

WORKING PAPER

THE UNITED KINGDOM: FROM FLEXIBLE EMPLOYMENT TO VULNERABLE WORKERS

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Debates on precarious employment in the UK have followed two key concepts: flexibility and vulnerability. During the 1980s, in the context of high unemployment, homelessness and industrial restructuring, debate focused on the growth of numerical flexibility (part-time work, temporary work and subcontracting) (Atkinson and Meager 1986; Pollert 1991). Did these 'new' jobs represent 'atypical', 'precarious' or 'insecure' employment? Research gathered the characteristics of these workers and their employment conditions. Subsequently, questions arose as to whether workers in these new categories could make transitions into permanent full-time employment (O'Reilly and Bothfeld 2002). Since the late 1980s there has been a wealth of cross-national comparative research on 'atypical' employment, as well as a number of government and company initiatives to encourage and remove regulatory anomalies around flexible work and encourage better 'work-life balance' (O'Reilly 2003). For example, legislation in the UK in May 2008 granted temporary agency workers the same rights as permanent workers after 12 weeks employment (BBC 2008). A key component of this debate has focused on gender differentials and the different ways households combine care and work.

The second strand of research around precarious employment has developed more recently, partly in relation to migration and the development of the concept of vulnerable workers (TUC 2008). Here the concern has been about the types of people coming to work in the UK and the conditions under which they are employed. The diversity of migrant workers in the

UK is extreme: some experience excessive privilege, others excessive exploitation, to the point of death, as evidenced by the Morecambe Bay Cockle Pickers (Meadowcroft and Blundell 2004; Barber *et al.* 2005; IPPR 2007).¹ McGovern (2007) argues that it is becoming increasingly difficult for industrial relations researchers to ignore migration, especially as these people are often in precarious employment (Leighton and Painter 1987; TUC 2008).

But the concepts of precarious employment and vulnerable workers are problematic, as the extent of insecurity in the UK is empirically and theoretically contested. In this chapter we outline these debates and examine trends in precarious employment, drawing attention to the dimensions of gender and household characteristics. In evaluating this evidence, we argue that methodological differences in conceptualization and measurement of precariousness have led to conflicting positions about its significance and symbiotic relationship with non-standard employment. Questioning the pervasiveness of precariousness is particularly pertinent at a time when the economic buoyancy of the last decade is clearly in demise.

CONCEPTUALIZING PRECARIOUSNESS: THE UK DEBATE IN CONTEXT

The contested and problematic nature of precarious employment in Europe is evidenced in the work of Barbier (2004), who critically analyzes the emergence of the concept in international research, drawing in particular on the French literature from which it originally emerged. He concludes that it was difficult to use the concept in the context of comparisons within Europe: ‘One key obstacle was the question of measuring the extent of “employment precariousness” quantitatively, where it was found that no satisfactory index could be devised, even in France where the concept originated’ (Barbier 2004: 2). One common trend was that precariousness was associated with ‘flexible’ employment in the form of temporary or part-time employment. But the degree to which these forms of employment were

‘precarious’ and gendered varied significantly both within and across countries (Rodgers and Rodgers 1989; O’Reilly and Fagan 1998; Gash and McGinnity 2007).

A more controversial debate in the UK has developed over the related concept of insecurity. Beck (1992, 2000), Giddens (1998) and Sennett (1998, 2004) argue that employment conditions, and wider social relations, are becoming more insecure and individualized. But Fevre (2007) questions these claims in a critical review of the empirical evidence measuring insecurity in the UK, referring to measures of non-permanent employment contracts, perceptions of risks of unemployment, and feelings of insecurity. The evidence, on all three counts, suggests that the trend goes in the opposite direction in the UK over the past decade: there has been a fall in the number of non-permanent contracts and the vast majority appear to feel quite secure in their jobs. This analysis is also supported by Doogan (2001, 2005) and Auer and Cazes (2000, 2003). Perceptions of insecurity are more common in Spain, Portugal and Poland than in the UK (Fevre 2007) or, according to Paugam and Zhou (2007), in countries where class inequalities are lower than in the UK.

More recently the debate about vulnerable workers in the UK has faced similar problems in defining which groups of workers and employment conditions are included in this concept (TUC 2008). Characteristics of vulnerable employment include: low pay, illegal and unfair deductions from pay, unsafe workplaces, limited rights to leave, and insecurity at work. The Commission on Vulnerable Employment organized by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) defines vulnerable workers as: ‘workers whose participation in the labour market places them at risk of ongoing and often extreme suffering, uncertainty and injustice resulting from an imbalance of power in the employer–worker relationship’ (TUC 2008). Here the focus is often on the worker rather than the job. Collecting reliable and systematic evidence on these workers is also problematic. The TUC estimate that there are two million such workers in the UK, which includes: agency workers, migrant workers, home-workers, informal workers,

younger workers, 'atypical' temporary workers, and unpaid family workers. However, the experience of these workers is heterogeneous, which as a result exacerbates the controversy both in the UK and elsewhere.

Comparative analytical frameworks can be found in the work of Barbier (2004), who argues that the conceptualization of the distinction between normal, secure employment and precarious work is dependent on: the nature of the national system of social protection; the industrial relations system; the 'employment and activity regime' in terms of the distribution of employment across generations and genders; and the 'normative system' expressed in regulations, collective agreements and firm practices. Barbier's emphasis on a differentiated normative framework highlights what is often taken for granted within national employment systems. The acceptability of precarious employment varies between groups both in terms of age, gender and occupation: for example, for creative workers 'a norm for photographers or for cultural workers is legitimised and different from the mainstream norm' (Barbier 2004: 15). The acceptability of the norm for mothers or young people to be employed part-time or on temporary contracts also varies significantly between countries, in contrast to the 'standard' norm for full-time, permanent employment for fathers aged 35+; Gottfried (this volume) refers to this as the 'reproductive bargain', related to gendered expectations around who takes responsibility for caring and earning. Gash and McGinnity (2007) illustrate the differential impact of these norms in economic terms in how fixed-term contracts may have a more punitive effect in countries like France where mothers are more likely to work full-time and continuously than in countries where they do not, such as western Germany or the UK (Booth *et al.* 2002).

Vosko (2006) argues for a multidimensional analysis of precariousness that differentiates both between societies and groups. A dualistic conceptualization of standard and non-standard work fails 'to capture the deterioration of full-time permanent employment' (Vosko

2006: 11). She argues for developing a more relational- and process-orientated approach ‘attentive to social context and to social location’ (Vosko 2006: 12). Her proposed ‘mutually exclusive typology’ of employment states allows her to map the proportion of workers in each category and how this has changed over time. For Vosko (2006: 11) ‘... precarious employment encompasses forms of work characterized by limited social benefits and statutory entitlements, job insecurity, low wages, and high risks of ill-health’. To this typology she adds the dimensions of ‘certainty’, regulatory effectiveness, control via unions, and the income package. ‘Certainty’, she argues, is normally conceived of in terms of job tenure.

