

# Work Precarity Among Paid Domestic Cleaning (PDC) Workers in Switzerland

**André Borges, Milena Greve, and Koorosh Massoudi**

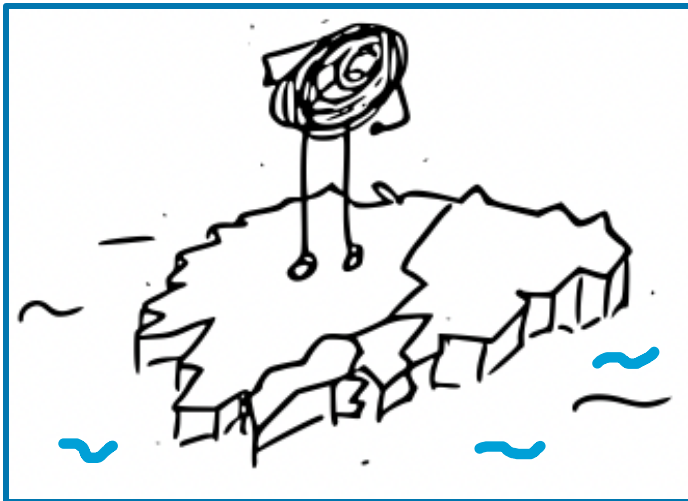
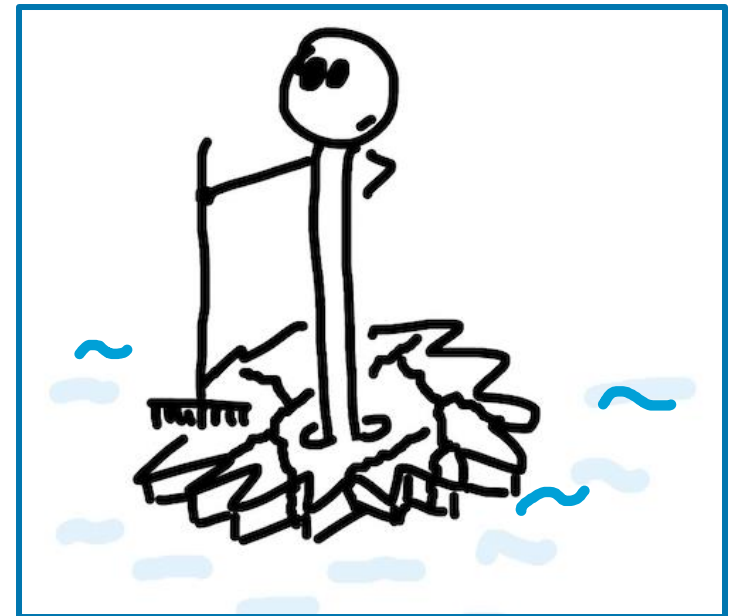
**IAEVG Conference 2024,**  
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# The issue(s) of work precarity: insecurity, instability and powerlessness



