

Course Syllabus - Precarious, Unstable, and Distressed: The Mental Cost of Precarious Work

Language of Instruction: English

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Course Contact Hours: 15 hours

Recommended Credit: 2 ECTS credits

Weeks: 1

Course Prerequisites: It is highly recommended to have notions of sociology and/or public health

Language Requirements: Recommended level in the European Framework B2 (or equivalent: Cambridge Certificate if the teaching language is English, DELE or 3 semesters in the case of Spanish)

Course structure: Seminar

Course classification: Introductory/Intermediate

Course Description:

Working can be a fulfilling, healthy, meaningful, and even enjoyable activity, but it can also turn into an unbearable ordeal that makes us sick and can even lead to our demise. Many workers fruitlessly strive to secure decent and fair employment, which is now quite scarce, and find themselves compelled to take on one or several precarious jobs that affect their health and their lives. Living precariously means leading an uncertain life, being more fragile, aging prematurely, and dying prematurely. At the same time, the existence of a vast army of the unemployed generates a social fear of being replaced. The blackmail of necessity forces one to accept employment for a subsistence-level salary (or less), with harmful working conditions. Using a transdisciplinary integrated approach, this course aims to provide a comprehensive integrated diagnosis, enabling students to understand the causes and the relationship between job insecurity and mental health. Additionally, it seeks to enhance students' understanding of the processes involved in the formulation of public policies.

Learning Objectives:

The student will acquire tools to critically address the following aspects:

1. Transdisciplinary and systemic thinking by exploring the primary causes of precarious work and its impact on mental health.
2. Public policy analysis with specific examples aimed at reducing precarious work and improving the mental health of the working population.
3. Understanding of the processes involved in the policy agenda- setting and the role of scientific knowledge.
4. Acquire notions regarding the interest and usefulness of adopting an approach based on politics, history and complex systems thinking.

Course Workload:

The course is divided into lectures, workshops, presentations and discussions. Students are expected to engage in pre-course and ongoing readings and collaborate on a group presentation.

Methods of Instruction:

The course is divided into lectures, workshops, presentations and discussions. Students should be prepared to read before and during the course. The structure of the course will be as it follows:

- Eight hours of theoretical classes divided into 4 days. Seven hours of internship: 4 hours (1 hour per day after the theoretical classes) of debate or group work
- Three hours on the last day for the presentation of group work and discussion.

Method of Assessment:

The course evaluation will consist of three components:

- Class participation and debates: 25%
- Presentation of a brief final group project during the last session: 25%*
- Individual final paper: 50% (to be submitted one week after the course concludes)**

* Group assignments will be defined during the first class. The group projects will focus on an aspect related to the course topics, and each group will present a proposal for analysis and methodology.

** The individual paper should not exceed 2,000 words (excluding references).

Absence Policy:

Attending class is mandatory and will be monitored daily by professors. The impact of absences on the final grade is as follows:

Absences	Penalization
Up to one (1) absence	No penalization
Two (2) absences	1 point subtracted from final grade (on a 10 point scale).
Three (3) absences	The student receives an INCOMPLETE for the course

The BISS attendance policy does not make a distinction between justified and unjustified absences. All absences—whether due to common short-term illnesses or personal reasons—are counted toward the total amount and cannot be excused. Therefore, students are responsible for managing all their absences.

Only in cases of longer absences—such as hospitalization, prolonged illness, traumatic events, or other exceptional situations—will absences be considered for exceptions with appropriate documentation. The Academic Director will review these cases on an individual basis.

Students must inform the Instructor and the International Programs Office promptly via email if serious circumstances arise.

Classroom Norms:

- No food or drink is permitted.
- There will be a fifteen-minute break during the class.
- Students must come to class fully prepared.

Course Contents:**SESSION 1. 07 July 2025**

Overview of the course. Introduction to key concepts, theories and models: precarious work as a social determinant of health

Discussion

Reading assignments:

Benach (ed). Precarious Work and Mental Health: An Integrated Approach from Knowledge to Policy. Edward Elgar, 2025. (Chapters 1 and 2).

SESSION 2. 08 July 2025

The relationship between precarious work and mental health: fundamental causes, inequalities and intersectionality

Discussion

Reading assignments:

Benach (ed). Precarious Work and Mental Health: An Integrated Approach from Knowledge to Policy. Edward Elgar, 2025. (Chapter 3).

SESSION 3. 09 July 2025

Health in all policies: the role of public policies in safeguarding workers' health

Discussion

Reading assignments:

Benach (ed). Precarious Work and Mental Health: An Integrated Approach from Knowledge to Policy. Edward Elgar, 2025. (Chapter 4).

SESSION 4. 10 July 2025

Critical analysis of public policies to reduce precarious work and enhance the mental health of the working population: The PRESME Report Experience

Discussion

Reading assignments:

Benach (ed). Precarious Work and Mental Health: An Integrated Approach from Knowledge to Policy. Edward Elgar, 2025. (Chapter 5).

SESSION 5. 11 July 2025

Presentations and discussion.

Required Readings:

- Benach J, Vives A, Amable M, Vanroelen C, Tarafa G, Muntaner C. Precarious Employment: Understanding an Emerging Social Determinant of Health. Annual Review of Public Health 2014; 35:229- 253.
- Julià M, Vives A, Tarafa G, Benach J. Changing the way we understand precarious employment and health: precarisation affects the entire salaried population. Safety Science. 2017; 100:66-73.
- Utzet M, et al. Employment precariousness and mental health – understanding a complex reality: a systematic review. Int J Occupational medicine and Environmental Health 2020;33(5):569-598.

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Recommended bibliography:

- Caroz JM, The double burden of precariousness: linking housing, employment, and perceived stress—a cross-sectional study. *International Journal of Environmental Health Research* 33 (11), 1102-1111.
- Ervin J, et al. A longitudinal analysis of the impact of multidimensional precarious employment on the mental health of men and women. *Nature. Scientific Reports* 2024. DOI: 10.1038/s41598-024-78843-z
- Gunn V, et al. A Systematic Review of Evaluated Labor Market Initiatives Addressing Precarious Employment: Findings and Public Health Implications. *International Journal of Social Determinants of Health and Health Services*, 2025(1);:1-21
- Hayat A et al Ramifications of Precarious Employment for Health and Health Inequity: Emerging Trends from the Americas. *Annual Review of Public Health* 2024;45:235-251.
- Kalleberg AL. *Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies*. Medford, MA: Polity Press; 2018.
- Kreshpaj B, et al. What is precarious employment? A systematic review of definitions and operationalizations from quantitative and qualitative studies. *Scand J Work Environ Health* 2020;46(3):235-47
- Matilla-Santander N, Martín-Sánchez JC, González-Marrón A, et al. Precarious employment, unemployment and their association with health-related outcomes in 35 European countries: a cross-sectional study. *Critical Public Health*. 2021; 31(4): 404-415.
- Quinlan M, Mayhew C, Bohle P. The global expansion of precarious employment, work disorganization, and consequences for occupational health: a review of recent research. *Int J Health Serv*. 2001; 31(2): 335–414.