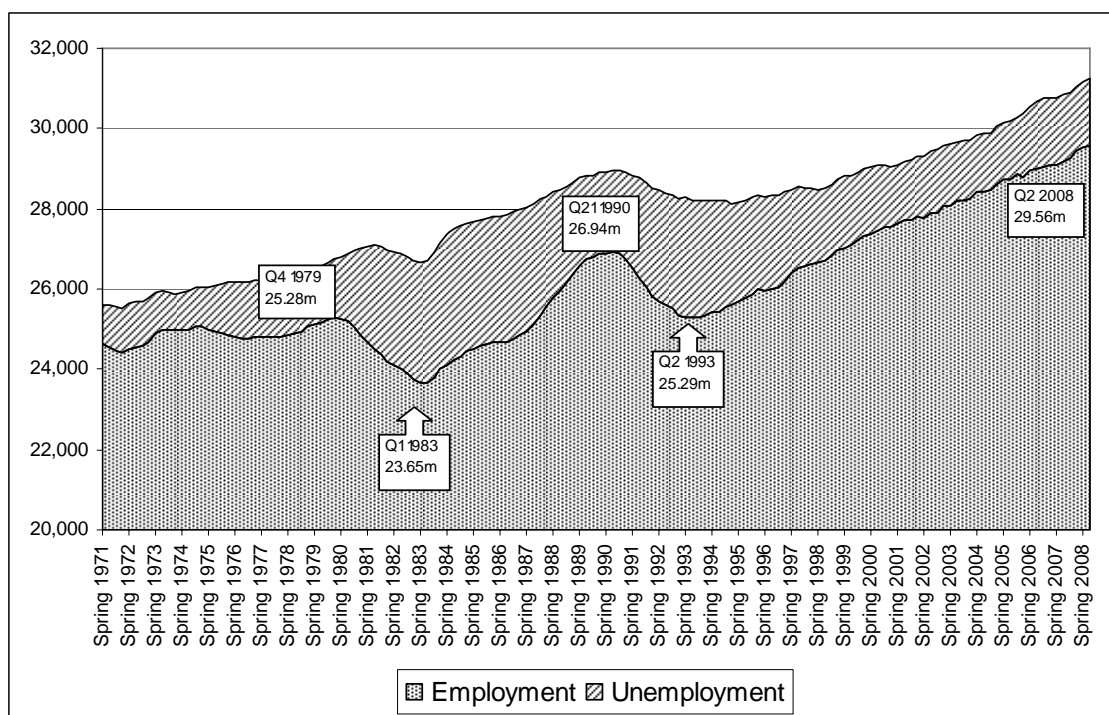
Much of the controversy about whether precarious employment is increasing or not in the UK is largely due in part to the way it is defined, measured and compared both over time as well as across societies. There is also a distinction between the methods used and the groups compared: small-scale qualitative research is more likely to find arguments to support the idea that precariousness has increased, depending on the types of workers studied; larger-scale quantitative studies, are divided between those who find little change and others who counter this claim from a comparative perspective (Forde and Slater 2005; Gash and McGinnity 2007).

Trends in the UK

As in the US, British employers have made less use of temporary contracts, compared to their European counterparts. Part-time employment and an increasing variety of work schedules are, however, more common in the UK. Overall employment rates here have increased since the early 1970s. Figure 3.1, using Labour Force Survey (LFS) data,² shows the broad trend in employment and unemployment for the last 35 years, marked by two periods of intense recession (1979–83 and 1990–3). The first period was precipitated by the Thatcher

government's switch to labour market deregulation and free collective bargaining from the previous corporatist management of the economy and industrial relations. Since 1993 employment has grown steadily by almost four million employees, which is about two million higher than its 1990 peak, while the population of working age has grown by a little over two million. This growth has drawn in substantial immigration, now mostly from the new accession states of the EU (for example, Poland), whereas previous immigration had been from former colonies in the Caribbean and Asia. Such immigration was virtually closed off by both Labour and Conservative administrations in the late 1970s and 1980s, but in recent years the UK has seen some of the highest levels of migration since the 1960s (IPPR 2008). The current international financial crisis has resulted in public debate about the numbers of migrants who should be allowed to come to the UK.

Figure 7.1: Employment and unemployment, UK, 1971–2008 (thousands)



Source: UK Labour Force Survey 2008.

Debates on labour market trends since the mid-1990s have taken place in the context of a relatively healthy economy, up until the Autumn of 2008, with previous low levels of unemployment and high levels of immigration; this contrasts to the German experience over

the same period (Fagan *et al.* 2005). Since 1995, the UK has benefited from sustained GDP growth; employment rates have risen; inflation has been low; interest rates fell until 2003; average earnings have grown (above the rate of inflation since 1996); and there has been a sustained growth in real disposable income (see Table 3.1) (DWP 2008: 16). The proportion of men and women in paid work has increased since 1995. The proportion of those in poverty has fallen since 1998–9. Individuals with an income below 60 per cent of median earnings (before housing costs) practically halved from 12.9 million people in 1994–5 to 6.6 million in 2005–6 (DWP 2006: 32–3).³ However, with the percipient recession these conditions will change and unemployment will increase.

Table 7.1 Recent economic indicators for the UK, 1995–2007^{a b c}

	<i>GDP growth^d</i>	<i>Base interest rates^e</i>	<i>Inflation rate (headline)^f</i>	<i>Male employment rate^g</i>	<i>Female employment rate^g</i>	<i>Average earnings growth rate^h</i>	<i>Real household disposable income growthⁱ</i>
1995	2.9	6.6	3.4	76.3	65.8	3.1	2.6
2000	3.8	6.0	2.9	79.3	69.1	4.5	4.5
2005	1.9	4.6	2.8	79.0	70.1	4.0	2.1
2007	3.0	5.5	4.3	78.9	69.7	4.0	1.2

Source: DWP 2008: 16.

Notes:

- a) All growth figures are for the year in question compared to the previous year.
- b) All figures are for the UK, except Average Earnings Growth, which covers Great Britain.
- c) Some minor revisions exist since last year due to revisions to underlying Office of National Statistics data.
- d) GDP at market prices, chained volume measure (UK National Accounts 2007 edition).
- e) The base interest rate is the annual average for the relevant calendar year.
- f) Inflation rate is the annual average change for each calendar year as measured by All Items Retail Price Index.
- g) Employment Rates are seasonally adjusted figures for the Spring quarter of each year (March to May).
- h) Average earnings growth is the actual (as opposed to real terms) annual average for each calendar year.
- i) Real disposable income growth is based on the Real Disposable Income series, calendar years.