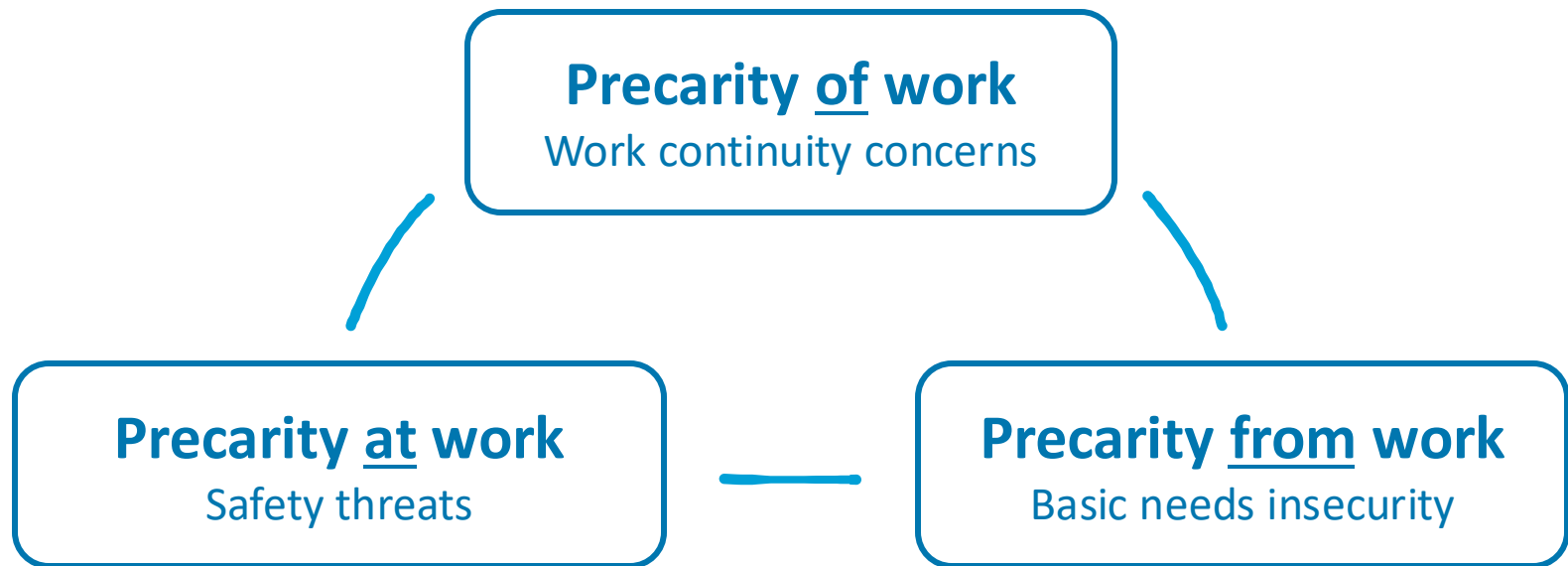
## Paid Domestic Cleaning (PDC) as an emblematic case



Blustein et al., 2022; D'Souza, 2010; Kalleberg & Vallas, 2017; ILO, 2023

# Work Precarity

Work precarity refers to the psychological experience of insecurity, instability, and powerlessness in one's job,



