status – unless they were completely unsatisfied with the tasks – compared to older generations. In the latter, a high sense of frustration for their stationarity was found. However, in younger people who have been working for a longer time, sense of frustration and stress were higher compared to others since, despite the young age, they were already feeling stuck in a certain position. This allows us to state that, following an age/time spent on the market variables, also hypothesis number one is legitimate. Moreover, even though, heavy discrimination and unfair treatment were found only in three cases (saying that since precarious employees can easier lose their position, colleges are less keen to listen or acknowledge their opinions and desires) this factor was highly associated with – and therefore linked as a cause of - frustration and stress.

Partially in line with what Alberti et al. (2018) have written, while job instability has remained relevant but constant, the *sense of insecurity* has risen in the past decades. Indeed, both concepts are present in most of the interviews. However, it must be kept in mind that the hardship faced by this research is the same as the precedent ones: while job insecurity is almost a measurable variable, the broad sense of insecurity is much harder to define and measure. Although, it is possible to find these concepts in interviewees' personal elaborations when words such as “future”, “planning/plans”, “anxiety”, and “instability” were used. While the results of Hassard and Morris (2018) have highlighted that when it comes to insecurity feelings a generational distinction must be made since younger generations accept the current situation as the new normality, this research reports a different result. Older generations after been dealing with precarity and occasional jobs seems more resigned to the ongoing Italian state of affair. Despite the overall sense of acquiescence, the interviewee also demonstrated a sense of frustration, discontent and dissatisfaction with the government's and trade unions' management and governance. On the other side, the younger generations were as much as critical of the state, and the administration and behaviour of their managers and colleagues, and in some cases, they were actively engaged in syndicate activities or not keen to be submissive and acceptable of unfair conditions. It is possible to draw another distinction from the analysis, which is related to the public versus private debate. In general, interviewees working in the private sector were enjoying less and more modest social protections, monthly salaries and rights, compared to those working in the public. This adds how, even though the Italian public sector counts way more precarity, this is still a better choice than working for private firms and employers.

Lastly, the SOFL framework adds another variable not contained in the conceptual model of this thesis which is “life beyond work”, which entails a clear, stable, and agreed-upon division between work and spare time. As written in the result section, the majority of the interviewees did not deeply elaborate on this particular feature of precarity except for those working as sanitary operators and those working in the hospitality sector. However, it is possible to state that this correlation (precarity and hardship in separating personal working life) was overall non-problematic in the examined sample. There have been authors, like Virtanen et al. (2005), that have taken a more positive standpoint toward precarious employment theorizing that precarization might bring the benefits of enjoying more freedom, acquiring multitasking and organizational skills, diverse expertise, and networking. Bosmans et al (2016) have found a result that indeed some individuals reported positive feelings, such as major freedom, challenging and mutable working environment, and heterogeneous learning opportunities. While, in this study, similar optimistic feelings were found especially in those professions in which these features are inherent – such as freelancer journalists. Other professional categories did not stress particularly these concepts.

Concluding, the one cited above are the main results of this thesis. Despite the findings were various and multidisciplinary, it is not possible to surely give a positive or negative answer to the main research question. However, stress and frustration were quite common topics within the transcripts it also important to remember that half of the interviewees have admitted neglecting medical examinations, considering both their cost, their age and health status and the lack of a social health insurance. This detail is believed to be the standpoint for future research interested in investigating precarious employment as a health variable in the long term.

7.2 Policy recommendations

Policy recommendations revolve around the main cleavages highlighted by the interviews. Firstly, the data collected together with the literature review highlighted the presence of an incoherent situation at both the social and institutional level, which get translated on one side with the necessity for the market to be more and more flexible, and on the other side, the modest and limited protections of the welfare state which does not sees precarious employees as an existent category apart. The deregulation started in the 1990s did not reduce unemployment rates nor made employment more sustainable, since in Italy the exercise of citizenship is still only guaranteed to those with standard contracts. Therefore, new policies should reconfigure the social component of the state, modifying the accessibility to social security protections and welfare programs which should be independent of the contractual agreements of the individuals. Indeed, this diverse distribution of benefits, between those included and those excluded (like, determinate employees, but also unemployed, stay-at-home parents and migrants), creates and increases existing inequalities and inequities. Therefore, more than changing the contract or fighting against non-standard types of employment, policies should focus on assuring those rights that are assured with the citizenship, and in line with the European and Constitutional values and principles. These principles can be found in “Beyond Employment” (European Commission, 1999) which maintains after 20 years an important standpoint to enforce a universal social policy for the member states.