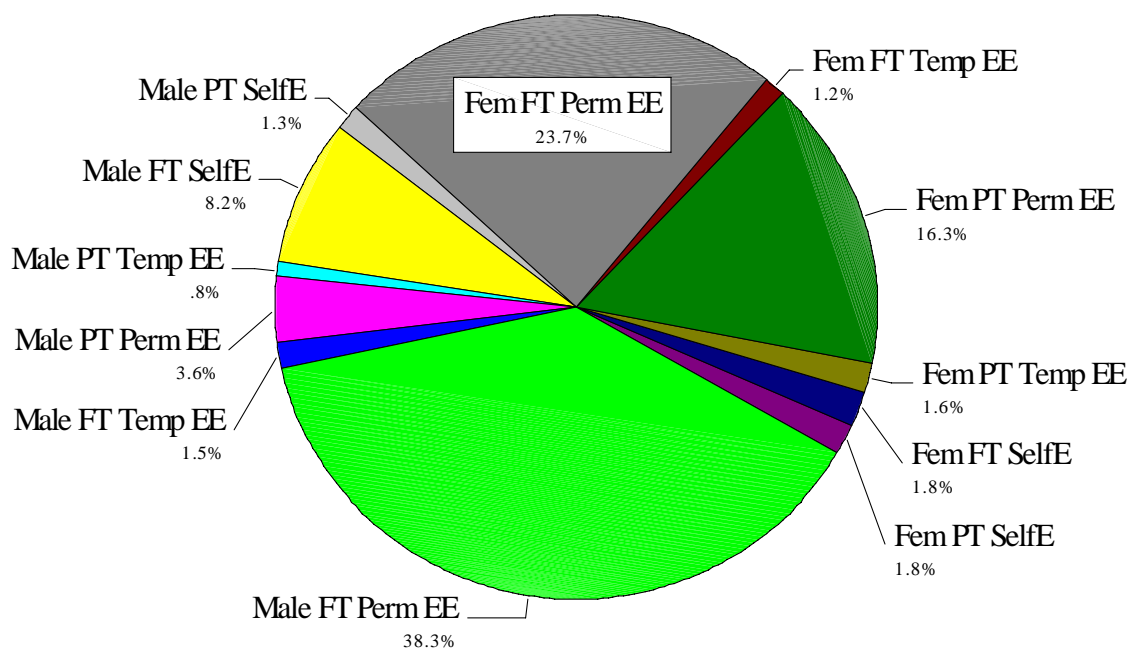
At an aggregate level, the LFS data provide little evidence of any significant increase in the spread of precarious employment. However, such a conclusion must be tempered by two fundamental qualifications. First, the LFS does not examine the distribution of earnings, a key indicator of precariousness. Second, precariousness is concentrated in particular groups of the population, occupations, regions and economic sectors. Insofar as the devil is in the

detail, a positive general picture is quite compatible with areas of very poor and worsening experience.

In the middle of 2008 there were around 28 million employed and self-employed workers in the UK. Around 1.1 million of these workers had a second job. Unemployment rates were at 5.7 per cent in October 2008 and are expected to increase. Temporary employment is relatively uncommon, covering less than 1.5 million and has remained fairly stable. Although more men are likely to be self-employed than women, there has been a slight fall in full-time self-employment for men. Male part-time employment has doubled, albeit from a fairly small base: it has increased to just over one in 10, compared to over four out of 10 for women.

There has also been a notable rise in the proportion of women working full-time. Figure 3.2 provides a breakdown by sex for all the forms of employment in the UK in 2007 according to the typology proposed by Vosko (2006).

Figure 7.2 Employment status and sex of employees and self employees, UK, mid-2007 (% of total employed)



Source: UK Labour Force Survey 2007.

Notes: base = employed and self-employed; FT = full-time; PT = part-time; EE = employee; SelfE = self-employed; Temp = temporary; Perm = permanent.

Table 7.2 *Employment status by sex, UK, 2007 (thousands and column, % by sex)*

	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>All</i>
FT Perm EE	10,789	6,696	17,485
	71.3	51.2	62.0
FT Temp EE	411	329	740
	2.7	2.5	2.6
PT Perm EE	1,008	4,586	5,594
	6.7	35.1	19.8
PT Temp EE	236	450	686
	1.6	3.4	2.4
FT SelfE	2,302	505	2,807
	15.2	3.9	10.0
PT SelfE	376	508	884
	2.5	3.9	3.1
Total	15122	13074	28196

Source: UK Labour Force Survey, Second Quarter (UKLFSQ2).

Notes: base = employed and self-employed; FT = full-time; PT = part-time; EE = employee; SelfE = self-employed; Temp = temporary; Perm = permanent.

Tables 3.3 and 3.4 show the distribution according to employment status and how it has changed between 1996 and 2005, both for the entire working-age population and for households with children. The two biggest changes for the working-age population since 1996 have been the fall in the numbers of the non-employed ('inactive') by nearly 3 percentage points, and the rise in full-time permanent employment also by 3 percentage points. Women in particular have benefited from this growth in full-time permanent jobs (Table 3.3).

Non-employment rates for mothers fell even more since 1996 — from 35 to 29 per cent (Table 3.4). In 2005, fathers were more likely than men in general to be employed, whereas employment rates for mothers and other women were virtually the same. However, mothers in the UK are more likely to be working part-time (42.2 per cent) than full-time (28.2 per cent). For women in general these percentages are reversed: full-time rates are higher than part-time ones.

Part-time employment for men continued its growth from a small base (Table 3.3). The proportion of individuals saying they worked part-time because they could not find a full-time job fell from 13.4 to 8.6 per cent. The proportion of women working part-time who said they did not want a full-time job was very high at around 80 per cent. The main reason men gave for not wanting to work full-time was feeling financially secure, while 43 per cent of women said they wanted to spend more time with their families. These differences in the acceptability of part-time employment are clearly related both to gendered expectations and to the possibility of securing working hours that are compatible with family demands at different stages in the lifecycle. Three-quarters of women cited care giving (mainly for children) as the reason they worked part-time, compared to just over one-quarter of men.

The reason parents gave for not holding a full-time job was because they wanted to spend more time with their families: 32.3 per cent of fathers and 57.8 per cent of mothers cited this reason (Table 3.4). However, nearly a third said domestic commitments *prevented* them from working full-time (23.5 per cent of fathers and 32.7 per cent of mothers). Although insufficient child care is not cited as the main reason for not working full-time, we cannot tell from this data if this is a post-hoc rationalisation where gendered expectations are that women are responsible for child care and this is the main reason they are working part-time (for parallel findings on Canada, see Vosko and Clark, this volume).

Table 7.3 Employment status and sex, UK, 1996 and 2005 (%)