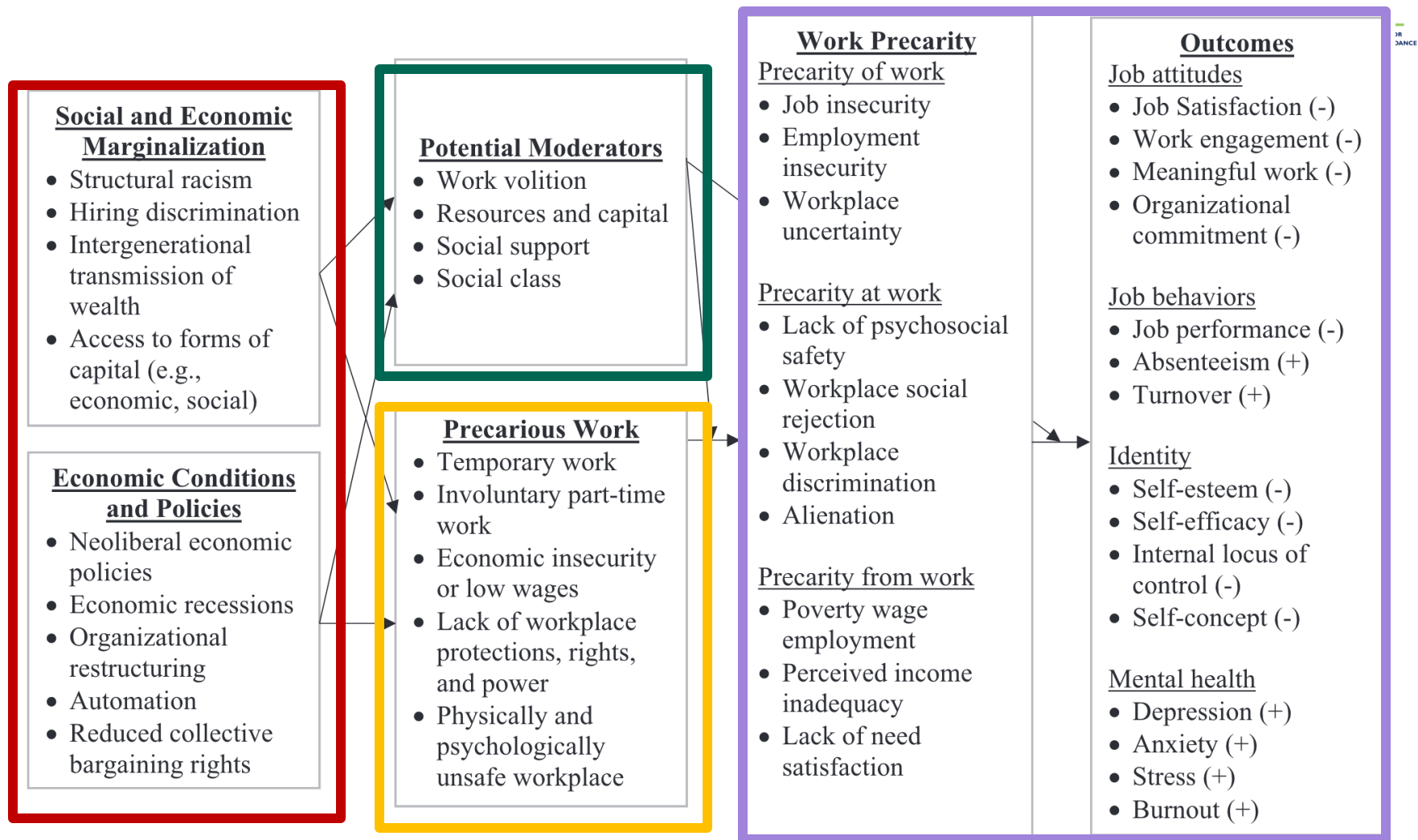
# Gap and objectives

- A psychological conceptualization of work precarity is recent and studies are needed on vulnerable groups of workers facing such precarity.
- It is still unclear if and how the working conditions in PDC translate into experiences of work precarity.
- Switzerland is an intriguing case: economic performance and social policies versus working poor.

**Our goal is to investigate:**

- (1) PDC workers' perceptions of their working conditions.**
- (2) The main challenges they face in accessing protective resources against work precarity.**

# Theoretical basis



Allan et al., 2021



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# Additions to the theoretical framework

## The threats of dirty work

- Social stigmatization, exacerbation of work precarity

## The specificities of PDC

- Work for multiple and dispersed employers
- Groups marginalized workers: women, migrants, fragile legal status.

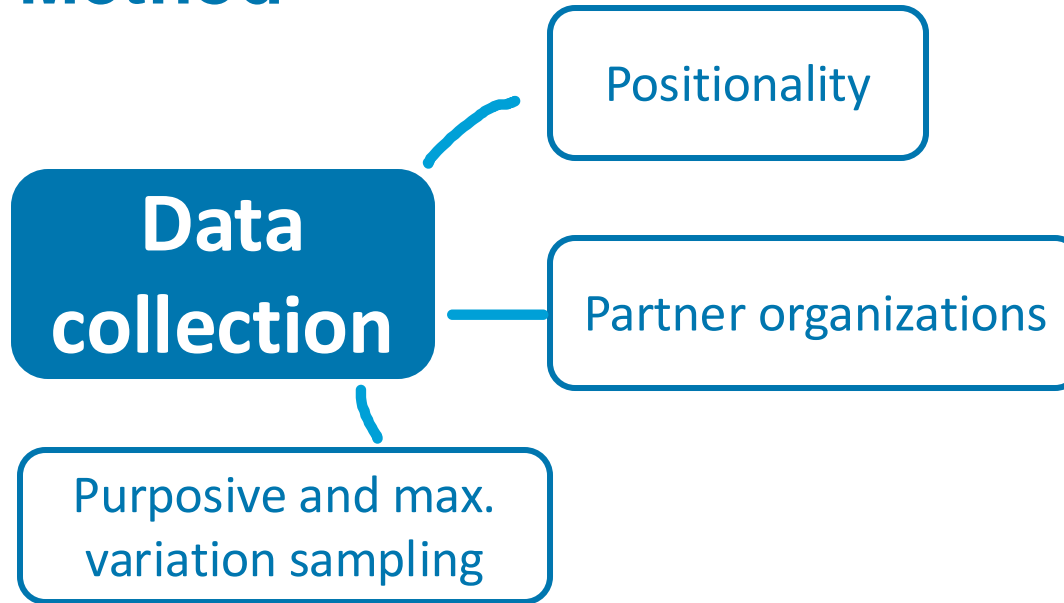
## The specificities of the Swiss context

- Liberal labor-market
- Restrictive migration policies
- Good salaries versus precarity of certain groups

Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999, Bosmans et al., 2016; Masdonati et al., 2019; Murphy & Oesch, 2018

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# Method



**Reflexive thematic analysis**

Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Crowhurst, 2013; Restubog et al., 2021