Following, the Green Paper of 2006 strove to reform the labour market and laws in order to adapt to new models of flexicurity, which should comprehend both freedom and security for labours. Clearly, these texts have been applied only in their “deregulation” prescription, but not in their sustainability and security protocols.

Secondly, include non-traditional labour categories in the operations of trade unions as much as possible, in order to allow them to be politically represented and exercise their citizenship rights, and augment the protection of those working in the private sectors, making the market economy more sustainable. The decline of the trade unions and consequently of their bargaining power is caused by the decrease of compliance of workers and the modification and the fragmentation of the labour market. Therefore, in order to improve and, luckily, reach universal social security, trade unions not solely should reacquire their representativity in traditional sectors and foremost increase the one for outsiders. This is believed to be the key to arresting and limiting the ongoing deregulation of the labour market. One of the limits and risks of this improvement is the possibility to lose the approval and compliance of those highly qualified segments of the labour force, which have in general more bargaining powers. Thus, labour unions will have the challenge of first, maintaining and convincing the crucial sector that the collective action is more convenient than an individual one. Secondly, achieving progress and profits for the government and the enterprises, while extending the provision of common-pool resources. Because as said by Boeri, Brugiavini and Calmfors (2001) “unions are, on the one hand, rent-seeking bodies; but on the other hand, they may also contribute to increasing aggregate welfare by remedying market failures”. This is not an easy task, primarily, because as said before, it is not an easy task to reach non-standard employees in non-traditional sectors, and secondly, the bargaining process with the private sector is not smooth given the fact that firms have all the advantages in preferring individual or group agreements with their employees. However, economists agree that trade unions cover a vital role since they can solve market failures through (i) setting minimum collective standards to augment the efficiency of the supply system, pushing the least efficient out of the market and (ii) the setting a minimum universal salary (which in Italy is still missing) increase consumptions, as happened in other European countries. Concluding, in Italy the triologue between enterprises (private sector), labour unions and the public institutions should be fostered in order to achieve the values contained in the European charts – over fair employment, production standards and sustainability -, augment the legitimacy of firms in front of citizens, increase the protections and representative powers of those working in the private sector, and boost the productivity and efficiency of the Italian market. Concluding, Italian policymakers and analyst together with the governmental institution should reconsider their strategy for the economic development and progress, which in the last decades have focused on compression of the human cost of labour and the limitation of investment, in key sectors such as education, culture, research and development (Chies, 2015). These choices are the main cause of the current stagnant situation, which constrains the internal demand, lowering the GDP of the entire country and does offer appropriate prospective to standard and non-standard employees, unemployed, juveniles and so on. Moreover, labour market reforms were not followed by appropriate reforms of the welfare system needed for reducing

adverse health outcomes, the outward migration of skilled workers and the (the rising) socio-political dissatisfaction toward democratic institutions.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I – Sample of the questions asked during the interview (s)	
Topic 1 – Income and material deprivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is your profession? What type of contract do you have? - Are you satisfied with you monthly income, in relation to the task and the schedule? - Does your income allow to have a comfortable life? - Are extra worked hours or festivities paid more?
Topic 2 – Working Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you, or your colleagues, ever faced unfair treatments because of your non-standard employment status? - Do you feel that your daily tasks and schedule differ from the one of standard employees?
Topic 3 – Social Security Coverage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the benefits you can ask for in case of (a) sickness, (b) injuries, and (c) familiar or personal reasons? - Are you satisfied about the social security protections applicable to your category? - What is your relationship with the trade unions?
Topic 4 – Physical and Mental Health Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thinking about your employment situation, and the years spent under it, how does this make you feel? - How often do you sustain preventive specialistic medical examinations?