	1996			2005		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Type of Contract						
FT permanent	55.1	32.4	44.1	56.9	36.6	47.1
FT temp	2.7	2.0	2.4	2.1	1.6	1.9
PT permanent	3.2	23.4	13.0	4.8	24.4	14.3
PT temp	1.0	2.9	1.9	1.1	2.1	1.6
FT no contract*	13.1	3.0	8.2	12.1	2.7	7.5
PT no contract*	1.2	2.7	1.9	1.4	2.6	2.0
No workers	23.7	33.6	28.5	21.4	30.0	25.6
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Reason for part-time job						
Student or at school	40.3	10.0	15.0	37.1	12.7	17.9
Ill or disabled	2.9	1.1	1.4	5.2	1.7	2.5
Could not find full-time job	29.4	10.3	13.4	16.7	6.5	8.6
Did not want full-time job	27.4	78.6	70.1	41.0	79.1	71.0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Reason not wanting full-time job						
Financially secure — work because want ^a				23.8	6.2	8.3
Earn enough part-time ^a				17.0	6.6	7.9
Want to spend more time with family ^a				12.3	43.3	39.6
Domestic commitments prevent full-time ^a				8.6	28.5	26.1
Insufficient child-care facilities ^a				0.4	1.6	1.5
Another reason ^a				37.9	13.7	16.7
Total				100	100	100
Reason part-time work						
Looking after children ^b				21.1	71.9	67.5
Looking after incapacitated adult ^b				5.6	3.3	3.5
Some other reason ^b				73.3	24.8	29.0
Total				100	100	100
Types of temporary job						
Seasonal work	4.4	5.2	4.8	5.1	4.0	4.5
Contract for fixed period, fixed task	55.1	50.0	52.2	44.9	49.8	47.4
Agency temping	12.6	13.2	13.0	22.5	15.9	19.1
Casual work	17.6	21.0	19.5	17.6	17.3	17.4
Not permanent in some other way	10.3	10.6	10.5	9.9	13.0	11.5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Reason for temporary job						
Contract including training	6.9	4.3	5.4	8.6	7.1	7.8
Could not find permanent job	49.9	37.6	43.0	31.9	21.1	26.3
Did not want permanent job	18.5	32.0	26.0	21.8	26.8	24.4
Some other reason	24.7	26.1	25.5	37.8	45.0	41.5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Roche and MacInnes calculation from the UK Labour Force Survey 1996 and 2005.

Note: Figures refer to male (16–64) and female (16–59) in any type of household.

*'No contract' refers to workers without a contract of employment: employers, self-employed, and family workers.

a) Autumn quarters only from Autumn '94 to Autumn '99. Spring and Autumn quarters from Spring '01.

b) Spring and Autumn quarters only from Spring '01.

Table 7.4 Employment status by household type, UK, 1996 and 2005 (households with couples and children) (%)

	1996			2005		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Type of Contract						
FT permanent	65.7	19.7	43.1	68.7	24.9	47.3
FT temp	2.1	1.3	1.7	1.7	0.8	1.3
PT permanent	1.2	33.1	16.9	2.2	35.8	18.6
PT temp	0.4	3.9	2.1	0.3	2.4	1.3
FT no contract*	16.4	2.8	9.7	16.7	2.5	9.7
PT no contract*	0.8	4.5	2.6	1.0	4.2	2.6
No workers (inactive and unemployed)	13.4	34.7	23.8	9.3	29.4	19.2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Reason for part-time job						
Student or at school	5.9	0.4	0.8	6.4	0.8	1.2
Ill or disabled	4.8	0.3	0.5	7.8	0.4	1.0
Could not find full-time job	57.7	5.4	8.3	27.3	2.8	4.7
Did not want full-time job	31.5	93.9	90.4	58.4	96.0	93.0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Reason not wanting full-time job						
Financially secure -- work because want ^a				8.4	1.5	1.9
Earn enough part-time ^a				6.7	1.7	2.0
Want to spend more time with family ^a				32.3	57.8	56.5
Domestic commitments prevent full-time ^a				23.5	32.7	32.2
Insufficient child-care facilities ^a				1.5	2.2	2.2
Another reason ^a				27.7	4.0	5.2
Total				100	100	100
Reason part-time work						
Looking after children ^b				58.2	93.8	92.3
Looking after incapacitated adult ^b				2.3	0.6	0.7
Some other reason ^b				39.5	5.6	7.1
Total				100	100	100
Types of temporary job						
Seasonal work	4.0	3.7	3.8	5.3	2.5	3.6
Contract for fixed period, fixed task	65.3	57.5	60.1	60.3	60.7	60.6
Agency temping	10.1	9.4	9.6	20.6	9.1	13.6
Casual work	10.6	19.1	16.2	4.9	12.5	9.5
Not permanent in some other way	10.0	10.4	10.3	8.9	15.2	12.7
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Reason for temporary job						
Contract inc. training	4.9	2.7	3.4	10.3	5.5	7.4
Could not find permanent job	62.6	34.8	44.1	33.1	18.8	24.4
Did not want permanent job	5.5	35.8	25.6	10.8	24.2	18.9
Some other reason	26.9	26.8	26.9	45.8	51.5	49.3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Calculations by Roche and MacInnes from the UK Labour Force Survey 1996 and 2005.

Notes: Figures refer to Head of Household (Household Reference Person) and partner in households with dependent children.

* 'No contract' refers to workers without a contract of employment: employers, self-employed and family workers.

a) Autumn quarters only from Autumn '94 to Autumn '99. Spring and Autumn quarters from Spring '01.

b) Spring and Autumn quarters only from Spring '01.

The proportion in temporary work and self-employment fell between 1996 and 2005; the former largely through the proportional fall in seasonal and contract / fixed-term work (Table 3.3). Note that seasonal work fell only for women, while fixed-term contract work fell only for men. Agency temping increased from 13 to 19 per cent of all temporary work in 2005, with larger increases for men. Agency temping became a more significant form of temporary work for men than casual work. Nevertheless, fixed-term contracting accounts for the lion's share of all temporary jobs in the UK for both men and women. The inability to find a permanent job has decreased in importance as a reason for working as a temporary worker: 43 per cent of temporary workers cited this reason in 1996 compared to only 26.3 per cent in 2005. A quarter of all temporary workers did not want a permanent job (note that this figure grew for men and fell for women over the time period) and an intriguing 41.5 per cent cited other unspecified reasons, which marks a large increase from the 25.5 per cent that gave this answer in 1996. Clearly the options given in the survey are inadequate in capturing the full range of workers' preferences.

Household types and transitions between caring and sharing

Researchers increasingly recognize the need to situate analysis in terms of household type, rather than focusing solely on individuals' experiences (see Clement *et al.*, this volume). For example, concern about the exceptionally high number of children in the UK who are living in households below the poverty line (around 20 per cent of all children) has drawn attention to the fact that their parents are often in precarious employment or they are not employed (Brewer and Gregg 2002). The short-term economic effects of precarious employment may be less severe for women or students in households where a male breadwinner can secure a regular salary.

According to LFS data, approximately 28 per cent of all households in the UK were couple households with children; lone parent households accounted for approximately 10 per cent of the remaining households. In dual parent households both parents were more likely to be working: 25 per cent of these children had both parents working full-time, which has increased over the decade; around 30 per cent of children were living in modified male-breadwinner households, meaning that the mother worked part-time and the father full-time. A further 25 per cent of children were in traditional male-breadwinner households. The remainder were in non-conventional dual parent families, where the woman is the main earner (5.2 per cent), or where both work part-time (0.9 per cent), or where no parent is employed (6.7 per cent). While this last category has fallen since 1997, the overall proportion of children in 'work-poor' households remains high by international standards. Estimates of poverty vary from between 15 and 40 per cent, depending on how the poverty threshold is defined (UNICEF 2005; Minoff 2006). Levels of employment for lone parents have been particularly low in the UK but have also been a target for government policy (Minoff 2006).