# Sample



## Total and age

- 24 participants (21 women, and 3 men)
- From 30 to 60 years of age ( $M_{age} = 43,5$ )

## Legal status and nationality

- Swiss nationals (4), refugee or work permit (17), undocumented (3)
- Africa (3), Asia (1), Europe (8), South America (8), Switzerland (4)

## PDC tenure and number of employers

- 6 months to 22 years of tenure in PDC ( $M_{tenure} = 8,5$ )
- Working for 2 to 19 employers in PDC only ( $M_{employers} = 6,3$ )
- 13 participants had additional jobs (e.g., store clerk)



# Findings

## Themes

## Subthemes

### 1. Conditions

Insufficient and insecure income  
Lack of labor protections and rights  
Lack of social recognition  
Lack of physical and psychological safety

### 2. Outcomes

Health impairment  
Stigma internalization  
Attitudinal ambivalence

### 3. Ressources and Vulnerabilities

Behavioral and psychological resources  
Limited work volition  
Inconsistent social support  
Inconsistent institutional support

# 1. Conditions

**Insufficient and  
insecure income**

Lack of labor  
protections and  
rights

**Lack of social  
recognition**

Lack of physical  
and psychological  
safety

**Maya – 53 yrs – Portugal, work permit**

*This job is not secure, it's not stable. [...] Here, you don't know if you're going to get the same salary every day.*

**Claude – 59 yrs – Switzerland**

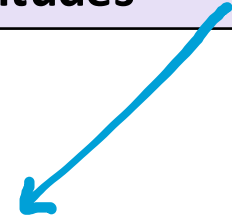
*You're not intelligent then you will be cleaning houses, you suck.*

## 2. Outcomes

Health impairment

Stigma internalization

**Ambivalent job  
attitudes**



**Lucia – 52 yrs – Brazil, work permit**

*I don't like cleaning. I have to, it's the way I found to work. But if someone tells me: "Work at the supermarket", I don't want either, because at least cleaning gives me time to get out for some fresh air.*

### 3. Ressources and Vulnerabilities



**Carla – 41yrs – Ecuador, work permit**

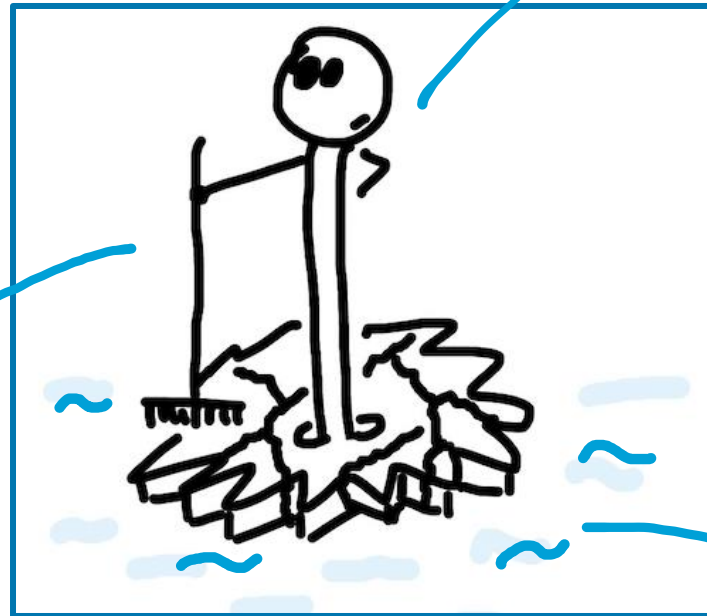
*With employers, if I can't take it anymore, I leave, but I'm always replacing them with someone new. That was how I got paid vacations and sickness leave, even without a working permit.*

*Now it's too late. I can't see myself as a cleaner when I'm fifty, but I'm sure I'll carry on cleaning because I won't be able to study.*

# Discussion

Attractor of  
vulnerabilized  
workers

Unsafe and  
isolated work



Precarity  
trap

Bosmans, 2023, McWhirther & McWha-Hermann, 2021; Sayre, 2023;

# Limitations, avenues and implications

## Limitation

## Research avenue

**PDC-focused**



Increasing sample diversity

Exploring career trajectories

**Static**



Performing dynamic investigations

## Implications

> Policy-oriented developments

> Holistic career counseling interventions

# An Investigation of Work Precarity Among Paid Domestic Cleaning Workers in Switzerland

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