In contextualizing precariousness in relation to household structures and transition patterns we used the European Community Household Panel (ECHP) to compare how households moved between different ways of organizing care and work (O'Reilly and Nazio forthcoming). This analysis examines eight years of data for the sequences in different types of the households in the population aged 25–45 years.⁴ By comparing sequences of household structures for the UK and a number of other European countries, we found some distinct differences in transition patterns in general and in those associated with the birth of a child. First, the pattern of dual full-time earner households was much stronger and widely found in countries like Denmark and Finland, as we might expect. More entrenched traditional male-breadwinner patterns, where the man works full-time and the woman stays at home, were observed in Spain and Italy; once the household had established a traditional breadwinner arrangement they were unlikely to change this over the course of time. In the

UK we found a more eclectic pattern of transitions between a range of different working and caring arrangements both across couples and within households.

After the birth of a child, it was common for Danish couples to revert to a dual full-time earner household after a period of maternity leave, or a short spell as a male-breadwinner household. In Spain, the arrival of a child usually resulted in the formation of a traditional male-breadwinner household, which was unlikely to change over the eight-year observation period. There were also a small minority of households in Spain where both parents either maintained or were able to return to full-time employment after having children. In the UK, after the birth of a child couples more often moved towards a male-breadwinner division of labour. However, this was peppered with periods of modified male-breadwinner and sometimes dual full-time earners. But compared with all other countries the UK had the most eclectic and erratic pattern of transition for individual households. In other countries, couples tended to veer towards a particular type and then settle in that one.

Interestingly, and somewhat unexpectedly, the eclecticism observed in the UK was also found in France, with a series of short-tenure states of different caring and working arrangements: in these two countries, less than half of the dual full-time *and* single breadwinner couples were in the same state four years later. Periods of reduced working hours after childbirth for one of the parents (usually the mother) tend to last longer in the UK than in France, where part-time employment is less popular.

This initial analysis of household transitions emphasizes the importance of understanding whether precarious employment acts as a stepping stone to something better or worse (namely, unemployment), or if workers in this employment are stuck in poor quality jobs (see Fuller, this volume). The evidence for the UK is mixed: some workers clearly use these types of jobs to move on to something better, while others are more likely to end up dropping out

of paid work. What differentiates them are the levels of qualification. Lower-skilled male workers and mothers in the UK are more likely to have broken trajectories, while better qualified workers and those in the public sector are able to move on to something more secure (O'Reilly and Nazio forthcoming).

Here we briefly examine the distribution of the length of either the spell of current continuous employment with the same employer, or the spell of self-employment on the same basis (Table 3.5) using LFS data. The distributions are all skewed by a significant minority of employed persons in all categories (including formally temporary employment) with long work spells, so that medians are well below means. The overall median employment spell for women is four-and-a-half years compared to five for men.

In all categories men have longer spells than women, except for men in part-time permanent employment; a higher percentage of men in this category are in fact looking for full-time employment (O'Reilly and Bothfeld 2002). There was a difference between permanent and temporary part-timers in the amount of time they spent in a job, although women in permanent part-time jobs have the longest duration in these jobs. The spells in temporary full-time employment are much shorter than those working in permanent full-time jobs, as we might expect.

For employees an employment spell can end because they choose to leave, because they are forced to leave (by dismissal, redundancy or the end of a temporary contract), or because they retire. The LFS data for employees in Table 3.6 suggests that the main reason for leaving a job is because they resigned or ‘for some other reason’, both for those who found a job and for those who did not. However, this kind of survey data cannot tell us why and the circumstances in which they resigned. Women are much more likely to leave for ‘family’ reasons, reflecting unequal gender relations and the reproductive bargain in the UK.

How these differences should be interpreted is one of the reasons for disputes about the nature of precariousness in the UK: if people leave a particular employment state quickly, is this because they have fallen out of the labour market or because they have moved on to something better? If those on part-time contracts have a similar length of duration in this status, are they in precarious employment, or is it because they have few other alternatives? These types of questions can only be answered using longitudinal data (see Fuller, this volume). To understand the circumstances in which people decided to resign from their jobs clearly needs more in-depth qualitative types of research.

Table 7.5 Employed persons, current continuous employment spell in months, by sex, UK

		<i>Mean</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>Std.</i>	<i>N</i>
		<i>Deviation</i>			
FT Perm EE	Male	106	64	110.6	10744
	Female	92	57	95.9	6675
FT Temp EE	Male	22	8	44.0	409
	Female	23	9	45.2	329
PT Perm EE	Male	59	24	93.6	1004
	Female	87	56	92.6	4570
PT Temp EE	Male	43	12	90.1	236
	Female	41	12	74.4	446
FT SelfE	Male	148	108	134.5	2273
	Female	111	74	106.7	503
PT SelfE	Male	166	96	171.4	374
	Female	109	62	118.9	506
Total	Male	107	61	117.1	15039
	Female	88	53	95.8	13030
	Total	98	58	108.2	28069

Source: UK Labour Force Survey.

Notes: FT = full-time; PT = part-time; EE = employee; SelfE = self-employed; Temp = temporary; Perm = permanent.

Table 7.6 Employees, reason for leaving job, by sex, UK

		Male	Female
Left < 3 months, working now	Dismissed	1.4	1.5
	(In)voluntary redundancy	10.6	8.0
	Temporary job ended	11.1	11.3
	Resigned	46.0	48.2
	Gave up work for health reasons	.9	1.1
	Took early retirement		.4
	Retired (at or after state pension age)	.3	.4
	Gave up wk for family/personal reason	4.9	5.1
	Left for some other reason	24.9	24.1
	All (n)	350	274
Left < 18 months, not working now	Dismissed	4.0	3.4
	(In)voluntary redundancy	17.4	13.1
	Temporary job ended	15.3	10.3
	Resigned	21.8	22.2
	Gave up work for health reasons	7.5	7.2
	Took early retirement	6.5	3.4
	Retired (at or after state pension age)	9.0	10.9
	Gave up wk for family/personal reason	6.5	16.3
	Left for some other reason	11.8	13.1
	All (n)	321	320

Source: UK Labour Force Survey.

Evaluating mixed messages in the UK: Is it good or is it bad?

This chapter set out to provide a brief review of the growing debates related to precariousness in the UK labour market. Precariousness is not a concept commonly used by British researchers. The UK debate has focused on whether employment durations are an indication of insecurity and disadvantage, or whether part-time and temporary work provide an integration step to more secure employment. Labour market analysis has increasingly realized the importance of moving away from a purely stock analysis of the proportions in particular positions, to ask, where do people move to and why (Booth *et al.* 2002; Gregg and Wadsworth 2002; O'Reilly and Bothfeld 2002; Fuller, this volume)? The evidence is mixed. Some workers are able to use what could be called 'precarious' employment to make

transitions to better quality and more permanent jobs. However, a significant group do not, and some of those people do not 'want' to. This lack of desire to make the transition is linked to normative or structural reasons related to gender inequalities, how these are internalized as acceptable norms, as well as the lack of structural opportunities like care provision and employment that is available to them. What differentiates the second group is usually the individuals' qualifications and the sectors in which they work.

Discussion of the positive and negative effects of non-standard employment — those that are not in full-time or permanent work — has also been divided on the methodologies researchers should use and the conclusions to be drawn from their evaluation of precarious employment. Quantitative analysis of labour market trends suggests that there has not been any significant increase in this type of work or perceptions of insecurity (Green *et al.* 2000). Although jobs tends to be of lower quality, the protection and wages of these workers have increased (Green 2008) and there is evidence that these workers are able to move into more permanent jobs (Booth *et al.* 2002). Nevertheless, the fortunes of seasonal and casual workers are more mixed (Green 2008). This is made apparent in research using more qualitative methods that focuses on low-skilled seasonal and migrant workers (McDowell *et al.* 2007). However, research that has focused on more high-skilled workers concludes with a more positive assessment of the experience of working on temporary contracts (Guest 2004). International comparisons emphasize that the consequences of a particular type of work depend a lot on country norms — Gash and McGinnity (2007) find fixed-term contracts to be of considerable disadvantage for women where the norm for women is to work full-time and continuously, as in France. As Vosko (2006) argues, the issue of interpreting precariousness is clearly related to social and geographical location.

By looking through the gender lens, we can gain a more complex, clearer image of these transitions. Some women — the highly qualified and childless — adopt a standard male-

worker model of integration into paid work, but they are a minority and still tend to do less well than their male peers, especially in high-skilled occupations. Nevertheless, they are moving on, and leaving behind a larger group of women who are piecing together care and work possibilities. Although some men are doing more in the home, for a great many homes the traditional gendered division of domestic labour remains as stark: women are still more likely to be found in low-paid, low-skilled occupations and with interrupted careers (Ward *et al.* 2007). They are also vulnerable to pension penalties in older life as a result of having had a ‘precarious employment career’ because of the competing demands of managing a family and financing them. While there has been an increase in women in the UK working full-time, the predominant model is one of a modified male-breadwinner, with the women working part-time.

A long-running seam of research has focused on the gender differences in employment status, pointing to the fact that women are much more likely to be on ‘precarious’ contracts compared to men. Debates in the UK have taken considerable time to discuss whether this is because these workers ‘prefer’ these types of contracts. Regardless, the characteristics of the British employment and reproductive regime mean that the option to take up part-time, temporary or precarious employment is a ‘constrained choice’, under the circumstances of the highest child care costs in Europe (Folbre 1994; Purcell 2000). The gender lens has itself had to become more complex, especially when we take account of new migrant workers in the labour market, an emerging area of research (Dale and Holdsworth 1998).

At the start of this chapter we argued that the concept of precariousness has been discussed in terms of two distinct debates: one focusing on issues related to work–life balance policies and the other on issues related to the employment conditions of migrants. Government policy in the UK, for example on parental leave arrangements, has been less coherent and difficult to justify within a business framework, according to Lewis and Campbell (2007). The *Work and*

Families Act 2006 extended maternity leave and allowed part of this to be transferred to fathers at a flat rate allowance with the right to return to their previous employment.

Nevertheless, the expectation was that the take-up of the entitlement for fathers would be very low (DTI 2005b Table E2; 2006a Table A1). In the context of a voluntaristic pattern of industrial relations, the government's approach has been cautious, incremental and oriented to consensus building, which, according to Hegewisch (2005), appears to be successful. Hegewisch (2005) shows that take-up has been higher in the UK than in Germany, where legislation was stronger. But Lewis and Campbell (2007: 23) argue that the focus on mothers, rather than fathers, does little either to address the issue of the long-hours culture in the UK or to develop targets to improve gender equality.

Migration studies add complexity to these debates around precariousness. Barber *et al.* (2005) briefly outline the range of existing temporary worker schemes in the UK, which include general work permits, working holiday maker schemes, seasonal agricultural worker schemes, sector-based schemes for hospitality, catering and food processing, the Highly Skilled Migrant Programme, and domestic worker and *au pair* schemes. The diversity of these schemes reflects the different employment conditions that migrants experience when coming to work in the UK on a temporary basis. One of the key arguments they make in their analysis is the need not just for rights for these workers but also for the enforcement of these rights. In particular the *Gangmaster Licencing Act (2004)* has been seen as an important initiative in regulating the use of migrant workers, especially in low-skilled sectors and where many of these workers do not have full legal status to work in the UK.

Precariousness, insecurity and vulnerability are contested issues within research and policy debates in the UK. Whether these developments are positively or negatively evaluated reflects not only methodological issues about assessment of the labour market as a whole but also issues concerning the experiences of particular types of workers. Research indicates that

when the economy is doing well people are more likely to make a greater number of transitions, whereas in harder economic circumstances they are more likely to try and retain their existing contractual relationships. The economic climate in the UK has been exceptionally positive over the past decade, but this is unlikely to continue. At the same time there have been a number of different policy initiatives to encourage both flexible work and protection of such workers. Nevertheless, the enforcement, monitoring and effectiveness of such policies will be a key issue in future analysis of the nature of precarious employment in the UK in particular with expectations that unemployment will rise.

NOTES

¹ These were a group of Chinese workers who died in Morecambe Bay in 2004. An excellent film, *Ghosts*, depicts the circumstances and tragedy of their deaths while working in the UK.

² There has been a range of different sources used to examine the growth and development of precarious employment, from the British Household Panel Survey (Booth *et al.* 2002), to the LFS (Forde and Slater 2005), to company-specific studies (Ward *et al.* 2001). By far the most useful data source for the UK labour market is the LFS, based on a weighted un-clustered rolling sample of around 56,000 private addresses, which stay in the survey for five quarters, giving it a useful but brief 'panel' element. Details of the labour force and other characteristics of around 105,000 people aged 16 and over are collected every quarter. Basic personal details are also collected for around 28,000 children aged under 16. 'Anonymized' micro-data is released quarterly. Fairly detailed comparisons can be made back to 1992, and for some more general trends, to 1984. The survey is both comprehensive and detailed, so that, for example, the description of the main direct and derived variables from the data set runs to over 1000 pages. Full details are available at:

<<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Source.asp?vlnk=358&More=Y>>.

The LFS suffers the drawback of any household-based survey that the most marginal strata of the population are less likely to be covered and, in any case, less likely to give useful answers, owing to fear of reporting an unlawful or illegal status to an interviewer identified as coming from the government. Thus it is very difficult to know how well the LFS gives information about the condition of the estimated quarter to half a million illegal immigrants who work in the UK, often in conditions of extreme marginality and exploitation.

³ The numbers are even higher if measured after housing costs fell from 15.8 million in 1994–5 to 8.2 million in 2005–6. These proportions are not reported in the most recent DWP report.

⁴ To avoid duplication of information, only the female members of the couples were selected (together with single or divorced/widowed women). Only the sequences of those women observed across all the eight waves of the panel are reported in these graphs, which are available from the authors on request.

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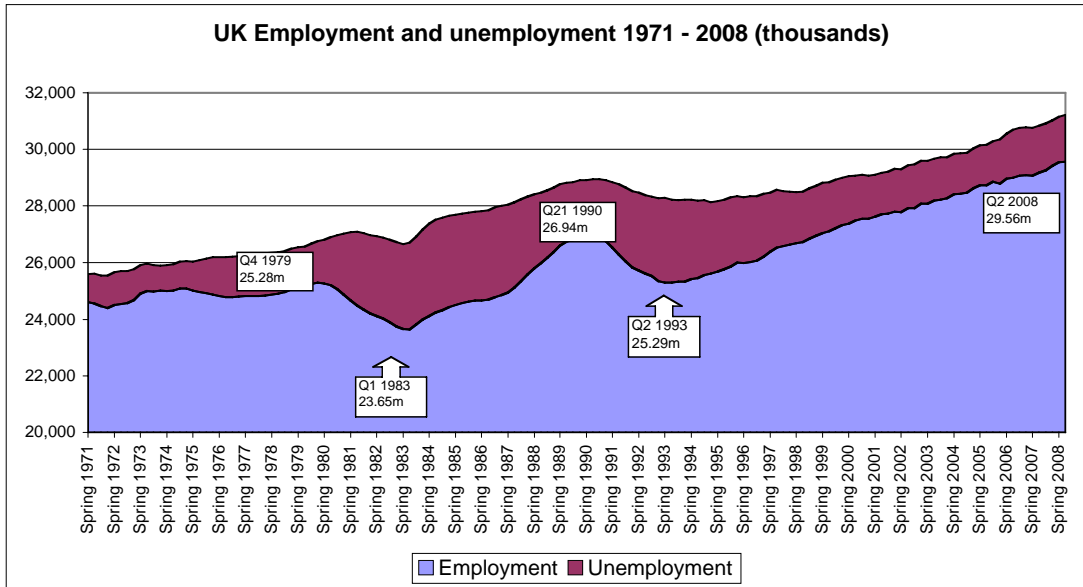
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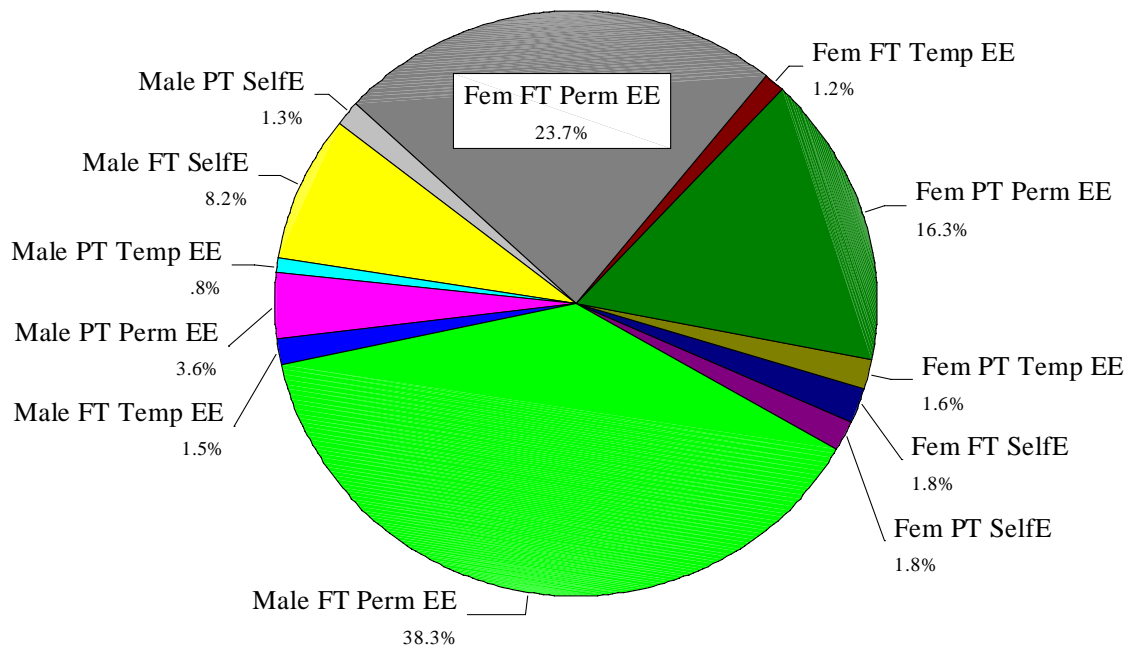
Tables and Figures

Figure 3.1: Employment and Unemployment, UK, 1971-2008 (thousands)



Source: UK Labour Force Survey, 2008.

Figure 3.2 Employment status and sex of employees and self employees, UK, mid-2007 (% of total employed)



Source: UK Labour Force Survey, 2007.

Notes: base = employed and self-employed; FT = full-time; PT = part-time; EE = employee; SelfE = self-employed; Temp = temporary; Perm = permanent.

Table 3.1 Recent economic indicators for the UK, 1995–2007^{a b c}

	<i>GDP growth^d</i>	<i>Base interest rates^e</i>	<i>Inflation rate (headline)^f</i>	<i>Male employment rate^g</i>	<i>Female employment rate^g</i>	<i>Average earnings growth rate^h</i>	<i>Real household disposable income growthⁱ</i>
1995	2.9	6.6	3.4	76.3	65.8	3.1	2.6
2000	3.8	6.0	2.9	79.3	69.1	4.5	4.5
2005	1.9	4.6	2.8	79.0	70.1	4.0	2.1
2007	3.0	5.5	4.3	78.9	69.7	4.0	1.2

Source: DWP (2008: 16).

Notes:

- a) All growth figures are for the year in question compared to the previous year.
- b) All figures are for the UK, except Average Earnings Growth, which covers Great Britain.
- c) Some minor revisions exist since last year due to revisions to underlying Office of National Statistics data.
- d) GDP at market prices, chained volume measure (UK National Accounts 2007 edition).
- e) The base interest rate is the annual average for the relevant calendar year.
- f) Inflation rate is the annual average change for each calendar year as measured by All Items Retail Price Index.
- g) Employment Rates are seasonally adjusted figures for the Spring quarter of each year (March to May).
- h) Average earnings growth is the actual (as opposed to real terms) annual average for each calendar year.
- i) Real disposable income growth is based on the Real Disposable Income series, calendar years.

Table 3.2 Employment status by sex, UK, 2007 (thousands and column, % by sex)

	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>All</i>
FT Perm EE	10,789	6,696	17,485
	71.3	51.2	62.0
FT Temp EE	411	329	740
	2.7	2.5	2.6
PT Perm EE	1,008	4,586	5,594
	6.7	35.1	19.8
PT Temp EE	236	450	686
	1.6	3.4	2.4
FT SelfE	2,302	505	2,807
	15.2	3.9	10.0
PT SelfE	376	508	884
	2.5	3.9	3.1
Total	15122	13074	28196

Source: UK Labour Force Survey, Second Quarter (UKLFSQ2).

Notes: base = employed and self-employed; FT = full-time; PT = part-time; EE = employee; SelfE = self-employed; Temp = temporary; Perm = permanent.

Table 3.3 Employment status and sex, UK, 1996 and 2005 (%)

	1996			2005		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Type of Contract						
FT permanent	55.1	32.4	44.1	56.9	36.6	47.1
FT temp	2.7	2.0	2.4	2.1	1.6	1.9
PT permanent	3.2	23.4	13.0	4.8	24.4	14.3
PT temp	1.0	2.9	1.9	1.1	2.1	1.6
FT no contract*	13.1	3.0	8.2	12.1	2.7	7.5
PT no contract*	1.2	2.7	1.9	1.4	2.6	2.0
No workers	23.7	33.6	28.5	21.4	30.0	25.6
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Reason for part-time job						
Student or at school	40.3	10.0	15.0	37.1	12.7	17.9
Ill or disabled	2.9	1.1	1.4	5.2	1.7	2.5
Could not find full-time job	29.4	10.3	13.4	16.7	6.5	8.6
Did not want full-time job	27.4	78.6	70.1	41.0	79.1	71.0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Reason not wanting full-time job						
Financially secure — work because want	Autumn quarters only from Autumn '94 to Autumn '99. Spring and Autumn quarters from Spring '01			23.8	6.2	8.3
Earn enough part-time				17.0	6.6	7.9
Want to spend more time with family				12.3	43.3	39.6
Domestic commitments prevent full-time				8.6	28.5	26.1
Insufficient child-care facilities				0.4	1.6	1.5
Another reason				37.9	13.7	16.7
Total	100	100	100			
Reason part-time work						
Looking after children	Spring and Autumn quarters only from Spring '01			21.1	71.9	67.5
Looking after incapacitated adult				5.6	3.3	3.5
Some other reason				73.3	24.8	29.0
Total	100	100	100			
Types of temporary job						
Seasonal work	4.4	5.2	4.8	5.1	4.0	4.5
Contract for fixed period, fixed task	55.1	50.0	52.2	44.9	49.8	47.4
Agency temping	12.6	13.2	13.0	22.5	15.9	19.1
Casual work	17.6	21.0	19.5	17.6	17.3	17.4
Not permanent in some other way	10.3	10.6	10.5	9.9	13.0	11.5

Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Reason for temporary job						
Contract including training	6.9	4.3	5.4	8.6	7.1	7.8
Could not find permanent job	49.9	37.6	43.0	31.9	21.1	26.3
Did not want permanent job	18.5	32.0	26.0	21.8	26.8	24.4
Some other reason	24.7	26.1	25.5	37.8	45.0	41.5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Roche and MacInnes calculation from the UK Labour Force Survey, 1996 and 2005.

Note: Figures refer to male (16–64) and female (16–59) in any type of household. * ‘No contract’ refers to workers without a contract of employment: employers, self-employed, and family workers.

Table 3.4 Employment status by household type, UK 1996 and 2005 (households with couples and children)(%)

	1996			2005		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Type of Contract						
FT permanent	65.7	19.7	43.1	68.7	24.9	47.3
FT temp	2.1	1.3	1.7	1.7	0.8	1.3
PT permanent	1.2	33.1	16.9	2.2	35.8	18.6
PT temp	0.4	3.9	2.1	0.3	2.4	1.3
FT no contract*	16.4	2.8	9.7	16.7	2.5	9.7
PT no contract*	0.8	4.5	2.6	1.0	4.2	2.6
No workers (inactive and unemployed)	13.4	34.7	23.8	9.3	29.4	19.2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Reason for part-time job						
Student or at school	5.9	0.4	0.8	6.4	0.8	1.2
Ill or disabled	4.8	0.3	0.5	7.8	0.4	1.0
Could not find full-time job	57.7	5.4	8.3	27.3	2.8	4.7
Did not want full-time job	31.5	93.9	90.4	58.4	96.0	93.0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Reason not wanting full-time job						
Financially secure - work because want				8.4	1.5	1.9
Earn enough part-time				6.7	1.7	2.0
Want to spend more time with family				32.3	57.8	56.5
Domestic commitments prevent full-time				23.5	32.7	32.2
Insufficient child-care facilities				1.5	2.2	2.2
Another reason				27.7	4.0	5.2
Total				100	100	100
Reason part-time work						
Looking after children				58.2	93.8	92.3
Looking after incapacitated adult				2.3	0.6	0.7
Some other reason				39.5	5.6	7.1
Total				100	100	100
Types of temporary job						
Seasonal work	4.0	3.7	3.8	5.3	2.5	3.6
Contract for fixed period, fixed task	65.3	57.5	60.1	60.3	60.7	60.6
Agency temping	10.1	9.4	9.6	20.6	9.1	13.6
Casual work	10.6	19.1	16.2	4.9	12.5	9.5
Not permanent in some other way	10.0	10.4	10.3	8.9	15.2	12.7

Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Reason for temporary job						
Contract inc. training	4.9	2.7	3.4	10.3	5.5	7.4
Could not find permanent job	62.6	34.8	44.1	33.1	18.8	24.4
Did not want permanent job	5.5	35.8	25.6	10.8	24.2	18.9
Some other reason	26.9	26.8	26.9	45.8	51.5	49.3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Calculations by Roche and MacInnes from the UK Labour Force Survey, 1996 and 2005.

Notes: Figures refer to Head of Household (Household Reference Person) and partner in households with dependent children. * 'No contract' refers to workers without a contract of employment: employers, self-employed and family workers.

Table 3.5 *Employed persons, current continuous employment spell in months, by sex, UK*

		<i>Mean</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>Std.</i>	<i>N</i>
		<i>Deviation</i>			
FT Perm EE	Male	106	64	110.6	10744
	Female	92	57	95.9	6675
FT Temp EE	Male	22	8	44.0	409
	Female	23	9	45.2	329
PT Perm EE	Male	59	24	93.6	1004
	Female	87	56	92.6	4570
PT Temp EE	Male	43	12	90.1	236
	Female	41	12	74.4	446
FT SelfE	Male	148	108	134.5	2273
	Female	111	74	106.7	503
PT SelfE	Male	166	96	171.4	374
	Female	109	62	118.9	506
Total	Male	107	61	117.1	15039
	Female	88	53	95.8	13030
	Total	98	58	108.2	28069

Source: UK Labour Force Survey.

Notes: FT = full-time; PT = part-time; EE = employee; SelfE = self-employed; Temp = temporary; Perm = permanent.

Table 3.6 Employees, reason for leaving job, by sex, UK

(1) left in last 3 months and now working

(2) left in last 18 months and now not working

		<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Changed job < 3 months	Dismissed	1.4	1.5
	(In)voluntary redundancy	10.6	8.0
	Temporary job ended	11.1	11.3
	Resigned	46.0	48.2
	Gave up work for health reasons	.9	1.1
	Took early retirement		.4
	Retired (at or after state pension age)	.3	.4
	Gave up wk for family/personal reason	4.9	5.1
	Left for some other reason	24.9	24.1
	All (n)	350	274
Left < 18 months not working now	Dismissed	4.0	3.4
	(In)voluntary redundancy	17.4	13.1
	Temporary job ended	15.3	10.3
	Resigned	21.8	22.2
	Gave up work for health reasons	7.5	7.2
	Took early retirement	6.5	3.4
	Retired (at or after state pension age)	9.0	10.9
	Gave up wk for family/personal reason	6.5	16.3
	Left for some other reason	11.8	13.1
	All (n)	321	320

Source: UK Labour Force Survey.